January 1, 2016

Paris Agreement--A Good Foundation for Meaningful Progress

By Robert Stavins
Huffington Post

The Paris Agreement, a truly landmark climate accord, which was gavelled through today, December 12, 2015, at 7:26 pm (Paris time) at the Twenty-First Conference of the Parties (COP-21), checks all the boxes in my five-point scorecard for a potentially effective Paris Agreement, described in my November 17th blog essay, Paris Can Be a Key Step. The Agreement provides a broad foundation for meaningful progress on climate change, and represents a dramatic departure from the Kyoto Protocol and the past 20 years of climate negotiations.

Essential Background

Anyone who has read this blog over the past several years, or—even more so—my academic writing over the past twenty years on international climate change policy architecture, knows that I have viewed the dichotomous distinction between Annex I and non–Annex I countries as the major stumbling block to progress. That distinction was first introduced in the climate negotiations at COP-1 in Berlin in 1995. That was, in my view, an unfortunate and narrow interpretation of the sound equity principle in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992)—"common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities." It was codified two years later in the Kyoto Protocol.

The Kyoto Protocol, which has been the primary international agreement to reduce the greenhouse-gas emissions that cause global climate change, included mandatory emissions-reduction obligations only for developed countries. Developing countries had no emissions-reduction commitments. The dichotomous distinction between the developed and developing countries in the Kyoto Protocol has made progress on climate change impossible, because growth in emissions since the Protocol came into force in 2005 is entirely in the large developing countries—China, India, Brazil, Korea, South Africa, Mexico, and Indonesia. The big break came at the annual UNFCCC negotiating session in Durban, South Africa in 2011, where a decision was adopted by member countries to "develop [by December 2015, in Paris] a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties." This "Durban Platform for Enhanced Action" broke with the Kyoto Protocol and signaled a new opening for innovative thinking (which we, at the Harvard Project on Climate Agreements, took to heart).
The Paris Agreement is a Departure from the Past

Today, in Paris, representatives of 195 countries adopted a new hybrid international climate policy architecture that includes: bottom-up elements in the form of "Intended Nationally Determined Contributions" (INDCs), which are national targets and actions that arise from national policies; and top-down elements for oversight, guidance, and coordination. Now, all countries will be involved in taking actions to reduce emissions.

Remarkably, 186 of the 195 members of the UNFCCC submitted INDCs by the end of the Paris talks, representing some 96% of global emissions. Contrast that with the Kyoto Protocol, which now covers countries (Europe and New Zealand) accounting for no more than 14% of global emissions (and 0% of global emissions growth).

This broad scope of participation under the new Paris Agreement is a necessary condition for meaningful action, but, of course, it is not a sufficient condition. Also required is adequate ambition of the individual contributions. But this is only the first step with this new approach. The INDCs will be assessed and revised every five years, with their collective ambition ratcheted up over time. That said, even this initial set of contributions could cut anticipated temperature increases this century to about 3.5 degrees Centigrade, more than the frequently-discussed aspirational goal of limiting temperature increases to 2 degrees C (or the new aspirational target from Paris of 1.5 degrees C), but much less than the 5–6 degrees C increase that would be expected without this action. (An amendment to the Montreal Protocol to address hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) is likely to shave an addition 0.5 C of warming.)

The problem has not been solved, and it will not be for years to come, but the new approach brought about by the Paris Agreement can be a key step toward reducing the threat of global climate change.

The new climate agreement, despite being path-breaking and the result of what Coral Davenport writing in The New York Times rightly called "an extraordinary effort at international diplomacy," is only a foundation for moving forward, but it is a sufficiently broad and sensible foundation to make increased ambition over time feasible for the first time. Whether the Agreement is truly successful, whether this foundation for progress is effectively exploited over the years ahead by the Parties to the Agreement, is something we will know only ten, twenty, or more years from now.

What is key in the Agreement is the following: the centrality of the INDC structure (through which 186 countries representing 96% of global emissions have made submissions); the most balanced transparency requirements ever promulgated; provision for heterogeneous linkage, including international carbon markets (through "internationally transferred mitigation outcomes" — ITMOs); explicit clarification in a decision that agreement on "loss and damage" does not provide a basis for liability of compensation; and 5-year periods for stocktaking and improvement of the INDCs.

The Key Elements of the Paris Agreement
Here are some of the highlights of what stands out to me in the Paris Agreement.

Article 2 of the Agreement reaffirms the goal of limiting the global average temperature increase above the pre-industrial level to 2 degrees C, and adds 1.5 degrees C as something even more aspirational. In my opinion, these aspirational goals — which come not from science (although endorsed by most scientists) nor economics, and may not even be feasible — are much less important than the critical components of the agreement: the scope of participation through the INDC structure, and the mechanisms for implementation (see below).

Article 3 makes it clear that the INDC structure is central and universal for all parties, although Article 4 blurs this a bit with references to the circumstances of developing country Parties. But throughout the Agreement, it is abundantly clear that the firewall from the 1995 Berlin Mandate has finally been breached. In addition, five-year periods for the submission of revised INDCs (and global stocktaking of the impact of the Paris Agreement) are included in Article 14. The first stocktaking review will be in 2018, with the start date for new INDCs set for 2020.

Article 4 importantly describes transparency requirements (domestic monitoring, reporting, and verification). This is crucial, and represents a striking compromise between the U.S. and Europe, on the one hand, and China and India, on the other hand. All countries must eventually face the same monitoring and reporting requirements, regardless of their status as developed or developing.

Article 6 provides for international policy linkage, and is thereby exceptionally important for the successful exploitation of the foundation provided by the Paris Agreement. The necessary language for heterogeneous international policy linkage (not only international carbon markets, but international linkage of other national policy instruments) is included. I have written about this key issue many times over the past ten years. It can bring down compliance costs greatly, and thereby facilitate greater ambition over time. (See our paper on this from the Harvard Project on Climate Agreements: "Facilitating Linkage of Heterogeneous Regional, National, and Sub-National Climate Policies Through a Future International Agreement" By Daniel Bodansky, Seth Hoedl, Gilbert E. Metcalf and Robert N. Stavins, November 2014.) The Paris Agreement accomplishes this through provision for "internationally transferred mitigation outcomes." With this provision, we have a new climate policy acronym — ITMOs — about which I suspect I will be writing in the future.

There is considerable discussion of "finance" in Article 9, but the numbers do not appear in the Agreement, only in the accompanying Decision, where item 54 states that by 2025, the Parties will revisit the total quantity of funding, using the current $100 billion target as a "floor."

Finally, the Agreement's Article 8 on Loss and Damage was necessary from the point of view of the most vulnerable countries, but the most contentious issue is settled in Decision 52, where the Parties agree that this "does not involve or provide a basis for any liability of compensation." That decision was absolutely essential from the perspective of the largest emitters.

Anticipated Impacts of the Paris Agreement
Before I turn to my assessment of the Agreement, I should comment briefly on a topic that seems to be of considerable interest to many people (based on the questions I received from the press during my 10 days in Paris), namely what effect will the Agreement have on business, what signals will it send to the private sector?

My answer is that impacts on businesses will come largely not directly from the Paris Agreement, but from the policy actions that the various Parties undertake domestically in their respective jurisdictions to comply with the Paris Agreement. I am again referring to the 186 countries which submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions — INDCs — under the Agreement.

So, in the case of the United States, for example, those policies that will enable the country to achieve its submitted INDC are: the Clean Power Plan (which will accelerate the shift in many states from coal to natural gas for electricity generation, as well as provide incentives in some states for renewable electricity generation); CAFE (motor vehicle fuel efficiency) standards increasing over time (as already enacted by Congress); appliance efficiency standards moving up over time (as also already enacted by Congress); California’s very aggressive climate policy (AB-32); and the northeast states’ Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

These various policies are credible, and they will send price signals that affect business decisions (but not across the board nor with ideal efficiency, as would a national carbon tax or a national carbon cap-and-trade system). In terms of impacts on specific companies, impacts will continue to vary greatly. But a useful generalization is that a major effect of most climate policies is to raise energy costs, which tends to be good news for producers of energy-consuming durable goods (for example, the Boeing Company) and bad news for consumers of those same energy-consuming durable goods (for example, United Airlines).

**An Assessment with my Paris Scorecard**

Lastly, here is my November 17th scorecard and my assessment of the five key elements I said would constitute a successful 21st Conference of the Parties:

1. **Include approximately 90% of global emissions** in the set of INDCs that are submitted and part of the Paris Agreement (compared with 14% in the current commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol). This was obviously **achieved**, with total coverage reaching 96% of global emissions.

2. **Establish credible reporting and transparency requirements.** This was **achieved**, through long negotiations between China and India, on the one hand, and Europe and the United States, on the other.

3. **Move forward with finance for climate adaptation (and mitigation)** B the famous100 billion commitment. This was **achieved**.

4. **Agree to return to negotiations periodically, such as every 5 years**, to revisit the ambition and structure of the INDCs. This was **achieved**.
5. Put aside unproductive disagreements, such as on so-called "loss and damage," which appears to rich countries like unlimited liability for bad weather events in developing countries, and the insistence by some parties that the INDCs themselves be binding under international law. This would have required Senate ratification of the Agreement in the United States, which would have meant that the United States would not be a party to the Agreement. There was success on both of these.

Final Words

So, my fundamental assessment of the Paris climate talks is that they were a great success. Unfortunately, as I have said before, some advocates and some members of the press will likely characterize the outcome as a "failure," because the 2 degree C target has not been achieved immediately.

Let me conclude where I started. The Paris Agreement provides an important new foundation for meaningful progress on climate change, and represents a dramatic departure from the past 20 years of international climate negotiations. Of course, the problem has not been solved, and it will not be for many years to come. But the new approach brought about by the Paris Agreement can be a key step toward reducing the threat of global climate change. In truth, only time will tell.

As many of you know, over a period of ten days, we (the Harvard Project on Climate Agreements) were hard at work at COP-21 in Paris. I made a dozen presentations and we held bilateral meetings on a daily basis with national negotiating teams and and others. You will find videos, photos, and numerous stories about our activities in Paris at our Tumblr page. Thanks are due to the entire team who were with me in Paris — Robert Stowe, executive director, Jason Chapman, program manager, and Doug Gavel, director of media relations — as well as Bryan Galcik, communications coordinator, back in Cambridge.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-stavins/paris-agreement-a-good-foundation_b_8903946.html

January 2, 2016

Time for leaders to make moral choice on climate change

By Russell L. Meyer
Palm Beach Post

During his visit to the United States in September, Pope Francis told the American people that “climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to our future generation. When it comes to the care of our common home, we are living at a critical moment of history.”
Nowhere does this message resonate more than in Florida, where our communities already are experiencing the impacts of climate change in our own backyards. Coastal and tourism-based counties are facing significant future loss of their tax base because of rising sea levels.

That’s why the Florida Council of Churches, where I serve as executive director, is one of the many religious bodies calling on our elected officials and candidates to set and reach bold targets for powering America with clean energy. We are doing so because the principles and traditions of our faiths call on us to make a moral and spiritual stand on climate change. We believe our leaders must make the moral choice to protect the earth and the most vulnerable among us.

A recent report found that Florida has more private property at risk from climate change than any other state. Without urgent action, by 2030, $69 billion worth of coastal property not currently at risk will be subject to flooding from sea-level rise. These impacts will result in losses to the tourism and agriculture industries, loss of jobs, damage to water supplies and threats to human health.

But much of these impacts can be prevented in Florida — and around the world — if our political leaders take action. Religious bodies representing people of two dozen faiths — including Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Sikhs, Buddhists and many others — have signed an Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change. It recognizes that we are “destabilizing the global climate system, heating the earth, acidifying the oceans, and putting both humanity and all living creatures at unacceptable risk.” It also declares that “strong action on climate change is imperative by the principles and traditions of our faiths and the collective compassion, wisdom and leadership of humanity.”

This is a powerful call to action — and it’s one that Floridians of every faith should embrace. We already have the solutions to help tackle the problem and to meet a goal of powering the country with more than 50 percent clean energy by 2030. We can help vulnerable people and communities survive and thrive. We can create sustainable jobs while cutting pollution and protecting our children’s health. We can establish America’s global leadership on climate and clean energy. But what’s missing is strong political leadership.

Interfaith leaders are grateful for the actions taken to date, including President Barack Obama’s executive leadership and the global climate agreement signed in Paris. But we now have to seize this momentum and solidify America’s leadership on climate action in the weeks and months ahead.

As Pope Francis reminded us, we must make the moral choice on climate to safeguard the most vulnerable and protect our common home. We can indeed do something to protect our communities — we can unite as a global family threatened by a common danger to urge political leaders to take decisive action and pursue the solutions we know already exist.

January 4, 2016

Religious leaders commit to environmental protection in Vietnam

By Joachim Pham
Global Sisters Report

Religious representatives promised to work to protect the environment and cope with climate change at a national conference that drew 400 participants to this central Vietnam area in early December.

Some 160 religious leaders and social workers from 14 religions attended the national conference called Promoting the Role of Faith-based Organizations in Environment Protection and Climate Change Responses. The Dec. 2-3 conference was co-organized by Norwegian Church Aid, an ecumenical organization for global justice, the National Resources and Environment Ministry, and Vietnam Fatherland Front, an umbrella of the communist party.

Nguyen Thien Nhan, president of Vietnam Fatherland Front, told the conference participants that the environment in Vietnam has been badly damaged by excessive exploitation and overuse, which has seriously affected people's lives. On average annually, the country has 457 injuries or deaths caused by climate change.

He said experts warn that, without adequate attention given to the issue, the country's Gross Domestic Product could lose 3 percent to environmental pollution for every 1 percent it gains.

Nhan urged religions that focus on human development to actively assume their social responsibilities to deal with environmental problems and climate change. The 14 government-approved religions have 22 million followers out of the country's population of 90 million, he added.

NCA General Secretary Anne-Marie Helland said religious groups play a vital role in environmental protection and responding to climate change. She said, although religious people are committed and dedicated, they should be equipped with more capacity, knowledge and experience to be in the forefront of the issue.

Religious leaders agreed. "To protect the environment means to protect ourselves because we are facing serious challenges and crisis of the environment," said Most Venerable Thich Hai An, vice director of the Social and Charitable Committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

An blamed climate change and environment pollution for people's irresponsible exploitation of natural resources. Drought, flood and outbreaks of SARS and MERS viruses, caused by the environmental impact of pollution and increasing climate change, have led to widespread loss of life in the world, An said.
Participants also watched a 30-minute video of recent environmental damage in the country created by harmful emissions from traffic and industries, waste, polluted water, widespread deforestation, lack of rain, floods and earthquakes throughout the country.

Nguyen Ngoc Tran, a dignitary of the indigenous Hoa Hao Buddhism, who was introduced to the conference participants, said humans and all living things only exist and develop in case they have to rely on one another. "This means we have to maintain the biological diversity of creation so that we can live a peaceful life and pursue sustainable development," he said. "We must save natural resources and keep the living world clean, safe and peaceful for all living things."

He said that safeguarding creation means repaying it.

Nguyen Thanh Son, from an indigenous Buddhist sect founded in 1934, said humans living in harmony with nature means they save energy and avoid the depletion of the environment because "the environment will treat us like the way we treat it."

He said individuals and communities that work together for environmental protection safeguard themselves at present and in the future.

The conference included demonstrations by Catholic and Buddhist nuns, who displayed artwork made of used items and paper waste. They competed in cooking and flower arranging and rehearsed rescue operations together.

Religious representatives and organizers also signed a joint statement on their commitment to protecting the environment and coping with climate change.

After the conference, some participants shared their plans for environmental protection with GSR.

Thich Nu Tinh Phuong, a 32-year-old Buddhist nun, said local nuns will organize first aid courses, found rescue teams, have youths grow plants on treeless hills, collect used items from beaches and rivers, and teach people how to grow herbs for medicines.

Sr. Teresa Nguyen Thi Kim Lan of Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation said her congregation plans to raise awareness of environmental protection among local people at its clinic and catechism classes. They will teach people how to separate organic waste from inorganic waste before throwing them in the garbage, set up groups to collect used items to sell and help poor people, grow flowers in inundated areas and teach vocational skills to climate change victims.

Lan said local congregations have started to install solar heating at their day nurseries, create areas of new forest, open their facilities for people to shelter from storms, and treat cases of diseases related to weather.

[Joachim Pham is a correspondent for National Catholic Reporter and Global Sisters Report, based in Vietnam.]
January 6, 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=ecb5f06f11&e=709fe41ec4

January 7, 2016

Pope Francis was right on climate change

By John Nagle
Washington Post

Climate will have such a profound effect on the earth that we will need to reconsider our relationship with the natural environment. That’s why many environmental activists are now being drawn to an evolving philosophical stance on the topic, shifting away from an approach that is simply political, scientific or economic.

“There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology,” Pope Francis said in *Laudato Si*, the papal encyclical released last summer. Francis rejected both an anthropocentric view that accepts all human desires and a misanthropic view that wishes people would disappear. To find solutions for climate change and other environmental challenges, we need to focus on the morality of our actions, including questions of fairness and obligation.

That understanding was on display during the debates at last month’s climate change negotiations in Paris. After failing to come to an accord in previous meetings, diplomats succeeded in Paris because they crafted an agreement that allowed each nation to decide its own response to climate change rather than dictating a prescribed set of regulations.

But the ongoing efforts after the talks face a number of moral challenges, especially the effects of our actions on the poor. Nearly 80 percent of the people living in the world’s least developed countries do not have access to electricity, yet energy production is the leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and other types of pollution. We have a moral obligation both to alleviate such energy poverty and to avoid harming people by our energy production.

Previous international agreements failed to address energy poverty in the least developed parts of the world. The Paris agreement acknowledges “the need to promote universal access to sustainable energy in developing countries, in particular in Africa, through the enhanced deployment of renewable energy.” Renewable energy holds much promise as its non-polluting
sources displace reliance on fossil fuels, though even renewable energy presents harms of its own.

Although renewable energy is spreading, it is still difficult — and expensive — to rely on as the only source of energy for large areas. That is why international lending organizations still fund projects that burn coal or oil in the least developed parts of the world, where such fuels offer the only alternative to having no electricity at all. Much of the debate in the United States labels coal in particular as intrinsically immoral, but a better understanding of the environmental trade-offs associated with all means of energy production calls for a more nuanced appreciation of the competing values.

There is also a moral question of who is responsible for climate change. Francis, the first pope from the developing world, insists that the developed world is culpable not just for climate change, but also for a range of environmental ills suffered by developing nations. He described “a true ‘ecological debt’” existing between the global north and the global south, one connected to the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time, as well as commercial imbalances that have environmental effects. In his encyclical, he states that the developing countries have a debt to pay. They should limit their energy consumption and help poorer countries support sustainable development.

In Paris, developing countries sought to include a requirement that developed countries accept legal responsibility to compensate the victims of climate change in the developing world, but the United States and other developed nations refused to agree. Instead, the Paris agreement explicitly states that it does not “provide a basis for any liability or compensation.”

The culpability debate is complicated. It is questionable that 21st-century Americans should be held responsible for the actions of their ancestors, who had little reason to think that their activities were endangering future generations. And many of the actions that resulted in climate change today also spread economic, social and cultural benefits throughout the developing world.

Perhaps the better way to envision the problem is to focus on generosity, not blame. Culpability is typically determined by adjudication, and two decades of climate change litigation have failed to make much progress in identifying who is legally obligated to pay for the harm caused. Generosity, on the other hand, needs no court order.

The appeal to love our neighbors who suffer from environmental devastation is already animating the work of faith-based organizations around the world. Such moral claims may not appear in legal documents such as the Paris agreement, but they play an essential role in any understanding of how to respond to climate change where it is most needed.

John Nagle is the John N. Matthews professor of law at the University of Notre Dame, where he teaches and writes about climate change and other environmental issues. He is writing books on the role of humility in environmental law and on the scenic value of our national parks.
January 9, 2016

Why climate change is an ethical problem

By Stephen Gardiner
Washington Post

Climate change presents a severe ethical challenge, forcing us to confront difficult questions as individual moral agents, and even more so as members of larger political systems. It is genuinely global and seriously intergenerational, and crosses species boundaries. It also takes place in a setting where existing institutions and theories are weak, proving little ethical guidance.

The critical question as we seek to address climate change will be which moral framework is in play when we make decisions. In many settings, we do not even notice when this question arises, because we assume that the relevant values are so widely shared and similarly interpreted that the answer should be obvious to everyone. Nevertheless, the values question is not trivial, since our answer will shape our whole approach.

If we think something should be done about climate change, it is only because we use our moral frameworks to evaluate climate change events, our role in bringing them about, and the alternatives to our action. This evaluation gives us both an account of the problem and constraints on what would count as relevant solutions.

Suppose, for example, one were deciding where to set a global ceiling on emissions.

At one extreme, we might give absolute priority to the future. It is technically feasible for us all to reduce our emissions by 50 to 80 percent tomorrow, or even eliminate them. We could, after all, just turn off our electricity, refuse to drive, and so on. The problem is not that this cannot be done; it is that the implications are bleak. Given our current infrastructure, a very rapid reduction would probably cause social and economic chaos, including humanitarian disaster and severe dislocation for the current generation. If this is correct, we are justified in dismissing such drastic measures. However, that justification is ethical: A policy that demanded those measures would be profoundly unjust, violate important rights and be deeply harmful to human welfare.

Still, the acknowledgement of those limits has its own implications. Even if any emissions cuts would be disruptive to some extent, presumably at some point the risks imposed on future generations are severe enough to outweigh them. Where is this point? That is an ethical question. So far, we do not seem very interested in answering it.

Perhaps this is because up until now we have been acting as if our answer is closer to the other extreme — giving absolute priority to our own short-term interests. Over the past 25 years — since the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report — we have continued to allow
high levels of emissions, suggesting that we are giving the future no weight at all. Given the threat of a tyranny of the contemporary (a collective-action problem in which earlier generations exploit the future by taking modest benefits for themselves now while passing on potentially catastrophic costs later), this bias is highly predictable. Yet it also appears grossly unethical.

Of course, acknowledging that moral claim is deeply uncomfortable. Consequently, there is a temptation to prefer framings of the climate problem that obscure the ethical questions. Consider, for instance, those who reject any moral lens, arguing that climate policy should be driven solely by national self-interest, usually understood in terms of domestic economic growth over the next couple of decades.

Their accounts face deep problems. Given the time lags that climate change involves, most climate impacts, including many of the most serious, will take many decades to arise. Moreover, those that may occur in the near term are likely already in the cards, due to either past emissions or those that are by now inevitable. Amoral approaches constructed with a focus exclusively on the next decade or two would confront only a very small set of the relevant impacts of climate change, and would likely miss the most important — and the potentially catastrophic. Climate policy could become yet another venue where narrow interests crowd out longer-term and broader concerns.

The real climate challenge is ethical, and ethical considerations of justice, rights, welfare, virtue, political legitimacy, community and humanity’s relationship to nature are at the heart of the policy decisions to be made. We do not “solve” the climate problem if we inflict catastrophe on future generations, or facilitate genocide against poor nations, or rapidly accelerate the pace of mass extinction. If public policy neglects such concerns, its account of the challenge we face is impoverished, and the associated solutions quickly become grossly inadequate. Ongoing political inertia surrounding climate action suggests that so far, we are failing the ethical test.

Stephen M. Gardiner is professor of philosophy, and Ben Rabinowitz is endowed professor of the human dimensions of the environment at the University of Washington, Seattle.


January 9, 2016

Pope inspires clergy to join environmental movement

A papal encyclical aimed at caring for the environment has given clergy a renewed imperative for responsible action

By T.J. Pignataro
The Buffalo News

Look at any environmental gathering in the Buffalo Niagara region, and you’ll see the usuals: the
bird-watchers, hikers, pollution fighters, neighborhood activists and even the granola-eating tree-huggers. But now others show up in greater numbers, too. You can thank God for that. Or Yahweh. Even Allah or the Great Spirit. Environmentalists are making room for priests, nuns, rabbis, imams and others of faith who care about the environment and want to play a role in protecting our water, air and land.

The Sierra Club’s Lynda Schneekloth said the clergy and others with religious backgrounds now account for between a third and a half of those attending local Sierra Club events.

“Two years ago, there wouldn’t have been anybody except for the diehards,” said Schneekloth, chairwoman of the Sierra Club’s Niagara chapter.

Some joined the environmental movement on their own. But others heard the call of Pope Francis, who published his encyclical, “Laudato Si,” last May “on care for our common home.” Environmental justice, specifically addressing global climate change, has become a calling like feeding and clothing the poor, caring for the ill and housing the homeless as moral imperatives for people of faith.

“The pope, from his religious and political positions, opened up the floodgates this past year,” Schneekloth said. “Now that the pope has said it’s a moral issue, it’s given everybody permission to talk about it.”

It’s not just their attendance and comments at rallies or public hearings making a difference, but also what the religious are doing and teaching at their places of worship and schools.

Faith-based environmental activism abounds across the region:

• Some 72 churches, schools and other diocesan buildings in the Buffalo Catholic Diocese are “green,” with others turning to solar energy for power.

• Sisters at Stella Niagara have launched a full-time outdoor education program for students.

• Jewish families are “repairing the world” with preservation pledges to take action in their synagogues and homes under the Green Faith Initiative.

• Local Muslims are promoting Quranic principles of conservation, moderation and compassionate stewardship of the environment in mosques.

• Eastern Orthodox Christians are teaching the environmental principles espoused by Bartholomew I, their “Green Patriarch.”

The groundswell of support and involvement from people of faith comes as a boon to organizations and activists, according to Schneekloth and others who have lobbied and pressed for environmental causes for decades.
When area environmental groups held a gathering and potluck dinner Thanksgiving weekend to send off University at Buffalo law students to Paris for the climate talks, the auditorium at Temple Beth Zion was packed with religious.

“I’m more hopeful now than I’ve been in years,” Schneekloth said.

“We need to build a bigger tent, and we welcome the faith-based community,” added Brian Smith of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment. “This can only help.”

A green diocese

Even before the pope’s encyclical, the Buffalo Catholic Diocese was working to become “earth-friendly.”

The Diocesan Care for Creation Committee was formed 10 years ago as a way to meld religious and science in launching environmentally responsible initiatives throughout the diocese.

“We say it’s about the care of Earth, but it’s really taking care of human beings,” said Sister Sharon Goodremote, the committee’s founder. “The Earth will be here without us.”

The diocese was one of the earliest consumers of solar energy products.

Today, six dozen diocesan buildings have shifted to renewable energy sources and the diocese hired an energy manager, Carol Anne Cornelius.

Cornelius said the transition just makes sense, both environmentally and economically.

“Our poorest parishes have the highest utility costs,” Cornelius said. “This helps take the pressure off the parish and the parishioners.”

Environmental stewardship varies at the parish level, but examples are rife.

St. Christopher’s in the Town of Tonawanda runs successful recycling initiatives.

Care for Creation committees are springing up at the parish level at places like SS. Peter and Paul in Hamburg, Nativity of Our Lord in Orchard Park and St. Joseph’s University Parish in Buffalo.

Parishes like Blessed Sacrament Church on Delaware Avenue hold meetings to read and study Francis’ encyclical.

Although each pope since John XXIII has called attention to the need for worldwide environmental justice, Francis “is the first pope who’s elevated it to an official church teaching,” Goodremote said.

She considers it “a call for action.”
“This isn’t a document where you said, ‘I read it and put it on the shelf,’” said Sister Karen Allen, who’s championed the environment at Stella Niagara for more than 30 years. “This is a document that makes you think, ‘What can I do? What groups or organizations can I join?’”

Packing people of faith into the tent “changes the entire picture going forward,” said the Sierra Club’s Schneekloth.

**Sisters of the earth**

More than 12,250.

That’s how many plastic water bottles were estimated to have been saved between last spring and Tuesday at the Stella Niagara Education Park.

The you-fill water station on the first floor of the prekindergarten through eighth grade Montessori school keeps count.

The water station is a necessity on the Lewiston campus because the nuns have forbidden bottled water.

The widespread proliferation of plastic pollution worried them.

“We studied it, and we took a stand,” said Sister Margaret Sullivan, the school’s principal. “We don’t purchase bottled water, and we don’t allow it at our functions.”

Disposable lunch wrappings and food containers will also earn you a black dot at Stella.

“Trash-free lunches,” said Kristen deGuehery, Stella’s director of institutional advancement. “Lunches need to be in reusable containers. No foil packaging. Nothing to throw away.”

Styrofoam or paper packaging also is banned in the cafeteria – real dishes only.

Recycling bins are found in every classroom and there’s also a campus composter.

“If they get in the habit, they’ll continue it when they’re older,” said teacher Coleen Edwards.

Added Sullivan: “Everybody can recycle and we all should, but we try to aim for something bigger. From the age of 3, we try and instill in them they’re part of nature.”

With the New Year, Stella also launched a full-time Outdoor Education Program for its 160 students on the 100-acre campus.

As part of a pilot project, students scavenged decayed tiger lily stems and used them in class to make paper. They planted a vegetable garden. They started “nature appreciation” journals. They documented the environmental changes to a vernal pond on campus.
The pope’s encyclical validated the school’s environmental movement that began in the Franciscan tradition decades ago. Signs of that are everywhere from the framed poster announcing Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s 2008 appearance at Stella to talk about the environment to Sister Karen Allen’s “Environmental Concerns” bulletin board.

‘Repairing the world’

“Green Shabbat” started three years ago at Temple Beth Tzedek in Amherst.

The temple upgraded to LED lighting, replaced disposable foam cups with china mugs or paper, held a bottle recycling fundraiser, bought a rain barrel for its Getzville Road site and reuses compostable paper products in its organic community garden.

“Caring for the earth is a religious value, and environmental stewardship is a moral responsibility,” said Rachel Anderson, the synagogue’s social action chair.

Guardianship of the earth is ingrained in Jewish tradition through the Torah, because Genesis states that humans are inherently of the earth, formed “of the dust of the ground.”

That provides the impetus for the synagogue’s Green Faith Initiative in pursuit of the Jewish theme of “tikkun olam,” which translates to “repairing the world.”

The synagogue asks its members to make planet-preservation pledges to make environmentally friendly changes at its house of worship and in their homes.

“We will be planning several events around the green theme, bringing awareness of the myriad things that help to destroy (the environment) and to show alternate things to use that are invariably cheaper and less toxic,” Anderson said.

Saving Allah’s creation

Conservation and preservation are constants for local Muslims.

The Quran explicitly prohibits waste of any kind – water, food or the bounties the earth provides.

That may have been behind the thinking to collect and repurpose stormwater on the grounds of Masjid An-Noor on Heim Road.

When the Islamic Society of the Niagara Frontier designed Masjid An-Noor, the mosque on Heim Road, stormwater was diverted into a fountain instead of running off into creeks.

“The entire universe of creation is God’s, and we need to make sure we use it in the best way we can and the most appropriate way we can,” said Dr. Khalid Qazi, who is on the society’s board of trustees and president of the Muslim Public Affairs Council of Western New York.
Qazi said he would like to see an even more concentrated effort toward stewardship, including green energy initiatives addressed at last August’s *International Islamic Climate Change Symposium* in Turkey. Muslim leaders from nearly two dozen countries issued a declaration, which aligned with Francis’ encyclical. The declaration was based on moral principles fundamental to Islamic law and designed to energize the Muslim community as environmental stewards.

“The whole earth belongs to God. Nothing belongs to us,” said Imam Yahye Yusuf Omar of Buffalo. “Compassion to creation is part of Islam.”

At Mussallah Salaam on Potomac Avenue, the youth hold an annual neighborhood cleanup day and grow a community garden.

“It is noble work to protect the environment,” said Dr. Othman Shibly, an Islamic Society board member.

**The ‘Green Patriarch’**

Environmental protection was at the heart of an ecumenical statement inked last September in Buffalo between the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox churches.

In the 30-page binding document, dubbed “the Buffalo Statement,” the two churches agreed on fundamental matters of faith governing “dominion” and “stewardship” of the universe.

The Eastern Orthodox Church knows a little something about environmental activism.

Its Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has been championing the cause for more than two decades.

Nicknamed “the Green Patriarch,” Bartholomew has gained international attention while leading spiritual and political leaders, media and other dignitaries on excursions to the furthest reaches of the planet from the glaciers in the Arctic to the rainforests of the Amazon River in South America.

“For us, it has a spiritual basis,” said the Rev. Christos B. Christakis, the presiding priest at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church on West Utica Street.

Besides significantly investing in sustainable energy sources with the upcoming multimillion-dollar development of its Family Life Center in Lancaster, Christakis said earth stewardship is a frequent Sunday school theme at Annunciation.

Christakis will officiate the church’s annual Outdoor Blessing of the Waters Sunday at the Erie Basin Marina.

“The earth is given to us not for exploitation, not for domination, but for the care of,” Christakis said. “We are part of creation.”
January 13, 2016

9 New Year’s resolutions for the Earth

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

January 13, 2016

Religion and Climate Change

By Lloyd Steffen, Professor, Religion Studies; University Chaplain; Director, Dialogue Center and Lehigh Prison Project, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

Huffington Post

At the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference, delegates from 196 countries signed the Paris Agreement aimed at reducing carbon emissions and thus halting the destructive effects of global warming. The agreement awaits ratification by signatories and takes effect only if 55 of the nations that account for 55% of global greenhouse gas emissions take action and endorse the agreement--the U. S. is not expected to ratify. The Paris agreement is significant in terms of politics and economics, but religious leaders have also voiced support of the agreement, and clearly a move is underway to make climate change and environmental responsibility an integral part of contemporary religious life and practice.

Religious involvement on this issue is not new. Environmental activism today is truly global and involves countless people in organizing efforts that are aimed at improving the health of the planet and assuring a safe environment for future generations. Environmental protection has been for decades an issue of science, global politics and international economics, but some voices speaking to the issue remind us that motivation for such activism can spring from deep moral concerns and religious sensibilities. Religious thought has long attended to the natural world and the environment, whether in the Western traditions affirming the earth as a glorious product of God's creative activity or in Native American and Asian religions that emphasize the interconnectedness of human beings and nature. Religious faith and spiritual commitments are today providing the energizing fuel to sustain involvement with issues like climate change and environmental responsibility.

Last May, Pope Francis published a remarkable document that calls on all people of good will to care for a creation entrusted to them by God. The document, Laudato Si', takes its title from the hymns of praise written by the Pope's namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, whose love of the natural world was central to a vision of life with God and whose canticles to the sun and moon began
with the words "Praise to You O Lord" or in Latin, "Laudato Si". In this document, the first papal encyclical ever dedicated exclusively to the environment, Pope Francis states that the environmental crisis is not only a scientific, political and economic problem but a moral and spiritual challenge as well.

The papal encyclical addresses a concern voiced in the 1970s by Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, whose worry that not enough attention was being focused on the environment led to the first Earth Day action-celebration. Although every major ecological disaster draws headlines, the news cycle changes daily, and the environment continues to be subject to cultural attention deficit disorder. When the environment drops off the front page in the wake of disaster, NGOs, international organizations and lobbyists take on the chore of keeping policy makers focused on the issue, and this is hard work. The unique contribution of Laudato Si' is that it is a big and bold statement that is seeking to make the environment a focal point of religious and theological reflection, a dramatic move that may keep the world's attention focused on climate change and environmental responsibility in a more long-term, sustainable way.

When the encyclical was released last May, the Pope, representing the priorities of the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholics, was certainly aware that his moral and spiritual authority would capture the world's attention. And so it did. The encyclical addressed the complexity of the environmental problem, offering criticisms and hope that faith can play a significant role in helping to address environment-related problems. The pope attended to the ways in which environmental degradation and pollution disproportionately affect the poor and reflect a false "techno-scientific progress" that must not be mistaken for "human progress." He criticized a "throw away" consumer culture in the privileged countries of the world and advocated changes in lifestyle (even criticizing air conditioning at one point), calling on wealthy countries to reduce consumption of non-renewable energy resources while helping poorer nations develop in sustainable ways. He confronted the self-centeredness and greed that so mark modern life and advocated help for the poor based on an economic model of fair distribution of wealth. The Pope concluded that when distributive justice is violated and a privileged few have too much while too many have too little, "it always leads to violence."

The encyclical has come under criticism. The economic justice concerns have been attacked by free market capitalists; questions have been asked whether the Pope's love for the poor translates into concrete policy concerning the immediate problem of climate change; and the fact that global warming gas emissions have increased as the global population has increased calls into question the carrying capacity of planet earth and also the church's teaching on birth control as it affects human population growth.

Any document speaking from such a place of authority and on behalf of so many is bound to raise controversy. The pope has said he is not a scientist, economist or a politician, but a person of faith speaking from a spiritual center to a spiritual problem. The pope has called on people to acknowledge the interconnectedness of human beings with nature; and he criticizes wealthy nations for their excessive use of natural resources. He argues that the economy of excess has created an economy of exclusion--it is the poor who lack access to clean water and air and who then lose out as well in employment, housing and economic opportunity.
Pope Francis was not talking just about climate change but the need for a change of heart. And he may be right in where he puts the emphasis—on questions of spirit and faith. Spiritual change, the Pope says, by making the world more humane will make the environment a "common good" for which all people must accept responsibility. As the Paris Agreement occasions reflection on motivation for environmental action and as it envisions global policy changes, Pope Francis' bold message placing the environment at the center of faith and spiritual commitment is worth serious attention by both environmental activists and persons of faith.

(Portions of this blog were previously published in *The Morning Call* and are used here with permission.)


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**January 14, 2016**

Donations stream into Catholic Charities amid Michigan water crisis

By Traci Badalucco
National Catholic Reporter

The Catholic community in Michigan is ramping up its efforts to support Flint residents affected by the recent crisis that left thousands of households with lead-contaminated tap water.

Health authorities in Genesee County have advised residents to not consume water without using a water filter, according to the City of Flint’s website.

Flint has a population of just under 100,000 residents.

The local Catholic Charities is collecting bottled water for residents in need. A spokesperson said the organization had received around 200 five-gallon containers and 40 to 50 cases of bottled water since Monday, but they are still urging community members to drop off water as the crisis continues.

Locations for dropping off donations of water are listed on the Catholic Charities website.

The Lansing diocese and Catholic Charities has set up an online PayPal account where people can make donations for the water crisis. Money would be used to buy more bottled water once the Flint facility runs out. Catholic Charities has raised more than $2,000 since Thursday.

“The diocese wants to support the people of Flint,” said Deacon Jim Kasprzak, director of Catholic Charities for the Lansing diocese, adding that doing so is a community initiative with an “emphasis in strengthening the Catholic presence in the city of Flint.”

According to NBC News, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder declared a state of emergency last week. The water crisis dates back to April 2014 “when Flint switched from using Detroit's water supply
to water from the Flint River to save money.” NBC News reported that “the river water was saltier and began corroding the old pipes and leaching lead into the system.”

On Tuesday, Snyder ordered the Michigan National Guard to distribute bottled water to residents, according to CBS News, and “were expected to arrive as soon as Wednesday to assist state authorities and volunteers in the distribution effort that was already underway.”

Snyder tweeted Wednesday that the National Guard would be on site passing out bottled water and filters at local fire stations.

Vicky Schultz, director of the local Catholic Charities and 17-year employee at the organization, says they are clearing space at their Flint location to make room for anticipated donations amid the continuing crisis.

“With the amount of calls and the attention, it’s finally treating it like we have a crisis,” Schultz said. “I’m worried now about the long-term of what is going to happen and what are we going to do for the kids that have already been damaged by the water.”

According to the Detroit News, medical professionals also urged residents to limit bath time for children.

“The problem is with small children, you really don’t want them to swallow the shower or bath water,” Dr. Cynthia Aaron, medical director of the Michigan Regional Poison Control Center at DMC Children’s Hospital of Michigan, said.

Dr. Sharon Swindell shared similar concerns. Swindell, a pediatrician and lead poisoning expert at the University of Michigan’s C.S. Motts Children’s Hospital, told the Detroit News that “Any lead exposure in childhood is of great concern, especially in younger children during important stages of brain development.”

Residents should continue using water filters until long term solutions are resolved, according to the City of Flint website. Boiling water does not remove lead from the water.


January 14, 2016

Pope Francis’ Call for Action – One Key to Global Climate Agreement

By Oscar Cantú
Morning Consult
In the wake of the historic Paris climate agreement, many commentators have focused on the extraordinary work of the negotiators, the terms that have been agreed upon and the global outlook going forward. While these important topics merit extended analysis, I believe that we should also reflect on the key role that morality and ethics played in brokering a successful deal in Paris.

Pope Francis provided invaluable moral leadership before and during the COP21 conference. I believe his leadership was a key factor and helped provide the momentum necessary to complete the successful agreement in Paris. Inspired by him, people of many faiths, as well as those of no particular faith, engaged energetically. In *Laudato Si*’, the Pope articulated a moral framework, specifically addressing every person living on the planet. Many responded and came together to protect our common home and its most vulnerable people from the threats posed by climate change.

As with previous negotiations, COP21 was marked by technical discussions in the areas of climate science, economics, technology and diplomacy. At the same time, however, the understanding of climate change as a pressing moral issue permeated the dialogue of commentators and negotiators before, during, and after COP21 to a higher degree than in previous U.N. climate talks. For example, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon explicitly cited climate change as a “moral issue” in reference to COP21. Diplomats, academics, activists and ordinary citizens who support an international climate agreement made moral appeals in reference to COP21 than was the case previously.

We should not be surprised that increased attention to climate change as a moral issue helped pave the way for the historic agreement reached in Paris. Moral and ethical concerns have the power to transcend political ideologies, neutralize special interests, and unite persons of goodwill in cooperating for the common good.

The dialogue and negotiations associated with COP21 were rich with moral insights and appeals: the poor and vulnerable are disproportionately and unjustly harmed by the adverse effects of climate change; ecological degradation compromises the right to life, the dignity of the human person and the protection of vulnerable communities; the human family has a responsibility to protect the global common good for future generations.

This is not to say that ethical considerations were entirely absent from previous international negotiations. The U.N. and many countries in the Global South consistently raised moral concerns about the disproportionate effects of climate change and the need for common, but differentiated, responsibilities. But I would argue that moral discourse played a much larger role this time around thanks to Pope Francis and other faith leaders.

Since his election, Pope Francis has used his unique office and humble personality to place the ethics of ecology at the center of public debate. The release in June of *Laudato Si*’, the first papal encyclical on ecology, was timed, as Pope Francis himself acknowledged, to encourage a positive outcome at COP21. The ethics of ecology were part of his September addresses to the U.S. Congress and the U.N. General Assembly. He awakened our consciences to one of the defining moral issues of our time. As Dr. Alison Doig, senior advisor on Climate Change and
Sustainable Development at Christian Aid, told Vatican Radio, “The whole mode that the Holy Father has brought to these talks [in Paris] has really transformed [COP21].”

The success of COP21 was undoubtedly due to the incredible hard work and persistence of many people, organizations and communities. At the same time, however, it is appropriate to recognize Pope Francis’s moral leadership. The ethical concerns he raised about ecology and climate change – which echoed those of Saint John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI – helped chart the path to a successful international agreement to address climate change. As it turns out, morality matters when the goal is to protect our common home.

Reverend Oscar Cantú is the Bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico and Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

http://morningconsult.com/opinions/pope-francis-call-for-action-one-key-to-global-climate-agreement/

January 15, 2016

Cardinal Turkson: Laudato si’ continues to be relevant

Vatican Radio

(Vatican Radio) The President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson, on Friday spoke during a special event in Geneva discussing Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter Laudato si’.

“Pope Francis puts forward the concept of integral ecology, which clearly respects the human and social dimensions of the crisis,” Cardinal Turkson said. “This is an inclusive, dynamic paradigm to articulate the fundamental relationships of each person with God, with other human beings including him- or her-self, and with creation.”

The Cardinal said in its relationship with the environment, humanity is faced with a crucial challenge that requires the development of adequate policies that continue to be discussed on the global agenda.

“The challenges of true commitment and real implementation are even greater, as all of you know,” said Cardinal Turkson. “Is Laudato si’ relevant to that agenda? Yes.”

The Cardinal spoke about the lead-up to COP21 climate talks in Paris, and said the world community needed to hear that we inhabit a common home, that every decision in that home carries an ethical dimension, and that our hope lies in profound conversion.

“At Paris, solidarity needed to pervade COP21, and thanks be to God we have an agreement which provides a framework for action at every level,” Cardinal Turkson said. “Henceforth, the
The full text of Cardinal Turkson’s speech is below

Caring for Our Common Home - the Encyclical Letter Laudato si’
International Conference Centre Geneva, 15 January 2016

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I greet you all warmly on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which is honoured to have been called to assist the Holy Father in his teaching ministry by helping to prepare the Encyclical Letter Laudato si’.

Coming from every corner of the globe, your presence reminds us that, from the very beginning, the Encyclical Laudato si’ brings into dialogue all persons and peoples, all institutions and organizations that share this same concern for our common home as the title of today’s Special Event emphasizes. The world situation compels us to discover that different yet equally important perspectives are ever more intertwined and complementary: the riches of faith and of spiritual tradition, the seriousness of business and of scientific research, the concrete efforts at various levels of both government and civil society, all for an equitable and sustainable development.

This type of dialogue can be seen in the Encyclical itself, which relies on a wide range of contributions, many of them acknowledged in the text and the footnotes.

As is well known, the Encyclical takes its name from the invocation of St Francis of Assisi: “Laudato si’ mi’ Signore – Praise be to you, my Lord!” The Canticle of the Creatures calls to mind that the earth, our common home, “is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (§ 1). The voice of St Francis also expresses the attitude which the entire Encyclical conveys. Contemplation is the posture of spirit that disposes us to listen to the message. Prayerful contemplation invites us to look towards the “poor one of Assisi” as a source of inspiration. As the Encyclical affirms, St Francis is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically…. He shows us just how inseparable is the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (§ 10).

Midway through Laudato si’, talking about justice between the generations, the Pope invites us to ask this question: what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? (§ 160). The Holy Father continues, “This question does not have to do with the environment alone and in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.” This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its values that are the basis of social life: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” Such questions are dealt with in Chapter 3 as consequences of the mis-directed anthropocentrism of today. “If
we do not ask these basic questions” – says the Pope – “it is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations” (§ 160).

The Holy Father’s deep questions arise from an observation: today, the earth, our sister, is mistreated, abused, and lamenting. Its groans join those of all the world’s forsaken and “discarded”. Pope Francis invites us to listen to them. One might thus discover the real sense of the anthropogenesis of ecological problems. Listening to them means He urges each and every one – individuals, families, local communities, nations and the international community – to an “ecological conversion” according to the expression of St John Paul II. Such a change of heart means to “change direction” by taking on the beauty and responsibility of the task of “caring for our common home”. Here are the words of Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople: “For human beings … to destroy the biological diversity … by causing changes in its climate,” by contaminating “the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins” (§ 8).

At the same time, Pope Francis welcomes the environmental awareness growing world-wide, along with concern for the damage that is being done. And in spite of the enormous threat, the Pope keeps a hopeful outlook on the possibility of reversing the trend: “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home” (§ 13). “Men and women are still capable of intervening positively” (§ 58). “All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start” (§ 205). Hopefully COP21 represents such a choice and new start.

So with hope for a renewed future, Pope Francis puts forward the concept of integral ecology, which clearly respects the human and social dimensions of the crisis (cf. § 137). This is an inclusive, dynamic paradigm to articulate the fundamental relationships of each person with God, with other human beings including him- or her-self, and with creation:

“When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Getting to the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, the ways it grasps reality, and so forth. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature” (§ 139).

In the Encyclical, Pope Francis places the various issues within this framework and approached them in three steps: challenge (§ 13), appeal (§ 14), and hope (§ 15). In the different chapters, they are picked up and continuously enriched starting from different perspectives (cf. § 16):

* the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet;
* the conviction that everything in the world is intimately connected;

* the critique of the unrestrained alliance between finance and technology and, arising from it, the dominant “technocracy”;

* the value proper to each creature;

* the human meaning of ecology;

* the need for forthright and honest dialogue;

* the serious responsibility of international and local policy;

* the throwaway culture;

* the proposal for a new style of life; and

* the invitation to search for other ways of understanding economy and progress.

The encyclical is divided into six chapters.

Chapter I (§ 17-61) asks “What is happening to our common home?” It provides a spiritual listening to the best scientific conclusions on environmental matters available today. “Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (§ 19). Extremely complex and urgent issues are addressed. Some of them – such as climate changes and especially their causes – are the subject of heated debate. The aim of the Encyclical is not to intervene in what is the responsibility of scientists, and even less to establish exactly in which ways the deteriorating climate is a consequence of human action. In the perspective of the Encyclical – and of the Church – it is sufficient to say that human activity is one of the factors that explain climate change. With that, we have a serious moral responsibility to do everything in our power to reduce our “footprint” and reverse the deterioration of the natural and social environment.

The second step in the Encyclical (ch. II, § 62-100) is a review of the riches of Judaeo-Christian tradition, above all in biblical texts and theological reflection. This expresses the “tremendous responsibility” of human beings for creation, the intimate link between all creatures, and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (§ 95).

The analysis then deals in ch. III (§ 101-136) with the human roots of the ecological crisis (chapter title) “so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes” (§ 15). One cause is the technocratic mentality which perceives all of reality as an object that can be manipulated limitlessly and which the economy globalizes. Other roots include modern anthropocentrism, relativism, and disrespect for life, all of which dehumanize human beings.
Instead, we need to conceive of “another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral” (§ 112).

Ch. IV (§ 137-62) goes on to lay out integral ecology. It properly integrates concerns for human life and for the natural environment. It comprehends “our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings”, in the varied aspects of our life, in economy and politics, in various cultures, in particular those which are most threatened, and in every moment of our daily lives.

On this basis, ch. V (§ 163-201) addresses what we can and must do. Practical proposals should not be developed in ideological, superficial or narrow (reductionist) ways. Instead, dialogue is essential, a term present in the title of every section of this chapter. Pope Francis expresses his concern “to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (§ 188). Thus, dialogue must go on for the renewal of international, national and local politics, of decision-making processes in the public and business sectors, of the relationship between politics and economy and of the relationship between religion and science. I think that this is what we are doing in today’s Special Event.

Finally, based on the conviction that “change is impossible without motivation and a process of education, ch. VI (§ 202-46) proposes “some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience” (§ 15). Pope Francis offers two prayers, the first to be prayed with believers of other religions and the second among Christians. The Encyclical concludes, as it opened, in a spirit of prayerful contemplation.

In its relationship with the environment, humanity is faced with a crucial challenge that requires the development of adequate policies that continue to be discussed on the global agenda. The challenges of true commitment and real implementation are even greater, as all of you know. Is Laudato si’ relevant to that agenda? Yes. In the lead-up to COP21, the world community needed to hear that we inhabit a common home, that every decision in that home carries an ethical dimension, and that our hope lies in profound conversion. At Paris, solidarity needed to pervade COP21, and thanks be to God we have an agreement which provides a framework for action at every level. Henceforth, the vision of Laudato si’ continues to be relevant, because the next, more difficult stages of continuous, concerted and effective action require true ecological conversion. May all joyfully learn to care for all.

I very much look forward to our two panels on the content, impact and call-to-action of Laudato si’.

Thank you!

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

President

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/01/15/cardinal_turkson_laudato_si_continues_to_be_relevant/1201212
January 15, 2016

The moral dimension of climate change—and of courage to address it

World Council of Churches

Implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change sharpened discussion of the 2015 papal encyclical *Laudato Si*’ at a UN conference initiated by the Holy See and several permanent missions to the UN on 15 January in Geneva.

Among the presenters at the conference were keynoter Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace; Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, apostolic nuncio at the Holy See’s permanent mission to the United Nations; and World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit.

The encyclical, issued six months before the historic COP21 meeting in Paris last fall, was credited by participants with energizing discussion of the underlying moral imperative of addressing climate change in advance of the negotiations of 195 nations there.

‘*Laudato si*’ catalyzes what churches in various parts of the world and the WCC have been saying about the intimate relationship between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Presented explicitly by Pope Francis as part of the social doctrine of the church, it marks a turning point by including creation as a key concern and integral ecology as part of the teaching of the church” said Guillermo Kerber, WCC programme executive for Care for Creation and Climate Justice.

Its breadth, said French ambassador María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, makes the encyclical the best example of comprehensive reflection on the deeper philosophical, ethical and broadly social dimensions posed by the contemporary crisis. In fact, said Tomasi, it regards not climate change only but “one complex crisis that is both social and environmental.”

Pointing to a distorted notion of the person as the root cause of the crisis, Pope Francis “urges each of us to an ecological conversion,” said Cardinal Turkson. COP21 “can enable all of us to make a new start,” a radical turn toward comprehensive solutions for the environmental and social aspects of our collective crisis. “Every decision carries a profound moral dimension,” said Turkson, and we need to engage with the world’s poor as well as with nature.

“We received the earth as a garden,” he said. “We cannot pass it on as a wilderness.”

Roots of moral change

“Quick and effective action” is needed to implement the Paris accord, said UN chief Michael Møller, director general of the UN in Geneva. “The moral leadership of religious communities is crucial.”
The Paris Agreement, which committed nations to limiting climate change to 2 degrees Celsius, will necessitate extensive and substantial economic, political, and lifestyle changes. “The problem is courage and imagination,” said Moy Hitchen, a Christian Brother representing Edmund Rice International at the meeting. “What has been missing is the will to implement” the policies and practices that we already know of, he said.

How does one nurture and stimulate the courage among all actors to make the radical changes needed? Tveit pointed to the quality of hope.

“Confronted with a global crisis of life that has political, economic, ecological, social, cultural and religious dimensions, we begin to see the deep need for change and transformation to sustain life on our planet,” he said. Yet “there are reasons to hope,” he said, pointing to the widespread engagement of churches and individuals in the lead-up to Paris.

“To nurture hope is a fundamental ethical principle in any human relation. It is not a matter of being purely optimistic, or even unrealistic or ignoring risks and problems. It is rather a matter of identifying those realities that are authentic signs of hope.”

Continuing, he observed, “All human beings have a right to hope. Faith in God, who desires fullness of life for all of humanity, is a way to relate to the world as it is with the conviction and the commitment that something more and better is possible than what we can observe immediately. This is one contribution to hope. Therefore we also need to renew a theology of hope. A relevant question in the critique of religion is: are religions and religious leaders conveying hope for all?”

Concluding, he remarked, “It is time for those who shape the moral discourse about sustainable values for the earth as our common home and the human family to point more to the possibilities existing presently to do what serves the future of our planet.”

Read the presentation by Olav Fykse Tveit

See the WCC’s programme on climate justice


January 18, 2016

Thou Shalt Not Toss Food: Enlisting Religious Groups To Fight Waste

By Maria Godoy
NPR

Separation of church and state? When it comes to fighting food waste, the U.S. government is looking to partner up with the faithful.
The Environmental Protection Agency on Monday launched the Food Steward's Pledge, an initiative to engage religious groups of all faiths to help redirect the food that ends up in landfills to hungry mouths. It's one piece of the agency's larger plan to reduce food waste by 50 percent by 2030.

"We can make leaps and bounds in this process if we tackle this problem more systemically and bring a broader number of stakeholders to the table," EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy tells us. By engaging religious communities, she says, "we are tapping into incredibly motivated and dedicated people."

Food waste connects to the core values of many faith communities, particularly helping the poor and feeding the hungry, McCarthy notes.

As we've reported, more than 1,200 calories per American per day are wasted, according to U.S. government figures. Loss occurs on the farm, at the retail level and in homes. We consumers often toss out foods because they've passed their sell-by date — but are still just fine to eat — or because we buy more than we can eat before it goes bad.

As McCarthy notes, a lot of that is discarded but still edible and wholesome and could be used to feed some of the 48 million American who struggle to get enough to eat.

At the consumer level, changing behavior is key, says EPA Assistant Administrator Mathy Stanislaus, and faith-based groups can help make that happen in a variety of ways. For instance, when these organizations hold potlucks, the leftovers can go to the local food bank.

EPA says groups can also work with local grocers, schools and restaurants to direct food to food banks and shelters that would otherwise be wasted. They can hold seminars for the faithful and the broader local community to teach them how to menu plan and shop their own refrigerators first to avoid buying excess food, and how to compost the leftover scraps. EPA has developed a toolkit with lots more suggestions for groups that sign its "Food Steward's Pledge."

"Getting out the message — particular what individual families can do ... local community leaders are critical in doing that," Stanislaus tells us. And because faith-based leaders are often trusted advisers in their communities, "we thought they were a natural ally."

Food waste is closely tied to another growing concern for many faith-based organizations: climate change, a problem that disproportionately affects the world's poor. Food waste is the single biggest material in U.S. landfills, according to the U.S. Agricultural Department. As this waste decomposes, it releases methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Last summer, Pope Francis made headlines around the globe when he issued a papal encyclical urging action on climate change. That call helped energize new conversations throughout the Catholic church on environmental issues — including food waste, says Cecilia Calvo, who coordinates the environmental justice program for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. She says more Catholics are asking, "Rather than contributing to a culture of waste, how can we be conscious of our choices?"
Many other faith-based groups already have programs targeting food waste.

For example, in the past year, the Evangelical Environmental Network, a policy and advocacy group, launched its own "Joseph's Pledge" program: It teaches churches how to minimize food waste through actions like donating to food banks, planting community gardens and composting. (The program's name refers to the biblical Joseph, who helped guide ancient Egypt through seven years of famine.) About 200 churches have signed up so far, EEN President Mitch Hescox tells us. The goal is to reach 1,000.

"Evangelicals are primarily conservative politically," Hescox notes. "They want to take action by themselves. And this is one step they can do themselves to help people to address the problem. And it's a win-win."

Shantha Ready Alonso, executive director of Creation Justice Ministries, an environmental justice group spun out of the National Council of Churches, says the 100,000 congregations in her organization's network, representing 45 million people, have a variety of programs to address food waste.

She points to the Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center in Little Rock, Ark. Run by the Presbyterian Church, she says it's a model program where 100 percent of food scraps get composted. She says some churches grow food in on-site gardens and direct it to the needy. And she notes that churches and individuals with gardens are also encouraged to donate to Ample Harvest, a nonprofit that connects gardeners to local food pantries.

"Good stewardship is part of our DNA," she tells us. "And the idea that 1 in [7] people in America are going hungry and yet we are wasting [so much] food is awful."

Hazon, a Jewish environmental organization, already has several programs focused on food and sustainability, says Becca Linden, the group's associate program director. But "this will be the year we make food waste a priority," she says.

Among other actions, she says Hazon will screen the food waste documentary Just Eat It, publish a compost guide and raise awareness that expiration dates don't necessarily mean food is no longer fit to eat.

Meanwhile, Muslims around the world have been calling attention to the food waste that occurs during Ramadan, a period when fasting is followed by feasting that can result in over-purchasing of food. The Quran says Muslims should "eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters." In the U.S., the group Green Muslims is trying to spread awareness of Islam's environmental teachings. For instance, the group offers a guide to hosting a zero-waste iftar.

Of course, action on food waste transcends Abrahamic religions. One example: White Pony Express, a program in Contra Costa County, Calif., that rescues food from farms and farmers markets, grocers, restaurants and caterers. It was founded by the leader of Sufism Reoriented, an American spiritual order.
Cecilia Calvo of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops says there's a growing recognition that protecting the environment is everyone's moral duty. As Calvo notes, the question for many has become: "What does it mean to care for our common home?"


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**January 20, 2016**

Church groups respond to water emergency in Flint, Michigan

By Barb Powell and Lauren Markoe
Christian Century

The Michigan bodies of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) launched The Gospel in Action—Flint in January as President Obama declared a state of emergency in the city over its poisoned water.

Two congregations in Flint are central in that effort: Vermont Christian Church is a designated water distribution point, and Woodside Church UCC is providing water filters and replacement cartridges.

More than 50,000 households in Flint, which is predominantly African American, have not had clean water for almost two years.

"The powerful disenfranchised minority citizens and then made decisions without citizen input," said S. C. Campbell Lovett, UCC conference minister in Michigan. "And nobody is being held accountable. This is . . . environmental racism."

The water problems began in 2014 when the emergency manager of the city, who had been designated by the governor, approved drawing water from the Flint River instead of purchasing water from Lake Huron via Detroit in an effort to save the city money.

According to Kathleen Reid, a member of Woodside Church UCC’s water accessibility committee, Flint’s filtration plant was not equipped to treat the warmer, highly corrosive river water. It caused lead from aging pipes to leach into the city’s water supply, according to a report released by Marc Edwards, an engineering professor at Virginia Tech and an expert on municipal water quality, who studied the water supply.

Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician at Flint’s Hurley Medical Center, did additional research on blood lead levels in area children. Lead poisoning causes neurologic damage and affects every organ system in the body, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It can cause lowered IQs, behavior difficulties, and even death in extreme cases.
Although the water sourcing was switched back to Lake Huron in October 2015, lead levels are still high.

“The water issue will be there a long time, because the infrastructure itself has been significantly damaged,” said Muzammil Ahmed, chairman of the Michigan Muslim Community Council, which has distributed more than 120,000 bottles of clean water.

Bringing in bottled water creates a new challenge: recycling plastic bottles. The UCC and Disciples are discussing ways they can assist in recycling.

The faith-based organizations involved in the response—including Catholic Charities and the Flint Jewish Federation—are also focused on a longer-term goal: to make sure the impoverished city will not be not neglected again.

“Charity can only take one so far,” said Deb Conrad, pastor of Woodside Church UCC. “Justice is needed.” —UCNews; Religion News Service

https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-01/religious-groups-step-flints-water-crisis

January 21, 2016

In North Dakota’s Booming Oil Patch, One Tribe Beat Back Fracking

The Turtle Mountain Band was among the first tribes to ban the drilling process. Here’s the difference it made.

By Sarah van Gelder
Yes! Magazine

Drive the long, straight roads of north-central North Dakota, and you pass lake after lake amid hayfields and forests. Migratory birds, attracted by the abundance of water and grain, pause here. Farmers, boaters, and fishermen orient their lives around the pure water.

The water, more than anything, explains why members of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians acted so quickly when they learned their region was next in line for fracking. Within just a few weeks of tribal women meeting on the topic in late 2011, the council banned fracking on the 77,000-acre reservation.

Their ban was one of the first in North America.

The process started in November 2011 when a tribal elder, Carol Davis, called the women of the tribe together. Fracking was booming on the Fort Berthold reservation just 190 miles away in the heart of the Bakken oil fields. Davis had heard that the Turtle Mountain reservation could be
next. In the tribe’s tradition, women are responsible for protecting the water, so she invited the women to discuss fracking over a meal.

When she first heard about fracking in Fort Berthold, Christa Monnette, a member of the Turtle Mountain Tribe, thought that an oil and gas boom on her remote reservation would be a good thing. “I remember thinking, ‘Wow, how lucky they are! How come we can’t strike oil here?’”

After Davis explained her concerns to the group of women, Monette and her half-sister, Cedar Gillette, decided they needed to learn more about the process behind hydraulic fracturing or fracking.

At a second meeting, Davis offered each of the women a tobacco leaf, telling them to accept it only if they were committed to work on the issue.

Monette took the tobacco reluctantly: She was a single mother of three and worked full time. But the more the women—and the men who joined them—learned about fracking, the more worried they became.

They learned that the frackers would drill right through their precious aquifer, risking contamination of their drinking water and lakes, and that the process produces large volumes of wastewater and contaminated materials.

They learned about Dimock, Pennsylvania, where a well had exploded and groundwater contamination was linked to fracking. The Cabot Oil and Gas company had been ordered to provide alternative water supplies for those affected.

Gillette and Monette were especially concerned about what was happening on the Fort Berthold reservation, where three affiliated tribes, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Tribes (also collectively called the MHA Nation), are in the midst of the fracking boom.

Gillette had worked as a domestic violence advocate in Fort Berthold. There, corruption, crime, drug addiction, and human trafficking had accompanied the massive influx of oil workers with money to spend.

“People are fearful,” Gillette said.

And for good reason. According to the FBI, the area’s violent crime rate rose 121 percent from 2005 to 2011. “These dramatic increases have overwhelmed state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies,” reported the 2014 National Drug Control Strategy.

And contaminated material, including radioactive material concentrated during fracking, has been found dumped on the reservation. The MHA Nation lacks the resources to oversee the many drilling sites and waste facilities.

In addition to this pollution, expenses associated with the boom—from damaged roads to social services for the flood of new workers and their families—have eaten up the cash windfall that
was supposed to support the tribe for years once the boom ended, according to a report by the Property and Environment Research Center.

“We knew what was happening to other areas,” Gillette said. “If we didn’t protect our water, what would tribal members have seven generations from now?”

It was with this knowledge that Gillette, Monette, and others in the Turtle Mountain group presented their findings to their tribal council on November 2, 2011.

“People were stunned when we presented the facts.” Gillette said. The council called a second meeting and invited the entire community. At that meeting, the council unanimously voted to ban fracking.

Still, the meeting was tense for Gillette. “I didn’t believe it would pass until they all said yes,” she said. After all, an impoverished tribe was leaving millions of dollars on the table. Chairman Richard McCloud supported the ban: “What is sacred to our tribe is water. We all know that in the very near future, water will be more valuable than oil or gold or anything else. This area is where our ancestors did their farming; the springs run through here, and this is how generations survived. The fracking ban will protect our water so future generations can continue to survive.”

What the sisters didn’t know when the fracking ban passed was that the Bureau of Indian Affairs had been on the brink of opening Turtle Mountain land for oil and gas leasing. The tribe’s action put a halt to that plan.

Fast forward to the present, and the Turtle Mountain Tribe is moving forward: Last year, the tribal council adopted a new water code that solidifies the tribe’s stance on fracking, and with the help of a Department of Energy grant, the tribe is moving into developing the abundant solar and wind energy resources of the reservation.

Gillette is now attending law school with a focus on environmental law. Monette is still on the Turtle Mountain reservation, still a busy working mom, except she’s now the main administrator of the “No Fracking Way Turtle Mountain Tribe” Facebook page, where she posts not only about her reservation, but about other people around the world resisting the devastation of fossil fuel extraction.

Sarah van Gelder wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Sarah is Editor at Large of YES! She visited Fort Berthold and the Turtle Mountain reservation as part of her Edge of Change roadtrip. Christa Hillstrom, YES! senior editor, contributed reporting to this article.

2015’s best advocate for the rights of the environment may very well be the Pope. And if other religious leaders follow his example, the U.S. just might be on its way to successfully combating climate change.

Climate change has been acknowledged as an environmental and politically divisive issue for years, but a new report published this month by Yale and George Mason universities suggests that redefining it as a moral issue may lead to more widespread support for action on behalf of Mother Earth.

The report, entitled “Faith, Morality and the Environment,” explores the wide range of American attitudes on climate change. Dividing these attitudes into six distinct categories, the report analyzes the traits and beliefs that each grouping holds. Its analysis suggests that large sectors of the American public who do not currently feel that climate change is a dangerous and very present threat can be convinced of the necessity of action if the issue’s presented as a moral one.

* * *

Senior research scientist and Yale Program on Climate Change Communication director Anthony Leiserowitz is part of the team working on “Climate Change in the American Mind,” a long-term project in the YPCCC. Since 2008, the team has written two national surveys on climate change each year. Over the course of their research, they’ve used statistical analysis methods to identify the aforementioned six groupings of Americans who respond uniquely to the issue of climate change; Leiserowitz calls these the “Six Americas.” According to Leiserowitz, understanding the Six Americas is key to understanding how to reframe climate change as a moral issue for all Americans.

“It is impossible to address America as a single group with a single mindset, and we know that one of the first rules of effective communication is ‘know thy audience,’” Leiserowitz said. “Otherwise, it’s kind of like trying to play darts in the dark with a blindfold on.”

The group that the YPCCC refers to as the “Alarmed” consists of the 12 percent of Americans most engaged in acknowledging and combating global warming. According to the report, the Alarmed are the most likely to view global warming as a moral issue — and therefore the most likely to support strong action against climate change.

On the opposite side of the spectrum is the “Dismissive,” who neither believe in global warming nor see it as a threat. In fact, they tend to view it as a largely political issue. Dismissive individuals are oftentimes “conspiracy theorists,” Leiserowitz said with a wry laugh.
It’s the four groups in the center of the spectrum — the “Concerned,” “Cautious,” “Disengaged,” and “Doubtful” — who are most likely to be reached if climate change is reframed as a moral issue, Leiserowitz explained. And in order to convince people that it’s a moral ill to stand idly by while global warming threatens to destroy the world as we know it, the discussion needs to be led by moral authorities, many of whom may be religious in nature.

* * *

As the team’s research suggests, it’s important to gain the support of religious and community leaders: It may even be necessary for opening up discussions on climate change and its consequences in American homes. A report the YPCCC published in November discussed the effects of Pope Francis’s support for sustainability and environmental activism. The Pope — who made his stance clear when he declared in front of the United Nations in September 2015, “Any harm done to the environment therefore is harm done to humanity” — had the potential to significantly impact the way Americans view climate change, co-author Edward Maibach said.

“Although relatively few Americans were seeing climate change as a moral issue last year before the release of the Pope’s encyclical on climate change, our research showed that many Americans [now] have the potential to see climate change as a moral issue,” Maibach said.

Connie Roser-Renouf, lead author of the report, suggested that because the news typically frames global warming as a scientific and political issue, the topic may alienate many Americans who aren’t particularly interested in either science or politics. If activists could make clear that global warming is a moral issue, Americans would likely express significantly more interest in working against it, Roser-Renouf said.

She added that while Americans across the board feel that it’s important to help the poor and future generations, many do not yet recognize that global warming poses a real and significant threat to those groups. In fact, there is a high level of religiosity in the USA along with a perceived conflict between religion and science, she said. But that doesn’t necessarily have to be the case.

Some politicians seek to exploit that apparent conflict, but many religious leaders, like Pope Francis, recognize climate change as an important moral issue. In fact, according to Roser-Renouf, many of the religious Americans who are on the fence about the legitimacy of climate change believe that humans are meant to be “stewards” of nature: At the same time, they do not recognize the potential damage to nature that climate change can cause. And the voices of scientists and political leaders alike have not been enough to bridge that disconnect.

“It’s likely that more people will listen when religious leaders speak up about climate change,” Roser-Renouf said. “The moral authority of figures like Pope Francis may reach segments of the public who have not yet recognized the issue as having any personal significance.”

And other researchers share that expectation. Matthew Riley DIV ’08, a lecturer at the Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, studies how individuals interact with the environment based on their values and beliefs, primarily looking at
those who follow one of the world’s major religions. Riley agrees that there is more to
environmental issues than just science and politics. Rather, there’s a larger spiritual value, which
he describes as a connection with nature, that some Americans may have lost sight of. Riley has
studied the way religion intersects with nature, and he has noticed that many of the world’s
major religions are increasingly supporting environmental activism. When asked if he felt
climate change was a moral issue, Riley responded, “absolutely.”

“Each of the world’s religions is going back and re-examining and reinterpreting their sacred
texts to seek for guidance on how, in the 21st century, to use our deepest values and convictions
to guide us in this very different world. Because none of those ancient leaders — Jesus, Moses,
Muhammad, etc. — had any inkling of climate change,” said Leiserowitz.

* * *

On a smaller scale, Yale undergraduate students have been working to improve sustainability
practices on campus. While changing student behavior is a less demanding task than changing
the views of the entire American populace, the issues that Yale’s Sustainability Coordinators
identified in convincing their classmates of the importance of a sustainable lifestyle were highly
similar to those discussed in the YPCCC report.

When it comes to encouraging students to make changes in order to live more sustainable lives,
there doesn’t seem to be a single approach that works across the board. According to former
Trumbull College Sustainability Coordinator Alexandra Golden ’17, many people will only
make necessary changes if they are convenient, and the conversation can vary widely depending
on whom you’re talking to.

Ezra Stiles College Sustainability Coordinator Sophie Freeman ’18 expressed a similar
sentiment. The efficacy of change depends on your audience — you need to reach people based
on their values, Freeman said. And oftentimes, according to Pierson College Sustainability
Coordinator Pratik Gandhi ’18, people are simply unaware of the ways in which their lifestyles
affect the environment.

These sentiments reflect what the YPCCC report explores: In order to change people’s views
and, more importantly, behaviors regarding sustainability, those people must be addressed
according to their individual systems of belief. All three sustainability coordinators stressed that
while students may feel that climate change is a real threat, they tend not to see it as a moral
concern and consequently do not change how they conduct themselves.

“I see [climate change] as both a scientific and moral issue,” Gandhi said. “Sustainability is not
just about one person on a crusade to save the world. It is about communities committing to
leading better lives, not just for the sake of the environment, but for their own health and that of
future generations.”

http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2016/01/22/on-moral-grounds/
Religious Groups Lend Helping Hand in Flint Water Crisis

By Derek Welch
World Religion News

Interfaith effort responds to Michigan’s Contaminated water supply. The Flint water crisis has pushed state and federal officials to respond with urgent help. Residents of Flint, Michigan have been exposed to dangerous lead levels due to the faulty water system. In response, musicians, religious groups and even ex-prisoners formed to participate in the grassroots effort of offering bottled water the residents of the city. Flint is located nearly 70 miles from Detroit.

An interfaith coalition is functioning to offer much needed drinking water to Flint residents as the metropolis continues to suffer the effects of lead contamination in its water supply. The participants include Flint Jewish Federation, Michigan Muslim Community Council, InterFaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit and Catholic Charities. The city residents are presently accepting donations of money, time and water. The faith organizations, apart from handling out food and water are also concentrating on longer term aims. They want to ensure that the economically poor city, the place where President Obama declared an emergency crisis concerning its poisoned water, will never be neglected again. Bob Bruttell of the InterFaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit said that a vital role the church can play is to be an ethical watchdog so that the community benefits. The response to the crisis was unprecedented. Large numbers of religious people -from in Flint black congregations to evangelicals based quite at a far distance, have responded with money and time. The majorly African-American populated city has announced that its discolored water is not safe for drinking. Bruttell has words of caution: the building of a new water system in the city is such a herculean task that the problem cannot be solved even if all the religious groups worked together.

Engineers and scientists who went through the enormous problem has opined that supplying good water free from pollutants and lead will not be either easy or quick. Public health officials seek to test the large numbers of children who have bathed and drunk the water supplied by the city. There is a fear that these children could suffer emotional and developmental difficulties linked with more than average lead levels within the bloodstream. Flint has seen deployment of soldiers belonging to the Michigan National Guard. About 70 National Guardsman are handing out water. A state of emergency has been declared by federal officials, thus bringing in $5 million more into efforts made in the city.

EPA recruits faith groups to help end food waste

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The Gospel story of the feast of the multiplication of loaves and fish ends with Jesus instructing his disciples to gather the leftovers, "so that nothing will be wasted." That’s a message the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency hopes to tap into with Christian and other faith communities through a new initiative.

Earlier this month, EPA launched its Food Steward’s Pledge, a campaign aimed at raising faith communities as leaders and leading advocates in reducing food waste, and along with it, hunger. By signing on as Food Stewards, faith organizations receive a toolkit and other resources to learn about food waste and help them audit their current waste levels, beginning by assessing shopping habits as well as what’s already in the fridge.

The food stewardship resources offer how-to’s on reducing food waste as well as donating and composting. A Food Waste Management Calculator allows congregations to track cost savings with other ways of disposal beyond the dumpster. Other tips address how to better organize a kitchen so older food is used first, to prepare meals with extras, and to properly prep and store fruits and vegetables to stay fresh longer.

The Food Recovery Challenge, another EPA program, encourages faith groups and other organizations to redirect food from landfills and toward food pantries and kitchens.

"Faith communities exemplify caring for the well-being of all people and are leaders in being responsible stewards of our resources for current and future generations," said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy at a launch event for the program Jan. 18 at the D.C.-based Miriam’s Kitchen, a non-profit food kitchen seeking to end chronic homelessness.

McCarthy called the goals of reducing, donating and composting excess food "a triple win that protects the environment, cares for the global human family, and saves organizations and Americans money."

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, a third of produced food is lost or wasted globally, the equivalent of 1.3 billion tons annually at a cost of $750 billion. At the same time, roughly 800 million people, primarily located in developing countries, are undernourished. The World Health Organization estimated in 2014 that 1 in 7 children in developing regions were underweight, most of them located in southern Asia.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates the nation’s food waste represents 30-40 percent of the food supply. EPA reported that Americans wasted 37 million tons of food in 2013 (a total that has sharply risen in recent years) and that food waste averages $1,600 of sunk cost annually.
for a family of four. More than throwing money away, food waste represents an environmental threat. Food, the largest component in landfills (21 percent in 2013), as it decomposes releases into the atmosphere methane, a greenhouse gas more potent than carbon dioxide.

The Food Steward program is an extension of a larger EPA program that targets reducing wasted food by 50 percent by 2030.

Two of the 17 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in September shortly after Pope Francis addressed its general assembly, address food issues. Goal 2 seeks to end hunger by 2030 and provide all people access to sufficient, nutritious food year-round. Goal 12 tackles food waste directly, placing a target by 2030 of halving per capita food waste at the retail and consumer levels; it also aims to increase awareness of sustainable consumption and production practices.

The issue of food waste has been a persistent focus of Francis’ papacy, referring often to a "culture of waste" in consumption beyond food. On the occasion of World Environment Day (June 5) in 2013, he lamented the culture of waste where "men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption. Such a culture, Francis said, makes us insensitive to wasting and throwing away excess food, which is especially condemnable when, in every part of the world, unfortunately, many people and families suffer hunger and malnutrition."

He continued: "There was a time when our grandparents were very careful not to throw away any leftover food. Consumerism has induced us to be accustomed to excess and to the daily waste of food, whose value, which goes far beyond mere financial parameters, we are no longer able to judge correctly.

"Let us remember well, however, that whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry!" he said, asking people to reflect on the problem of food waste and to identify ways to address it while also “convey solidarity and sharing with the underprivileged."

Francis drove that point home in his encyclical "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home," in discussing waste in another arena: water. The pope described water access as "a basic and universal human right," and said its continued waste -- in developed countries as well as developing nations with abundant supplies -- shows the problem "is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior within the context of great inequality."

During that general audience on World Environment Day 2013, Francis connected food waste with the biblical story of the multiplication of the loaves. He noted Jesus had his disciples gather the leftovers in 12 baskets.

"Why 12? What does it mean?" Francis asked. "Twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel, it represents symbolically the whole people. And this tells us that when the food was shared fairly, with solidarity, no one was deprived of what he needed, every community could meet the needs of its poorest members. Human and environmental ecology go hand in hand."
January 28, 2016

Flint water crisis draws Southern Baptist response

By Tobin Perry, Baptist Press
Christian Telegraph

Charnisha Brown could describe in one word her feeling when she first realized that the water coming out of her pipes was contaminated -- devastated.

"It was devastating to me because of the kids -- especially my kids," said Brown, a Flint, Mich., resident. "We don't want the kids going through that. We don't want anyone going through that. It's not a good thing that you can't drink your water."

So when Southern Baptists provided Brown, a mother of two, with multiple cases of water, she appreciated it, saying it took stress off of her.

Michigan Southern Baptists distributed a truckload of bottled water last week to Flint residents whose contaminated water supply had led to the city being declared a disaster by the state and national governments. The truckload, sent from the North American Mission Board (NAMB), was the second Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) truck full of water sent to the beleaguered city in the past three months.

The water's contamination had become a problem since the city decided to save money three years ago by switching its water supply from Detroit to a new water authority that would get water from Lake Huron. During the transition time the city received water from the Flint River. The contaminated water had elevated lead exposure, and the dangers from that exposure remain today. According to a recent USA Today article, there is no safe level of lead in water. Children, the article says, face the most danger when exposed to lead.

Working out of Westside Baptist Church, just a couple of miles outside of Flint, volunteers have given three to four cases of water to each resident they've helped.

According to Westside Baptist's pastor Ed Emmerling, most Flint residents were only able to get one case of water per day through other sources. Many families needed more water than that because of both drinking and cooking needs.

Emmerling appreciated that his church got a chance to be missionaries on the ground during the water distribution.

"My church got to see the real tangible value of the Cooperative Program in working with churches all across the country," Emmerling said of Southern Baptists' channel for giving to
missions and ministry. "My church could never have afforded all of that water. But together churches from all across the country pooled their money. It was an honor for us to hand out. I'm glad our church could see the value of working together. It was a tremendous object lesson."

As volunteers handed out water, they also had the opportunity to pray with residents, invite them to church and tell them about Jesus.

"We had many opportunities to tell people that we were doing this as a way to show our love for them, because Christ loves us and He loves them, too -- and we'd love to tell them more about that love," Emmerling said.

Win Williams, the state disaster relief director in Michigan, says he is looking into other potential ways of helping Flint residents through water purification units from other state conventions and providing 1-gallon and 5-gallon water containers, which can be particularly helpful for cooking and cleaning needs. Both of those possibilities will require further evaluation.

Williams says efforts like this help show people in Michigan that Southern Baptists care about them. He noted that Michigan Baptists' disaster relief works through local churches, like Westside Baptist, because they will remain in the community once many disaster relief volunteers leave.

"We want people to remember the local church, not disaster relief, when we leave," Williams said. "We're just a tool that God has given the church to show the community that our churches care."

Mickey Caison, NAMB's interim executive director for SBDR, echoed Williams' hope for more SBDR responses in the state.

"Especially in Michigan where we're still small and we don't have a lot of churches, this begins to show that Southern Baptists are people who care and are willing to minister in the context of great tragedy in their lives," Caison said.

NAMB coordinates and manages Southern Baptist responses to major disasters through partnerships with 42 state Baptist conventions, most of which have their own state disaster relief ministries.

Southern Baptists have 65,000 trained volunteers -- including chaplains -- and 1,550 mobile units for feeding, chainsaw, mud-out, command, communication, child care, shower, laundry, water purification, repair/rebuild and power generation. SBDR is one of the three largest mobilizers of trained disaster relief volunteers in the United States, along with the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army.

http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue27277.html
January 31, 2016

Laudato Si and Renewing Creation at the Earth Summit

By Kristen Hannum
Catholic Sentinel

The well-spoken man spoke out a bit too late; most of the attendees at the session, “Catholic Farmers Reflect on Pope Francis’ Encyclical” had already stood up, chatting about what they’d heard.

Some were on their way out the door, ready to leave the workshop, one of a dozen at the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light’s seventh annual Earth Summit, on Jan. 31 at the University of Portland. It was time to go to Bauccio Commons, where there would be dinner and Portland Mayor Charlie Hales speaking.

Others in the audience were at the front of the room, congratulating — and in one case challenging — the presenters.

“I just wanted to say,” said the late speaker to the chaotic room, “that Laudato Si is a gift to the entire world, not just Christians.”

The man’s name was Gulzar Ahmed. He’s Muslim, and has presented on Laudato Si to his faith community. “All faiths should be proud to of what Pope Francis did with Laudato Si,” he said. “It is something that brings people and different faiths together.”

Although few heard Ahmed at that moment, he voiced the spirit of the conference.

“We’re all called to participate,” said Jan Elfers, EMO’s new executive director. “We all need to be awakened to the miracle of creation, and to see our relationship to the earth and to each other with new eyes.”

Nearly 300 people attended the event, which this year focused on the primacy of soil, farming and food.

Three young people led another breakout session on food, climate and the future. Summer Grandy, a University of Portland environmental science student, shared that she sees her future revolving around climate change. “My generation doesn’t have a choice about caring about climate change,” she said.

Tyler Wagner, the food justice coordinator for EMO’s Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership, agreed, saying that while for many years the discussion was couched in terms of what would be happening in 2050 or 2080, there’s more recently been a realization that climate change is already with us. “Climate change is our new reality,” he said.

Wagner said that his Catholic faith gives him an anchor of hope.
In the question segment, Debra Baker, a sophomore at Benson High School, asked the group how she could speak out for change “without being that weird, annoying hippy girl.”

Young Woodley, an intern at the Native American Youth and Family Center and the third youth panelist, had a ready answer. “I don’t know how you make change without being different,” he counseled.

The conference was a family affair for the Woodleys, as the keynote speaker was Dr. Randy Woodley, a Keetoowah Cherokee who is an author, Baptist preacher, farmer and professor at George Fox University in Newberg.

Dr. Woodley offered stories, history and philosophy, challenging his audience to consider how the world works in a new way — a non-hierarchical, non-Western way.

The summit ended with a different challenge from Mayor Hales. He too offered a story — that of traveling to Rome, to sit in a room with 60 other mayors and Pope Francis. “It was a life-changing experience,” he said.

Mayor Hales’ office had at first thought that the invitation to the Vatican was a prank. Once they determined it was real, he did his homework and read Laudato Si.

Pope Francis told the mayors that they were his instruments for change. Pope Francis inspired the mayor of Paris to ask the group to get together 500 mayors to come to the climate summit there last autumn, to drive more change. The mayors did that, and they, in turn, inspired a virtuous competition to limit greenhouse gasses and limit climate change. “Five hundred mayors made a difference,” he said.

In the same way, Mayor Hales said the people at the Earth Summit were also making a difference. “I’m here to tell you it works,” he said. “Bless you all.”

http://www.catholicsentinel.org/main.asp?SectionID=2&SubSectionID=35&ArticleID=30912

Winter 2016

Capsules - Creation Justice Ministries’ Newsletter

http://www.creationjustice.org/capsules.html

February 2016

Green the Church Newsletter

February 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

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February 2016

Earth Keeper Newsletter

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=acad47b&e=a758405790

February 1, 2016

Faith communities unite for action on climate change

By Russell L. Meyer
Orlando Sentinel

No matter our own personal faith or spiritual beliefs, one universal truth is that climate change threatens everyone. The climate agreement reached in Paris in December is a ray of hope in the international response to climate change. However, a lasting solution requires strong grass-roots action from concerned citizens and aggressive efforts on the part of political leaders.

Religious institutions and citizens of all faiths know that we have a moral duty to be stewards of the Earth, and to protect it from the disastrous effects of climate change. That's why the Florida Council of Churches has joined with many other Florida religious organizations to demand bold action from our officials and candidates on building a clean alternative economy, in pursuit of a nationwide goal of powering America with more than 50 percent clean energy by 2030.

Nowhere in the country do we feel the implications of climate change more than in Florida. A 2015 report shows that we have more private property at risk because of climate change than any other state. We need to begin taking action today to address the $69 billion worth of coastal property in Florida in danger of flooding and water damage. Rising seas will flood homes and erode our world-famous coastline — endangering lives, damaging property and threatening our tourism-reliant economy.
Some of our most vulnerable communities are also the most threatened by climate change — and it is our moral duty to help protect them. To that end, representatives of two dozen faiths, from Baptists to Buddhists (and everywhere in between), have signed an Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change. It's a message we can all stand behind: "Strong action on climate change is imperative by the principles and traditions of our faiths and the collective compassion, wisdom and leadership of humanity."

Across Florida, faith leaders are uniting to turn this message into action. This past weekend, we gathered at the Florida Interfaith Climate Action Network National Assembly in Longwood. The event provided people of faith and goodwill the opportunity to collaborate on climate-related efforts here in Florida, which has been called "ground zero" for climate change.

We have come a long way as a nation and as a planet from where we were decades ago. We honor and applaud the great strides we have made, but our journey is far from over.

We must build on the Paris agreement and solidify America's leadership on climate action in the coming weeks and months. As Pope Francis reminded us on his recent visit to America, we must make sure our leaders stand up and make the moral choice to safeguard the most vulnerable and protect our common home from climate change.

The Rev. Russell L. Meyer is the executive director of the Florida Council of Churches.


February 2, 2016

US Catholics allergic to reality of environmental racism, theologian says at St. John's University

By Peter Feuerherd
National Catholic Reporter

Queens, NY -- Catholic environmentalists need to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, Fr. Bryan Massingale, theology professor at Marquette University, told a conference at St. John’s University here on Saturday.

"We all live on the same planet but we don’t breathe in the same air. Some environments are more equal than others," said Massingale, who cited how minority communities have been used as dumping grounds for decades. "The poor and communities of color bear risks that would be unacceptable" for white and more affluent areas. These communities, he said, have long been "sacrifice zones" of environmental degradation, places where unwanted waste is disposed.

Titled "Care for Our Common Home: The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor," the conference was the ninth such biennial gathering that St. John’s, a Vincentian university, has held on social justice matters. Speakers included theologian Erin Lothes of the College of St.
Elizabeth and several experts in sustainable development. Massingale delivered the keynote address.

"We are not faced with two separate crises," said the priest, citing what he described as an environmental and racism disaster inflicted upon the people of Flint, Mich. -- a city that is largely African American and poor.

"Environmental racism is a reality in this country," Massingale said, faulting elements in the Catholic green community for being concerned about the earth with much less concern about some of the people who inhabit it.

He praised Pope Francis, who, in his encyclical "Laudato Si’ on Care for Our Common Home," links the two crises, frequently citing shortcomings in the "human ecology" of lack of access to basic needs such as clean water and housing.

Even with the pope’s insights, Massingale said, Catholic environmentalists often fail to see the links between racism and the environment. He noted how some Catholic environmentalists complained on a website in last June that the papal encyclical launch was being overshadowed by media coverage of the killings in a church by a white supremacist in Charleston, S.C.

He said that American Catholics in general have "an allergy" to talking about racial issues, even when race is evident.

The situation, for example, in Flint -- where residents, despite frequent complaints to governing authorities, have been drinking and bathing in contaminated water for more than a year -- is a stark example of environmental racism in action. He said that such a crisis would never have been allowed to continue in more affluent cities.

Flint, governed by a state-appointed manager, no longer has democratic rule for its largely minority and poor population. That undemocratic system allowed an intolerable situation to continue, he said.

Massingale said that racism "enables people to not care for people who are not like them" and is the root cause of many environmental crises.

That racism is not only evident in the wider culture, it is also part of American Catholic life as well.

In Catholic circles, he said, racism is often defined as individual acts of rudeness and discrimination, remedied by appeals to overcome personal sin. It is, however, Massingale said, a more systemic issue.

And, even while immigrants, many of them black and brown, continue to redefine what it means to be a Catholic American, leadership still sees European Catholic culture as normative. He described participating in the writing of a bishops’ pastoral on racism, a document which was
never completed. "Our people will get mad," said one consulting bishop about the concerns raised. Another commented, "Our people will not understand."

Who were "our people" that they mentioned? Both bishops, said Massingale, defined themselves, their people and the church in the United States as white.

Other speakers at the conference -- held at the third largest and most ethnically-diverse U.S. Catholic university in the country -- agreed with Massingale. The speakers at the meeting, sponsored by St. John’s Vincentian Center for Church and Society, argued that the crisis articulated in *Laudato Si’* is increasingly urgent.

"Environmental pillage has been catastrophic," said Anthony Annett, climate change and sustainable development advisor at the Earth Institute of Columbia University. He described the encyclical as a social document, not merely an environmental manifesto, concerned with people’s relationship to God, the earth and humanity.

Elham Seyedsayamdost, researcher and developmental specialist and visiting scholar at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, noted that the 21st century has witnessed three times as many natural disasters documented per decade as the previous century. Most of the impact of those disasters were felt by poor people who are least responsible for growing carbon fuel pollution, which many experts see as contributing to global climate change.

John C. Mutter of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, and author of *The Disaster Profiteers: How Natural Disasters Make the Rich Richer and the Poor Poorer*, said the Hurricane Katrina disaster, as one vivid example, fell most heavily on the poor of New Orleans. For decades those with means had established themselves in flood-free areas, he said, away from the industrial canal system that enveloped the poor neighborhoods of New Orleans with water, bringing death and destruction to thousands.

[Peter Feuerherd is a journalism professor at St. John’s University and frequent *NCR* contributor.]


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**February 2, 2016**

Heeding Pope Francis’s Call, SJU Hosts Conference to Tackle Worldwide Crisis

St. John’s University

His Holiness Pope Francis’s deep concern for the global ecological crisis and its impact on the poor was the topic of the *Ninth Biennial Vincentian Chair of Social Justice Conference*, held on January 30 at the Queens, NY, campus.
The Vincentian Center for Church and Society at St. John’s—along with the faculty Vincentian Research Fellows—hosted the daylong event, entitled “Care for Our Common Home: The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor.” Approximately 240 participants, attendees, faculty, and students took part in panels, break-out meetings, and question-and-answer sessions.

“Pope Francis’s goal of uniting people to address the care for our common home has special meaning to St. John’s University and the entire Vincentian community,” said Rev. Bernard M. Tracey, C.M., Executive Vice President for Mission. “Our faculty members from across the disciplines are leaders in the field in terms of Catholic education, teaching, conducting research, and promoting social justice. This event is a natural extension of their commitment to this critical issue.”

The gathering, known as “the poverty conference,” brought together theologians, economists, scientists, and other experts whose charge was to develop specific action plans in response to the encyclical Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home—the Pope’s document on combating the ecological crisis. In it, the Holy Father urgently appeals for “a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.” A Vigil Mass followed in St. Thomas More Church.

Rev. Bryan N. Massingale, S.T.D. ’01HON, Professor of Systematics/Ethics at Marquette University, received a standing ovation for his keynote address, entitled “The Evidence of Things Unsaid: The Silence About Racism in the Care for Creation.” In his 40-minute talk, he framed the issue of environmental racism through the lens of the yearlong water contamination situation in Flint, MI.

“The events unfolding in Flint provide a tragic illustration of the nexus between caring for creation and care of the poor, of the deep connection between racism and environmental neglect, and of the confluence of social neglect and ecological harm,” said Fr. Massingale. “Environmental racism is a reality in this country, where communities of color have long borne the brunt of degraded neighborhoods and a higher prevalence of environmentally-linked diseases. There is one interwoven story here—care for the Earth is impossible in the absence of a proactive concern about racism.”

Panel presenters and dialogue session participants included Anthony Annett, Ph.D., Columbia University; Erin Lothes, Ph.D., College of Saint Elizabeth; John C. Mutter, Ph.D., Columbia University; Juan Elias Chebly ’08TCB, ’09MBA, a lead advisor to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP); Elham Seyedsayamdost, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Boston; Joanne Carroll, Ph.D., College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, St. John’s University; and Basilio Monteiro, Ph.D., College of Professional Studies, St. John’s University.

“Our faith and hope is to provide a vision of a just, peaceful, and sustainable world,” Lothes said. “The challenge to this vision is the ecocidal scale of environmental injustice.” She added, “To solve it, we need to address both sides of the crisis—the environment needs to be stabilized for all of us experiencing the impacts of climate change, and justice needs to be created for those suffering energy poverty.”
Christine Hammill-Cregan, Associate Director, Vincentian Center for Church and Society, characterized the encyclical as being about people, at its core. “It isn’t just for Catholics. It’s a 92-page letter to everyone, a call to action on all levels,” she said. “That’s a very strong message—caring for the planet is about people.”

“When most people hear the phrase ‘social justice,’ their first instinct is a desire to help,” said Mitchell Petit-Frere ’16G. “However, you need to be informed in order to lend a hand and this conference equipped me with the tools to do so,” he said. “The event fostered new thoughts and perspectives within the minds of others—which may end up leading to social progress outside the University’s gates.”

Rev. Patrick J. Griffin, C.M., Executive Director of the Vincentian Center for Church and Society, delivered the homily at the Mass that culminated the day’s events. “We are here on this day to give special attention to the document Laudato Si’ and the message of Pope Francis on behalf of our environment—which can place him as a prophet among us,” he said. “Pope Francis takes up the role of a prophet in this effort and he must do so. These experts who have gathered among us today legitimize his voice.”


February 3, 2016

NGT questions Hindus' cremation procedure, says it causes air, water pollution

India TV News Desk

New Delhi: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has questioned the centuries-old tradition practised by Hindus to cremate dead bodies at the river banks, saying the method of burning wood leads to air pollution and also effects natural water resources.

Keeping in mind the growing level of pollution, the NGT said that there was a need to adopt environment-friendly methods like electric crematoriums and use of CNG and change the 'mindset of the people'.

The NGT bench headed by Justice UD Salvi also directed the Union Environment Ministry and the Delhi government to initiate programmes to provide alternative modes of cremation of human remains, saying the traditional emitted hazardous pollutants in the environment.

"The issue involves question of faith and circumstances in which the people live, it is, therefore, the responsibility of the men who lead, particularly religious leaders, to steer the faith in a direction so as to change the mindset of people practising their faith and make them adopt practices which are environment-friendly," the bench observed while directing authorities, including civic bodies, to educate the public in this regard.
"It is also the responsibility of the government to facilitate the making of the mindset of the citizens as well as to provide environment-friendly alternatives for cremation to its citizenry," the bench further said.

The green panel said the traditional means of cremation caused adverse impact on environment and dispersal of ashes in the river led to water pollution.

"Religions of the world, therefore, conceived of different methods for disposal of the dead on the basis of their theology and the circumstances in which the believers lived. Where there was plenty of wood, the individuals thought of disposal of their dead by burning with wood, but where there was scarcity of wood the individuals buried their dead," it said.

In Hinduism, the cremation ground (shmashana ghat) is located near a river, if not on the river bank itself. According to tradition, a dead body is washed by family members in the river water before being put on wood pyre with feet facing south. It is said that Hindus believe that soul of a dead person must be completely detached from the body to attain 'moksha'. And for this, an open cremation is needed so that the soul can be released easily as soon as the body is set on fire. The ashes are later immersed in the river completing the rite.

The NGT was hearing a plea by advocate DM Bhalla who had said that cremation of humans by conventional methods added to air pollution, therefore, alternative modes of cremation needed to be used.

Bhalla contended that cremation of human remains by traditional method involving wood has serious impact on the environment as 'the forest cover is sacrificed and obnoxious gases emanated from the burning of human mortal remains pollute the air'.


February 3, 2016

Center for Spirituality in Nature blends ecology and theology

By Mark Jenkins
Washington Post

Beth Norcross likes to take walks in the woods. But when she does, she’s looking for more than scenery and solitude.

The Arlington resident is the founding director of the Center for Spirituality in Nature, which combines ecological and theological objectives. She will encourage the hikers she leads through D.C.’s Fletcher’s Cove on Saturday to look outside and inside.
“We’ll walk along the canal and see what’s happening on that particular day that we might get some spiritual insight from,” Norcross said. “For example, we’ll take a look at the frozen canal, and we’ll wonder together what’s happening underneath the surface. And we’ll compare that with what might be happening to us spiritually. Where it might seem cold and frozen and dormant on the surface, what riches lie underneath?

“There are frogs that are probably hibernating, turtles that are hibernating underneath,” she added. “And we’ll talk about times in our lives that have felt dormant spiritually, where in fact things have been happening with us that we’re unaware of.”

Patience is a theme, she said. “Trees set their buds in fall, and everything it needs to blossom and grow in the spring is being held in that bud in the winter. What does that tell us, spiritually? Does it tell us to hold our faith during the course of the cold, hard winter?”

After working as a staff member for the U.S. Senate National Parks and Forests Subcommittee and as vice president of Conservation for American Rivers, Norcross sought another sort of insight into nature. She studied at Wesley Theological Seminary, a United Methodist school near Ward Circle, and got her master’s degree in theological studies and a doctorate in ministry. She’s now an adjunct professor at Wesley, but did not become ordained.

“I self-identify with the Christian story,” she said. “I use those words carefully because I think there are many stories out there — religious stories, spiritual stories.

“I find that when I teach from my own story, I can teach with depth and substance,” Norcross added. “But we encourage other stories and interaction with other faiths, as well.”

In October, one of Norcross’s walks was co-sponsored by the Potomac Conservancy, which is also promoting the upcoming one.

“We thought that this was a great opportunity to explore a different side of the Potomac River that we at the conservancy don’t always take the time to look at, and give people the space to experience,” said Katie Blackman, director of community conservation for the Silver Spring-based group.

“Even for people who aren’t part of a particular faith or cultural tradition, there’s that moment where the trail opens up and you’re standing at the edge of the river and it’s just this kind of deep breath, and you suddenly feel free of stress and worry,” Blackman said. “We think that the deeper the connection that people form with the river, the more likely they’ll be to stand up and take action to protect it.”

Norcross has similar goals, even if she approaches them from another direction. “I started the center a year and a half ago because I began to realize that, if we were going to make behavioral change, we really needed to reintroduce people to the natural world. And to having a kind of relationship with the natural world.”
Fletcher’s Cove doesn’t offer the most dramatic vistas in the Potomac watershed. It was chosen partially for a practical reason: In wintertime, it’s easier to reach than some wilder locations.

Still, Norcross said, “It has the canal, and it has the river. We can talk a lot about the river and the significance of water, spiritually.”

She has led winter hikes there before, she said. “It’s actually one of our favorite walks. Once you get the participants bundled up and out there, they so enjoy it. It’s clear, it’s cold, the sun is shining, the sycamores are beaming in contrast to the great blue sky.”

Norcross laughed when asked whether she can guarantee sunshine. “I’ve done programs in storms. There’s always something that nature has to offer. No matter what the weather.”

Jenkins is a freelance writer.

The three-hour hike begins at 10 a.m. Saturday. The cost is $20. For information, visit centerforspiritualityinnature.org.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/center-for-spirituality-in-nature-blends-ecology-and-theology/2016/02/02/3dsc89f6-c92e-11e5-88ff-e2d1b4289c2f_story.html

February 3, 2016

Exxon Stiff-Arms a Request to Take Moral Responsibility for Climate Change

Opposing a shareholder resolution, Exxon says the call to accept responsibility for global warming and support the 2 degrees Celsius goal is 'vague.'

By David Hasemyer
InsideClimate News

Oil giant ExxonMobil moved to reject a shareholder proposal calling for the company to assert moral leadership on climate change and pledge to work toward limiting global warming to 2 degrees Celsius or less.

In a letter to securities regulators, the company said the resolution filed by a faith-based organization is "vague and indefinite." Exxon also said it’s unnecessary for shareholders to consider the proposal at the annual stockholders meeting on May 25 because the company has already taken steps to tamp down global warming. The resolution was filed by the New Jersey-based Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment.

While social responsibility groups have been demanding action on climate change from Exxon for decades, the Tri-State resolution is the first to call on the company to acknowledge moral responsibility. Over the past 25 years, shareholders have submitted 62 climate change-related proposals to Exxon, according to an InsideClimate News review of shareholder resolutions. Of
those, 22 were either withdrawn or blocked by the company. None of the remaining 40 got enough votes to pass.

Management often urges the Securities and Exchange Commission to bar shareholder proposals from the proxy statements they publish for annual investor meetings.

Sister Patricia Daly of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Caldwell, N.J., one of the sponsors of the resolution, called Exxon’s move "arrogant and dangerous."

"This challenge demonstrates that ExxonMobil plans to continue to cling to an unsustainable paradigm that severely harms our planet, without reflecting on the moral dimensions of a ‘business as usual’ scenario," she said. "I wonder what management fears will be revealed if they allow this resolution to go to a vote.

"They don’t see the moral imperative," she said. "They are dodging the 2 degrees."

The resolution declares, “We believe that ExxonMobil should assert moral leadership with respect to climate change.” It also calls on Exxon to adopt policies consistent with limiting the average global temperature increase to 2 degrees since the beginning of the Industrial Age and to acknowledge urgency in meeting that goal. The Tri-State Coalition represents nearly 40 Roman Catholic groups with pension funds that hold shares of Exxon.

A spokesman for Exxon declined to comment. The Tri-State proposal was among the first of seven 2016 shareholder resolutions to be filed with Exxon addressing climate change.

Exxon asked the SEC to allow the company to dismiss the resolution because it does not spell out exactly what actions Exxon would have to take to comply.

"The Proposal’s request that the company commit to ‘support the goal’ of limiting warming to less than ‘2° C’ is vague and misleading," according to Exxon’s letter to the SEC.

"The meaning and implications of this reference to ‘2° C’ are not defined or explained in the proposal and are likely only understood and appreciated by shareholders with a significant level of knowledge and expertise regarding climate change science and policy," Exxon said in the letter.

The company argued that there is disagreement in the scientific community over how to define or reach a 2-degree target, so it would be impossible for the company to do so.

The goal of holding global warming to 2 degrees or less was embraced by 196 countries during the Paris climate talks last year. The resulting agreement aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which are the largest contributor to global warming.

Exxon also said it has taken numerous steps to reduce the risk of climate change.
"The Company’s past and current actions and initiatives compare favorably with the shareholder proposal’s essential objective of having the Company publicly support the goal of addressing climate change risk," according to the Exxon letter.

It cited steps to improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions at its own operations and to conduct and support research on new technologies. Exxon said it also has urged governments, private companies and consumers to embrace climate policy solutions.

The sponsors of the proposal said Exxon's objections show that it is out of step with the rest of the industry and the world. Daly said the moral dimensions of climate change are clear and have been articulated in statements from world leaders and faith leaders, including Pope Francis in his environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si’*.

Robert Brulle, a professor of sociology and environmental science at Drexel University, said he understands Exxon's argument that the resolution is vague. He said the resolution’s sponsors could have specified how Exxon should contribute to the 2-degree limit, or how much in greenhouse gas emissions Exxon should curtail.

"Without the specificity, you end up with all the varying interpretations," said Brulle, who has studied the funding behind climate change denial campaigns mounted by the fossil fuel industry, including Exxon. "What Exxon is doing is using that discussion to muddle the issues."

As for Exxon's contention that it has already met its responsibility, Brulle called it "laughable."

"They say 'Oh yeah, we've met that goal,'" he said. "But what have they really done?"


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**February 5, 2016**

Why climate change is really, really unfair

By Chris Mooney

Washington Post

With his 2015 encyclical “Laudato Si’,” Pope Frances went further than perhaps anyone has before to reframe the entire debate around climate change by focusing on the world’s poor and the duty to protect them from environmental harms that they did not cause themselves.

Now, new research in the journal Scientific Reports has underscored the pope’s message by showing that when it comes to climate change, it is indeed the countries with the most to lose that tend to contribute to the problem least — and also the other way round. The countries that contribute most to the problem — such as China and the United States, the current top two
emitters — tend to show less relative vulnerability to the impact compared with nations that have quite low levels of emissions, the research finds.

“The general rule is, at a global scale, if you’re a nation that is going to suffer from climate change, you’re very likely not contributing to the problem,” says James Watson, a professor in the school of geography at the University of Queensland in Australia who also works with the Wildlife Conservation Society on climate change. Watson conducted the study with two colleagues from the University of Queensland.

“That’s the general rule that we found,” Watson continues. “But it’s completely inequitable.”

Many have observed this — including small island nations, which successfully lobbied to have the extra-protective climate target of 1.5 degrees Celsius included in the Paris climate agreement in December — but the new research has done something else: quantified it.

To do so, Watson and his colleagues compared two datasets. The first is a dataset kept by the World Resources Institute of the present-day emissions of countries around the world. Clearly, the relative contributions to the problem are quite unbalanced. The study notes that just 10 countries currently contribute more than 60 percent of all emissions, and a single one, China, contributes more than 20 percent (or did in 2010, which was the year used for the study).

The second dataset is a “Climate Vulnerability Monitor” kept by the humanitarian group DARA, which ranks countries according to vulnerability based on measures such as exposure to sea-level rise and drought, health hazards, risks of extremes or disasters, and more. Here, 17 countries were rated as “acutely vulnerable,” and they tended to be either island nations such as Vanuatu or African nations such as Gambia.

And the result? Sure enough, the research found — based on 2010 emissions and 2010 vulnerability levels — widespread inequity. The study noted, “20 of the 36 highest emitting countries are among the least vulnerable to negative impacts of future climate change. … Conversely, 11 of the 17 countries with low or moderate GHG emissions, are acutely vulnerable to negative impacts of climate change.”

The research also looked toward the future, when the number of climate-vulnerable countries grows as climate change itself becomes worse. In 2030, there are expected to be 62 “acutely” vulnerable countries, rather than 17. Again, small island nations and African nations lead the way. And inequity, the study found, is expected to be even worse.

Climate equity concerns were a key factor in the decision in Paris late last year to include the 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature target in a historic climate accord. The idea of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels has long been championed by small island nations, as well as a growing body of climate-vulnerable nations, and for understandable reasons; it limits their impacts.

However, it is generally agreed upon that the world is well off course if we want to hold warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. (We are currently at about 1 degree warmer than the late
19th century.) Indeed, many scientists say it won’t be possible without overshooting the goal and then coming back down again thanks to future technologies that will be capable of removing carbon dioxide from the air on a vast scale.

Granted, although the effects of climate change may be very disproportionate, it’s also becoming clear that the major emitters are also going to see their share of problems. Recent research, for instance, points to a major warming of waters off the U.S. East Coast that could have large implications for fisheries, storms, and sea-level rise.

So it’s not that the major emitters won’t suffer any impacts — but that those impacts aren’t likely to be distributed across the globe in proportion to emissions. Watson likens the current research on climate inequity to prior findings about secondhand smoke: “The people suffering from the impacts of smoking aren’t the smokers themselves, it’s the people next door,” he says.


February 5, 2016

In February prayer video, Pope Francis pleads for creation care, 'a new way of living'

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Pope Francis reinforced core messages of his major encyclical on the environment in his video prayer intention for February, asking people across the globe to do their part in "caring for our common home," and to discover "a new way of living."

The video, the new medium for the monthly prayer intentions, opens with dawn breaking through a forest. Images of majestic mountains follow, along with a school of fish and budding plants.

"Believers and unbelievers agree that the earth is our common heritage, the fruits of which should benefit everyone," he said.

"However, what is happening in the world we live in?" Francis asked.

A beach scene with children playing in the sand and water quickly transitions to the tide receding and revealing plastic cups, bottles and other trash in its wake.

The scene brings to life a much-cited line from Francis’ social encyclical "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home" regarding the state of the planet: "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish."
"The relationship between poverty and the fragility of the planet requires another way of managing the economy and measuring progress, conceiving a new way of living," the pope said in the video, to the backdrop of a bicyclist riding through a smog-filled city in traffic wearing a gas mask.

"This month I make a special request: that we take good care of creation -- a gift freely given -- cultivating and protecting it for future generations," Francis said. "Caring for our common home."

The video closes with scenes of people outdoors enjoying nature, another cyclist recycling a cup, and even the sharing of a four-leaf clover for good measure.

In a press release from the Global Catholic Climate Movement Jesuit Fr. Frédéric Fornos, international director of the Apostleship of Prayer, said the February prayer intention "comes at a crucial time for humanity, addressing an area where we urgently need to make changes."

"We need a conversation that brings us together, because we are all affected by environmental challenges, especially the poor and displaced," Fornos said.

The video is the second released since the Vatican announced it as the new prayer intention format, which it produces with the Apostleship of Prayer international organization. The first video asked for peaceful, loving dialogue among people of different faiths. Also on Friday, news broke that Francis will meet with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill in Cuba -- the first ever meeting between leaders of the two Christian churches -- as part of his upcoming trip to Mexico.

In April 2015, Francis made his universal prayer intention for the month, "That people may learn to respect creation and care for it as a gift from God." Two months later, he released Laudato Si', the first papal encyclical to focus primarily on issues of ecology and the environment.

Watch the video here:


February 8, 2016

Poet Wendell Berry bequeaths farming legacy to small Catholic college

By Judith Valente, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

St. Catharine, K.Y. -- The tobacco farms, hay fields and rolling knobs of central Kentucky mark the landscape that inspires much of the work of award-winning poet, fiction writer and essayist Wendell Berry.
Berry describes the solace he derives from this land in one of his most famous poems, “The Peace of Wild Things”:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things …

The Berry family has lived in these parts for nine generations. While pursuing a prolific writing career, Berry never stopped caring for the land of his ancestors. Now, the 81-year-old writer wants to pass on his family’s farming legacy to a new generation. He decided against teaming up with a large university agricultural program, and instead selected a small Catholic liberal arts college, St. Catharine College, about an hour’s drive from Louisville, run by the Dominican Sisters of Peace.

“It’s probably the most unlikely place that the Berry Farming Program could have ended up,” says Sr. Claire McGowan, an environmental activist and member of the Dominican Sisters of Peace. “We’re so small, so rural. We’re not famous, but those are the characteristics the Berry family appreciates and promotes.”

The sisters have been part of this community since 1822, teaching -- and farming -- on their own 550-acre stretch of land. That impressed Berry’s daughter, Mary.

“When I went to St. Catharine’s, their first question to me was not about my father’s reputation and how it might serve their desire to raise funds for whatever,” Mary Berry says. “The first question at St. Catharine’s to me was how does your work fit with the four pillars of the Dominican life?”

Those four pillars include prayer, study, ministry and community. “The Berry Farming Program really maximizes each of those,” McGowan says.

Berry, whose writings often explore the connection between the natural world and the human spirit, proved a good fit for the sisters too.

“Wendell Berry is a deeply soulful man,” McGowan says. “He lives his life out of deep spiritual convictions and always has, and has a simplicity and a love for everything that’s wild, everything that’s natural, and at the same time for people, particularly simple people who are trying to build a relationship with the natural world.”

The Berry Farming Program offers an interdisciplinary approach to agriculture, combining fieldwork with philosophy and studies in agricultural science and agribusiness with classes on literature, history and culture.
“In our thinking we often have silos,” says the program’s coordinator, Leah Bayens. “Agricultural economics (is) one area. Agricultural production is another area, another silo. Community leadership, that’s another silo. So when Wendell says things like, ‘You can’t take the culture out of agriculture,’ ultimately what I think he means is you can’t take the heart out of agriculture, you can’t minimize it into an equation or minimize it into one particular scientific study.”

For Berry, the heart of agriculture springs from a spiritual kinship with the land.

“I believe the world and our life in it are conditional gifts. You have to take good care of it. You have to love it,” he told Bill Moyers in a rare interview he gave three years ago at the opening of the Berry Center.

Bayens says, “That kind of reframing of agricultural production and the human place in that system is radical, because what it does is make an ethical and spiritual relationship to land stewardship the center point, not something on the periphery.”

It’s a belief Berry laid out in a 2012 essay he wrote called “It All Turns on Affection” when he received a medal from the National Endowment for the Humanities for his lifetime of work.

“Wendell has written that the care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and most pleasing responsibility. To have a sense of affection for one another and nonliving beings, that’s what we’re trying to instill as a goal for our students,” Bayens says.

Instruction on soil stewardship is a major part of the Berry program, as are classes like the one in eco-spirituality, taught by religious studies professor Matt Branstetter.

“Wendell is also a poet, so he’s really great at bringing out the spirituality of what would otherwise seem like very simple, mundane tasks, but looked upon with the right attitude, they’re kind of living mysticism,” Branstetter says.

“I consider myself a person who takes the gospels seriously,” Berry told Moyers in the interview. “A lot of my writing, when it hasn’t been in defense of precious things, it’s been giving thanks for precious things.”

Mary Berry says she hopes the program will help curb the trend over the past century toward ever-bigger industrial farms.

“I can’t think of much that’s right about farming in America right now. If anything was working very well we’d have more people farming. We have three-quarters of 1 percent of the population farming now,” she says.

The Berrys hope to encourage young farmers to grow products for local markets on mid-sized parcels of land that don’t depend heavily on chemical fertilizers and herbicides.
“I heard Daddy say recently that big agriculture, industrial agriculture is in its death throes. It’s brain-dead and it’s just thrashing around now. I think he’s right,” Mary Berry says.

In a part of the country where farming income once depended on tobacco -- a crop in severe decline -- Berry program students are researching ways farmers can diversify and still practice soil conservation. On a 15-acre research farm near the college, the students are participating in a government-sponsored program that grows a type of hemp used in making clothing fiber.

“I want the students to realize that soil is part of the whole. It’s an eco-system,” says Shawn Lucas, who teaches soil science. “I mean, the soil is not just dirt; it’s minerals, organic materials, living roots, living micro-organisms, and the more diversity you can get into that system the healthier it’s going to be.”

The farming program has grown from just one student two years ago to 25 now. The students come from urban and farm areas, and from as far off as India and Nepal.

Student Sie Tiioye plans to return eventually to his family’s grain farm in Burkina Faso, in West Africa. “I think the most attractive thing about the farming program is that it teaches you how to make a productive farming system using very basic techniques. I think that’s something that’s very practical for my country,” he says.

Rachel Mendoza, another of the students, is interested in urban farming. “I was raised with a very sustainable lifestyle as far as growing our own food and I was very interested in how I could do this in an urban setting. I’m particularly attracted to meeting the needs of underserved people in our urban communities.”

Before enrolling in the program, many of the students had never read Berry’s poems, stories and essays on farming, but they can now quote chapter and verse.

“I always love this one quote (of Berry’s): ‘What I stand for is what I stand on,’” says Winnie Cheuvront. “We all walk on this earth. Why are we not taking care of it? And that’s something he tries to convey in his writings, so that we all can get a passion for the earth and for what we do in everyday life.”

“He writes in a way that you’re sitting on the front porch at the farm with him,” adds student Shelby Floyd. “He stresses the fact that it is humans that this earth is feeding. It is our responsibility to take care of it. We have to take care of our mother that is the ultimate source of life.”

Mary Berry says she’s thrilled that many of the students want to farm in communities where they were raised. She half-jokingly says the farming center offers degrees in “homecoming.”

“It doesn’t mean people have to go to the place that they were born,” she says. “The concept of homecoming, I think, is simply to take root someplace, and care about a place, not just for a short amount of time, but forever.”
It’s a point her father often makes. “The important thing is to learn everything you can about a place, then make common cause with that place, set a good example,” he told Moyers.

Mary Berry says the family wants to re-create the kind of supportive agricultural community that it benefited from through generations of farming.

“We were surrounded by neighbors and friends and family who had known the farm we bought, so they understood, they knew the mistakes we might make. They’d seen them made. They could advise us. They could give us what no college program could give us,” she says.

The St. Catharine’s program, she says, is the next best thing for passing on “what we just had handed to us.”


February 10, 2016

Coal Money Divides Oakland's Churches

The company behind the plan to ship coal through Oakland has promised millions of dollars to Oakland churches for their support.

By Darwin BondGraham
East Bay Express

Reverend Ken Chambers' Westside Missionary Baptist Church is located on Willow Street in West Oakland, just half a mile from the bustling railroad yard where dozens of trains pass each day. The locomotives pull mostly sealed shipping containers filled with furniture, fruits and nuts, and electronics to and from the city's busy seaport. But soon these tracks could become the busiest corridor for shipping coal on the West Coast.

Terminal Logistics Solutions (TLS), a company headed by former Port of Oakland Executive Director Jerry Bridges, is proposing to ship millions of tons of coal through a marine terminal that will be built on the old Army Base. If the coal plan moves forward, Chambers fears that members of his congregation would be poisoned by toxic dust blowing from train cars, silos, and conveyors. Chambers is also concerned about the effects of burning coal in the global climate. But Chambers isn't just fighting the developer TLS to stop the project. He is also pushing back against a group of politically influential Oakland clergy who have lined up behind TLS and coal.

Oakland's Black clergy members are split on the question of coal, and part of the reason is the money that Bridges has promised to churches that support the plan, according to numerous sources.
Last December, Chambers attended a meeting of Oakland pastors at the Greater St. Paul Church in Uptown to discuss the issue of coal. Bridges of TLS spoke to the pastors, promising jobs at the marine terminal, and stating that there would be no negative health and safety impacts. Then Bridges thanked Bishop Bob Jackson, leader of Acts Full Gospel Church for supporting coal. And according to Chambers and other sources, Jackson thanked Bridges for the financial contribution that Bridges had made to the Acts Full Gospel Church's youth program.

"Jerry said he'd already given money to Bishop Bob Jackson's church youth program," said Chambers in an interview. "And Bishop Jackson thanked him for the donation. He's been bought off."

Jackson did not return multiple phone calls and emails seeking comment for this story. But numerous sources confirmed that Bridges told the group of pastors that he gave money to Jackson's church. Furthermore, sources say Bridges has been in talks with Jackson and other pastors about setting up a fund to channel cash from coal shipments to their churches and nonprofits — if the pastors can convince the Oakland City Council to approve coal shipments through the city.

Pro-coal church leaders have organized themselves into a group called the Ecumenical Economic Empowerment Council. Members of the group appeared at a December 8 council meeting to urge the councilmembers to approve the coal plan. "We would like to see this project moving forward as soon as possible," said Pastor Joseph Simmons of the Greater St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, to the council. "And we would like to see that there's not any more information going into the public that scares the public."

Simmons wrote in an email to the Express that the Ecumenical Economic Empowerment Council is pro-coal because of the jobs it will generate for Oakland residents. "With the very high level of gentrification that has been occurring in Oakland (West Oakland, specifically), people need quality jobs and careers to live where the rents are escalating to be the highest in the country," wrote Simmons. Simmons also denied that Bridges has contributed money to any churches, or made any promises to fund churches with coal money. "There are no promises to any of our churches or us as individuals in any way," Simmons wrote. "The community benefits program has not been discussed with us. How this will be done should be discussed with TLS officials."

Bridges did not respond to multiple phone calls and emails seeking comment for this story. TLS's official website states that the company will "grow strategic partnerships with community and faith-based organizations to make a positive and meaningful impact by committing funds," and that "TLS will commit funds based upon the annual throughput of the terminal.""

As the Express reported last fall, members of the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP), a West Oakland nonprofit, said Bridges offered the organization money on the condition that the group help line up support for coal shipments through the city (See "Buying Support for Coal," 9/21). Margaret Gordon, co-founder of WOEIP, said at the time that her organization rejected the offer because coal would pollute Oakland and other communities along the rail line, and would also drive climate change when it is burned in foreign countries.
Gordon said in a recent interview that there are multiple problems with the money Bridges is offering to churches and possibly other organizations. "These dollars that Bridges is offering to these ministers, is this separate from what the city and Oakland Global Trade and Logistics have already implemented, or is this a separate deal?" asked Gordon.

Gordon said that the original community benefits package with Prologis CCIG Oakland Global, the master developer of the former Army Base, was negotiated between the city and the developer in order to ensure transparency and to provide benefits to the most impacted communities and to the city as a whole. Gordon said Bridges, whose company has a separate, private business agreement with Oakland Global, appears to be negotiating side deals in secret to gain political support for his project. "Who gave the authority to Jerry Bridges to do such a thing?" Gordon asked. "How do they choose who they give dollars to? And is this money dependent on coal?"

Reverend George Cummings of Imani Community Church, who also opposes the plan to ship coal through the city, said the coal plan has divided the city's Black clergy. Cummings said he attended some of the earlier meetings between the pastors and Bridges, and said the meetings only took place once the coal plan was made public. "They weren't talking to clergy until they ran into trouble at the city council, and then all of sudden they wanted to engage the faith community in a conversation," said Cummings. "They are interested in making money. That's okay. I'm not mad at them — but not at the expense of the community and people's health."

Chambers, who is a cancer survivor, said his children grew up struggling with asthma. "I'm very sensitive to any unhealthy air quality that I would breathe, or that my family and my parishioners would have to breathe," he said. Chambers has been organizing meetings of other Oakland clergy and community members against coal.

The council isn't expected to make a decision on coal any time soon. City staffers are in the process of hiring Environmental Science Associates, a San Francisco-based consulting company, to analyze potential health and safety impacts of shipping coal through Oakland. A draft report will not be ready until June, according to city records. If the report shows that shipping coal through the TLS marine terminal would harm the health and safety of workers or city residents, the council could exercise a clause in its contract with Prologis CCIG Oakland Global to block the coal plan.


February 10, 2016

What these Christians are giving up for Lent: Fossil fuels

By Chelsea Harvey
Washington Post
A new initiative in the United Kingdom is not only calling for Christian communities to band together in support of clean energy, but actually helping them get their own electricity that way. The Big Church Switch, which launched Wednesday, aims to inspire both individuals and churches to make the switch to renewable energy sources — and they’re already gaining support from church leaders in the country.

The project is a collaborative initiative spearheaded by UK-based international development charities Christian Aid and Tearfund, both of which concern themselves largely with addressing issues related to global poverty. The project’s goal is to convince Christian communities in the UK to register for renewable energy by switching their energy suppliers. The project’s organizers will negotiate with suppliers on behalf of interested individuals or churches and provide quotes on the best deal.

It also reflects the growing interest of faith communities around the world in promoting clean energy and combating climate change, and similar organizations and initiatives have cropped up in other places. San Francisco-based Interfaith Power and Light, for example, refers to itself as a “religious response to global warming” and also helps congregations reduce their carbon footprints and adopt renewable energy sources. And on a broader note, many Catholics around the world have embraced Pope Francis’ call last year to reduce the use of fossil fuels. But the Big Church Switch may be one of the first initiatives that actually facilitates the transition to renewables by making an organized call for a switch and working out group deals for participants.

“Part of what we’re interested in is tackling the root causes of poverty, one of which is climate change,” said Tim Gee, campaign strategy lead at Christian Aid. As he pointed out, the effects of climate change have been shown to have a disproportionate impact on the poor. So tackling the problem of climate change is not only an environmental issue, but also a social one.

“Ultimately, the reason [for the project] is that climate change is hitting the world’s poorest people hardest,” said Ben Niblett, a senior campaigner at Tearfund. “These are the people who did the least to cause it, but they’re the people who are feeling it already.”

In the United Kingdom, as in many other developed nations, energy supply remains the biggest national source of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for more than 30 percent of all the country’s emissions in 2014. Making personal changes in their consumption of electricity is one of the biggest ways citizens in the UK can start to tackle the issue of global climate change, Niblett said.

And Gee noted that the climate negotiations at the UN’s climate conference in December were another major catalyst for the project. While world leaders hope to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees above their pre-industrial levels, Gee acknowledged that there’s still “a significant gap between what governments have acknowledged to be the need of a 1.5-degree world and what has been pledged so far. So what we want to do is to show what needs to happen.”
The organizers deliberately chose to launch the campaign on Wednesday, which is an important date for many Christian denominations. Known as Ash Wednesday, the Christian holy day marks the beginning of Lent, the season in the church calendar leading up to Easter. Traditionally, it’s a season of self-reflection and self-sacrifice.

“Lent is a time people are looking to give something up, take stock, thinking how do I want to live my life better,” Niblett said. ‘We want to encourage people to think, ‘How can I do good with my energy?’”

According to Gee, the project’s organizers hope to make an announcement some time around Easter, at the conclusion of Lent, about how many individuals and churches have made the switch so far. But he noted that the project is also about celebrating those who have made the commitment already. Both offices of the Lutheran Church and Quakers in Britain have switched to renewable energy ahead of the campaign’s launch. Additionally, the initiative has been endorsed by several notable church leaders, including the Church of England’s Bishop of Salisbury, Bishop of Guildford and Bishop of Manchester, among others.

One of the initiative’s selling points is that it negotiates an easier and cheaper transition to clean energy than might otherwise be possible for individuals looking to make the switch alone, Niblett said. The initiative has partnered with The Big Deal, a switching site that helps individuals in the UK get better deals on changing their energy provider, and buying groups 2buy2 and Parish Buying, to negotiate the best group deal for people who make their energy transition through the Big Church Switch campaign.

“If you live in the UK you can get a better tariff [through Big Church Switch] than you could get for yourself, and that’s the power of buying together,” Niblett said. There are a number of renewable energy suppliers that participants can use to make the switch, and the energy may come from a variety of renewable sources — mostly wind and solar, according to Niblett.

The initiative may represent a growing national movement toward the adoption of clean energy. Between 2013 and 2014, greenhouse gas emissions from the UK’s energy sector dropped by 14 percent, and between 2014 and 2015 the share of renewables in energy generation jumped from 17.6 percent to 23.5 percent.

The organizers of Big Church Switch also hope that their initiative will continue to encourage other communities — not just faith communities — to join the movement.

“We want to show government and businesses that the church is doing this and we want that change,” Niblett said. And he later added, “We hope in the U.S. and the UK and all around the world people will make the switch to renewables. Tearfund can only do that in the UK, but we hope people will find their own ways to do it in every country that they’re in.”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/02/10/what-these-christians-are-giving-up-for-lent-fossil-fuels/
February 11, 2016

The forest is crying

Fighting deforestation in the Congo Basin by giving voice to indigenous people

By Angela K. Evans
Boulder Weekly

“One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk.”

The quote is attributed to Crazy Horse in the late 19th century, as he fought to keep the federal government off the land his Sioux ancestors had been living in for generations. A war that centuries of indigenous populations across the globe before and after him have fought, both violently and more often peacefully, from myriad Native American tribes to the people of the Amazon rainforest to the hill tribes in South-East Asia to hunter-gatherer tribes in Africa. Yes, Africa.

Although many consider everyone in Africa to be indigenous with the same ethnicity as their pre-colonial ancestors, there are groups of hunter-gatherers deep in the rainforests of the Congo Basin who are marginalized and underrepresented because of their way of life.

“In Africa, you’ll find pygmies, as they are called in the literature, and these are the original inhabitants of the forest,” says Samuel Nnah Ndobe, an environmentalist working with the hunter-gatherer Baka populations in his native Cameroon and throughout Central Africa. “They have stayed strong to their culture for ages. They’ve remained attached to the forest for ages.”

And it’s these people that are largely feeling the effects of environmental degradation that is a result of international companies’ operations in the Congo Basin. With a degree in agriculture engineering, Ndobe collaborates with community and grassroots organizations to document what’s happening in the region, i.e., deforestation, mining and wildlife poaching, while also working with local governments and international NGOs on forest issues, specifically “ensuring there is forest governance,” he says via Skype from Yaounde. “Ensuring the rights of the people who live in the forest are respected.”

As part of that work, Ndobe has been a volunteer advisor for the Boulder-based nonprofit Global Greengrants Fund for the last decade, helping to connect grassroots organizations and activists on the ground in Central Africa with small grants to fund their efforts.

“He’s an extremely passionate environmentalist and at the same time a really dedicated scholar,” says Terry Odendahl, the executive director at Global Greengrants Fund. “We really value local knowledge… and we know that he knows what’s going on in Central Africa. There’s no way that from Boulder we can have the depth of understanding of environmental and human rights in the region.”
Assuredly, the situation of the Baka people is complicated. Indigenous people make up an estimated 1 percent of the population in Cameroon, but it’s difficult to obtain precise numbers as the groups are largely nomadic and they have never been adequately represented during censuses. Needless to say, they don’t hold much sway when it comes to setting both conservation and economic policy.

As with most colonized countries, the current governmental and legal structures in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa are adapted from European culture and don’t recognize the rights of indigenous people, nor do they require or even leave room for adequate consultation with the communities still living in the forest. “The pygmies are not recognized. Their whole mode of life is not recognized by the bureaucrats, by central government. Their land rights aren’t recognized,” Ndobe says. “All the land belongs to the state, but who is the state? The state are people sitting in Yaounde, in the capitals, who don’t know the issues that are happening on the ground.”

Furthermore, the indigenous people don’t see the land as something to own but rather a partner in survival, a resource to be used symbiotically but not abused.

“They don’t want to possess [the land],” Ndobe says, “but they want to have access. I was talking to [an older pygmy man] and he said, ‘The forest is crying because of the number of ancient souls that you find there. It is no longer our forest, it has become the forest of orders because we don’t have access.’”

Ndobe first became interested in the indigenous people while working on his final paper for a degree in agricultural economy. “This took me deep into the forests where I was so disappointed by the level of discrimination these people were going through,” he says. “I’ve been very passionate about the issue because of the injustice — the social, the environmental injustices — that I experienced.”

Ndobe is no stranger to discrimination. Present day Cameroon was colonized by both the French and the British, with roughly 20 percent of the population identifying as Anglophone compared to the majority francophone population. Although the two populations remained more or less autonomous for the first decade after independence, the 1972 constitution united the two populations and Ndobe says the Anglophones, like himself, were widely discriminated against.

After spending time with the hunter-gatherers, he started working on forest issues with the Center for Environment and Development and quickly realized that perhaps the largest threat to the Baka people is the ongoing deforestation across the Congo Basin that threatens the very existence of these tribes who depend on biodiversity for their survival.

Ndobe says the level of deforestation in the Congo Basin is low when compared to the larger Amazon rainforest, but his country is the most deforested in the region, and Ndobe expects it to escalate in the near future. Industrial logging is the historic cause of deforestation. As the industry searches out rare wood, forest is fragmented, which makes way for poachers and others to come by road and hunt wildlife, limiting the availability of food for the indigenous people due to national hunting quotas.
Plus, as the area is further fragmented and degraded, the government allows agriculture and other industrial uses on the land. But as the indigenous people are given more of a voice, the deforestation can be curbed. Recently, activists saw a huge victory as the government of Cameroon significantly reduced the size of proposed oil palm operation by New York-based Herakles Farms. The company had plans to turn 170,000 acres into the country’s largest oil palm plantation when it began operations in Cameroon in 2009. With funding from the Global Greengrants Fund and help from Ndobe, local activist Nasako Besingi and his grassroots organization, the Struggle to Economize Future Environment, was able to draw the attention of large environmental players.

“The small grant that we could give made his voice heard to the big environment groups like Greenpeace…” Ndobe says. Greenpeace then launched a huge investigation into Herakles Farms, which drew the attention of the president of Cameroon, who in turn reduced Herakles’ lease to 20,000 acres while increasing rent 1,400 percent.

Ndobe has also been very active in documenting the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Project, which was funded by International Finance Group and the World Bank as a new paradigm for sustainable development with environmental and social regulations attached. Although Ndobe fundamentally disagrees with the pipeline model of development and has been outspoken about the project from the very beginning, he is using the international regulations to push for national reform.

“We are building capacity for communities and groups to understand how the international financial institutions function and how they can use their compliance mechanisms to make their voices heard,” Ndobe says.

“International policies, in principle, inform the national policies,” he continues. “And the national policies should reflect what is happening on the ground. So, if people don’t raise their voices, if we don’t document what is happening, then it becomes very, very difficult for national policies to shift international policies.”

And this is where the situation in Cameroon adds to the global environmental conversation. The issues surrounding the indigenous people in the Congo Basin rainforest are similar to problems happening in other countries, and through his work with Global Greengrants, Ndobe is able to share the challenges and successes of his work with others outside his region.

“The governments [in Central Africa] aren’t doing anything to understand their culture and propose development scenarios that are adapted to these people’s culture,” he says. “Which I think this is a problem happening all over the world.”

http://www.boulderweekly.com/news/the-forest-is-crying/

February 15, 2016

A Crime Against the People of Flint
By Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson Global Leader, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) Huffington Post

Last week, a colleague said, "The Flint water crisis is a crime against humanity." I was taken aback. This is a serious charge, but when the Rev. Jesse Jackson declared that the entire city of Flint was a "crime scene," I thought again. Then, when I learned that officials gave bottled water to government employees in Flint, more than a year before they admitted that Flint River water was dissolving lead pipes into tap water, how else can it be understood except as a premeditated crime?

I was a pastor in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s when government officials dragged their feet on AIDS medicines and research. I know what it is to lose loved ones due to official foot dragging and the bureaucratic blame game.

Michigan was also once my home. Early in my ministry, I served the Metropolitan Community Church in Detroit, and I helped a small group of people to start their own MCC church in Flint. Today, both MCC congregations in Flint and Detroit are impacted by this catastrophe. We care about what happens to our members, everyone's children, and everybody!

People who live in Flint do not deserve to be poisoned.

Flint is a city that is burdened with a decimated industrial economy, a diminishing tax base, failing schools, and the usual systemic poverty profile for a city with a 60% Black and Hispanic population.

"In 2013, the Flint city council voted [for] ... a new system that would pump water from Lake Huron. But Flint couldn't connect until 2016, so the city, operating under the control of emergency managers appointed by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder (R), opted to save money by using the Flint River in the meantime," said Huffington Post senior reporter, Arthur Delaney.

Poor people, people of color and their children, were literally "sold down the river," by those whose greed and callousness made their lives cheap and dispensable. As a minister of the Gospel, I am reminded that Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me." In effect, they poisoned Jesus, and the children, the little ones, whom Jesus loves, in Flint.

This betrayal of humankind didn't happen overnight.

The New York Times noted that, by April of 2014, complaints were coming from residents about dirty water, rashes, and illness. The city then issued a press statement saying, "Flint water is safe to drink." In fact, the acidic polluted river water was dissolving lead pipes, and the lead level in children was surging. Simultaneously, more than once during the summer, city officials urged residents to boil their water due to high bacteria count.

CNN reported that EPA staff tested tap water in homes over a 6-month period. They were supposed to take 100 samples but only took 71; only 69 made it to the report. The other two
samples were apparently so high that they would have tipped the whole study into the bracket of actionable levels of lead--and there was no money to take action.

What happened was immoral, criminal, and a human rights violation.

In September of 2015, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha and other Flint doctors went public with the high levels of lead in the blood of children, but state officials still said the water was safe, and accused the doctors of using lead levels as a "political football" in a blame game against the state.

Days later, the governor was briefed on lead levels, city officials told residents not to drink unfiltered water, and by October 1, the city was hooked back up to Detroit water. By this time, the lead pipe linings were deteriorated, so they still were leaching lead. Finally, the Department of Environmental Quality reported that staff used "inappropriate protocols" for corrosion control.

Besides the water in the lead pipes, the most corrosive element was the profound betrayal of the public trust. These actions and inactions reveal the meanness of our times, meanness towards the poor and vulnerable with callous and, too often, cold calculations.

The mayor who oversaw this was voted out of office in November and replaced by Mayor Karen Weaver. In a few short months, she and others laid out the real extent of the poisoning. In January 2016, Mayor Weaver worked with President Obama to have Flint declared a disaster area, which allowed FEMA to pour in $15 million to a city that has been a dumping ground for generations.

The situation in Flint is just one of the many tragedies of environmental injustice--and specifically environmental racism, where communities of poor people and people of color are the preferred sites for industrial dumping.

Back In 1992, Flint citizens protested emissions from power plants, cement plants, asphalt plants and other industries. This pollution was only possible after centuries of slavery, Jim Crow, White flight, and Black ghettos dehumanized whole swaths of people. Industry dumped lead-based paints, chemicals, and industrial toxins, and then abandoned their waste sites for the government to clean up. Concentrated pollution has a deeply racial geography.

"The single greatest determinant of where certain kinds of toxic sources are located, like hazardous waste facilities, is race, and yet [the EPA has] never once made a finding of discrimination, and they very rarely use any of the other tools at their disposal to push states or localities or private actors to change their behavior," said Marianne Engelman Lado, an Earthjustice attorney who is suing the EPA on behalf of Flint and four other communities whose civil rights complaints have been ignored.

This is an old festering boil on our collective body. The situation in Flint ripped off a putrefying bandage to reveal corruption that is far more than skin deep. Can we save the patient? We are all in toxic shock!
In my tradition, there are many stories of Jesus healing people from lifelong illnesses and even raising people from the dead. I am not arguing that everyone should turn to Jesus, but how about we start with everyone repenting from the sin of polluting our garden, poisoning our own children, and pouring acid into our rivers, streams, lakes and oceans?

Is it too late? Can we stop? I believe the planet can heal, even if the children of Flint do not ever fully recover. From this harm, even Jesus cannot save us.


February 16, 2016

Mexican Farmers Praise Pope Francis for Continued Advocacy of Environmental Protection and Climate Change Reform

As small farmers in Mexico fight to protect biodiversity and resist pesticides, they have found support in a higher power

By Karen Lo
The Daily Meal

‘We thank you for your courage and your commitment to the world’s poorest,’ the farming commission wrote, ‘and we accept your challenge to approach these complex crises by seeking solutions that not only protect nature, but also combat poverty and restore dignity to the excluded.’

In an open letter to Pope Francis, 50 farming and environmental groups thanked the Pontiff for his ongoing support for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity in the face of powerful special interest groups that have downplayed agricultural concerns, like the need to promote greater understanding of climate change.

In the bold style for which the Pope has come to be known, the Catholic leader has said previously that the Earth’s inhabitants, particularly the wealthy, would one day be judged by God on whether or not “they really tried to provide for Him in every person, and if they did what they could to preserve the environment so that it could produce this food.”

In his encyclical letter “On Care for Our Common Home,” Pope Francis addressed the urgency of climate change, telling Catholics, “This sister [the Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.” In a message given on World Environment Day in 2013, the Pope also compared food waste to “stealing from the table of the poor and the hungry.”

Once again, Pope Francis has been asked to speak out on behalf of the powerless, with the coalition of farmers asking him for his “continued support in protecting regenerative organic food systems like the milpa, and the rights of ‘Every campesino…to possess a reasonable
The letter continues, “We share your conviction that everything in the world is connected, and that to seek ‘only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system.’

“As world leaders prepare to gather here in Mexico for the COP13 Convention On Biodiversity in December, we ask you to continue to speak out about the role that industrial agriculture has played in destroying our soil, health and biodiversity, even as it has failed to alleviate world hunger.

“There is a solution to food insecurity, climate change and biodiversity loss. We must opt for regenerative organic agriculture. The urgency of this problem demands that we join forces and work together to achieve change. We thank you for your courage and your commitment to the world’s poorest, and we accept your challenge to approach these complex crises by seeking solutions that not only protect nature, but also combat poverty and restore dignity to the excluded.”


February 16, 2016

Climate Change And Environmental Justice

By Charlie Shelton & Frank Stasio
WUNC – North Carolina Public Radio

A conversation with Wake Forest University School of Divinity professor Elizabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo, and Miles Silman, professor of biology at Wake Forest University about climate change

Listen here:

Climate change was a prominent global topic in 2015, with both the Paris climate talks and the Pope’s encyclical stirring up conversation about the future of the planet.

But questions remain about what role businesses and community institutions should play in the ongoing effort. Some say that the Pope’s encyclical speaks to a need for religious leaders to step up in the movement, while others say that the business community needs to take the lead.
The Wake Forest University School of Divinity hosts a panel discussion at the Wake Forest University Charlotte Center in Charlotte at 7 p.m. tonight called “Our Common Home: the Pope’s Encyclical, Climate Science, and Our Clean Energy Future.” Entrepreneurs, biologists and scholars will examine many aspects of climate change.

Host Frank Stasio previews the conversation with two of the panelists: Wake Forest University School of Divinity professor Elizabeth O’DONNELL Gandolfo, and Miles Silman, professor of biology at Wake Forest University.

The music in this segment was provided by Kelcey Ledbetter. When she isn't leading Afro punk band Dalton Village, her music takes a turn toward a stripped-down, pop R&B aesthetic. Her acoustic guitar provides the rhythm while her versatile voice drives her song's melodies.


February 17, 2016

Cardinal Turkson speaks on environment, Laudato Si’

Vatican Radio

Mankind is called to participate in “ongoing creation and ongoing incarnation” rather than in the “domination and devastation” of our planet. That’s the message at the heart of a talk given Wednesday in the U.S. by Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Cardinal Turkson was addressing a conference entitled "Catholics, Capitalism and Climate" at Molloy College on Long Island, New York focusing on Pope Francis' historic encyclical letter, "Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home."

The Cardinal did not shy away from topics concerning the United States like capitalism and legal challenges to the implementation of the Clean Power Plan to reduce emissions from power plants: “Let me only comment that greenhouse gas pollution already affects every man, woman, and child on the planet now, and more so in future generations. Law, as Thomas Aquinas said long ago, must always be oriented to the common good.”

“Today, irresponsible financial and commercial practices are the offenses that we now tolerate, because of the interests in the profits and lifestyle of excessive consumerism that they promote.” By contrast, “a healthy economy with free and fair markets climaxes in the role of business as a vocation to care for our common home.” Cardinal Turkson ends with a note of hope: the Encyclical affirms that “All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start”

Below, please find the full text of Cardinal Turkson’s remarks:
Your Excellency Bishop William Murphy, President Drew Bogner, Vice President Edward Thompson, dear Faculty, Staff, Students and Friends:

Introduction

Warm greetings to you from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, where we miss our former under-secretary (1980–1987) who is now your Bishop. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace contributed significantly to the writing and launch of Laudato si’. Thank you for the invitation to introduce the Encyclical, and then to reflect on “Catholics, Capitalism and Climate” with the help of Fr James Martin as moderator and three distinguished panellists Meghan Clark, R.R. Reno, and Erin Lothes.

It is gratifying to address faculty, staff, students and friends of Molloy College. It is fitting that this audience show a diversity of ages and situations in the world, for regarding today’s topic, everyone is involved. This very important encyclical touches on the timely issue of climate, as well as fundamental issues of faith, economy, development, progress and lifestyle.

Pope Francis himself offers us a quick review of the core message. Let us watch his short video now – it takes just a minute and a half!
Let me please suggest the take-aways, to keep in mind throughout today’s discussions:
- Our nature is created by God and surrounded by the gifts of creation
- Our failures are that we over-consume and that we do not share the gifts of creation
- This has dire consequences for the poor and the planet
- And so it is urgent that we change our sense of progress, our management of the economy, and our style of life.
- Such change is going to require major shifts in our thinking and commitments – indeed, a conversion of groups and institutions at every level, from local communities to global humanity.

So join me, please, in appreciating the inspiration of Laudato si’. I. As Catholics, how should we understand our common heritage, this freely given gift of creation? II. What should care mean? After that, III. under climate, we can turn our attention to the United States and, more specifically, to Long Island and the New York City area. Then, IV, we can raise some questions about capitalism. And we conclude, as does the Pope’s video, with caring for our common home.

I. Catholics and Creation
The Catholic doctrine of creation does not regard the world as an accident. Our planet, indeed the universe, is an intentional act of God that is provided to human beings as a gift. Creation is not just passing from nothing to many things, a lot of “stuff” getting made. Rather, creation is the first step in the great vocation of man: creation, incarnation, redemption.
Humanity is not an afterthought. God did not have two agendas: first, the world and then, humanity. Man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God, they are an intrinsic part of the universe, and their vocation is “to till and to keep” it all. But tilling and keeping cannot include domination and devastation -- these make a mockery of dignity and respect. We are called to participate in ongoing creation and ongoing incarnation.
In this light, we should find it easy to understand the concerns of Pope Francis for the poor and for nature. He is not offering worldly advice on how to be prudent and practical, although his message has immense practical consequences. Rather, he is reminding us of the demands of our vocation to participate in the divine – in the work of God who does not hide his face from any aspect of creation, poor or rich, nature or human. Here is how Laudato si’ presents these ideas.

Laudato si’ recounts the creation story and moves directly to its moral dimension. The second chapter of the encyclical offers a comprehensive view of the gift of creation, based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. With this Pope Francis articulates the “tremendous responsibility” (§90) of humankind for creation, the intimate connection among all creatures and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (§95). The collective good and the responsibility of all underpin the insistent message about the moral dimension of how we treat nature.

But the relationship with nature does not stand alone; it is intertwined with other dimensions. In the Bible, “the God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected” (§73). The story of creation is central for reflecting on the relationship between human beings and other creatures. “These accounts suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin” (§66). Sin breaks the equilibrium of all creation.

These are strong words. The Holy Father is explicit that the human relationship with nature can be regarded at times as sinful. He wishes to put an end to that. Thus, even if “we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (§67). Human beings have the responsibility to “‘till and keep’ the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15)” (§67), knowing that “the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward, with us and through us, towards a common point of arrival, which is God” (§83).

Where does this leave us? Dominion must not be absolute domination. Other creatures have their own dignity and purpose. As we search for the right balance, we must avoid two pitfalls. One would be to regard everything as fundamentally the same and “deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails”. The other would be to fall prey to “a divinization of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility” (§90).

This brings Pope Francis to certain virtues and attitudes that are most appropriate to our relationship with creation. Being so connected to all living things, we must accept that “every act of cruelty towards any creature is ‘contrary to human dignity’” (§92). Moreover, “a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (§91). What is needed is the awareness of a universal communion: “[All are] called into being by the one Father. All of us are linked by unseen bonds
and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (§89).

II. Catholics and Care
Let us turn now from creation to care for creation, and care for our common home. A great innovation of Pope Francis is that he advocates something more than stewardship. In Laudato si’ he uses the word “steward” only twice, and instead speaks about care. It is in the title, “Care for our Common Home,” and is repeated dozens of times.

Care goes further than “stewardship”. Good stewards take responsibility and fulfil their obligations to manage and to render an account. But one can be a good steward without feeling connected. If one cares, however, one is connected. To care is to allow oneself to be affected by another, so much so that one’s path and priorities change. Good parents know this. They care about their children; they care for their children, so much so that parents will sacrifice enormously—even their lives—to ensure the safety and flourishing of their children. With caring, the hard line between self and other softens, blurs, even disappears.

Pope Francis proposes that we think of our relationship with the world and with all people in terms of caring. As Jesus does when he calls himself the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11-15). Caring for our common home requires, as Pope Francis says, not just an economic and technological revolution, but also a cultural and spiritual revolution—a profoundly different way of living the relationship between people and the environment, a new way of ordering the global economy.

To speak in this way locates Laudato si’ in the great tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Pope Leo XIII responded to the res novae or “new things” of his time, when the industrial economy was only a century old and posed many dilemmas, especially for workers and families. So too, Pope Francis is responding to the “new things” of our day, when a post-industrial, globalized economy is posing many dilemmas for humanity and for the planet.

The key principles of our Catholic Social Teaching ground the messages of Laudato si’:

• The world’s economy must meet the true needs of people for their survival and integral human flourishing. This is a matter of human dignity and of the common good. We must make objective moral judgments in this regard: “Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products,” he says, “people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending… When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume.” (§§203, 204)

• How do technologies contribute to the common good? The Encyclical gratefully acknowledges the tremendous contribution of technologies to the improvement of living conditions. Yet it also warns about the misuse of technology, especially when it gives “those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world” (§104). Moreover, markets alone “cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (§109).
• Solidarity with all, especially the marginalized and the poor, is a hallmark of our Holy Father’s papacy, and it marks the Encyclical as well. The text speaks with great compassion of dispossession and devastation suffered disproportionately by the poor, vulnerable and unable to protect themselves or escape. Pope Francis embraces all people. “Let us not only keep the poor of the future in mind, but also today’s poor, whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting” (§162).

• Solidarity must also apply between generations: “we can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (§159). The Pope’s key question for humanity is put in those very terms: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (§160).

• Human dignity underpins the extensive treatment of “The need to protect employment” (§124-29). Work is a noble and necessary vocation: “Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment” (§128). Work is how human dignity unfolds while earning one’s daily bread, feeding one’s family, and accessing the basic material conditions needed for flourishing every day. Further, it should be the setting for rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God.

In the reality of today’s global society, it is essential that “we continue to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone,” no matter the limited interests of business and economic reasoning that excludes the human and social costs (§127). It is wrong when some businesses simply replace workers with machines on the basis of efficiency and utility, viewing human beings as interchangeable with machines as mere factors of production. Clearly, the obsession is to gain still more profit, but at the cost of less and less decent work. Do individuals thrive from being unemployed or precariously hired? Of course not. Does society benefit from unemployment? Of course not. In fact, we everywhere witnesses far too many people who cannot find worthwhile and fulfilling work. We should not be surprised when unscrupulous people with demented fantasies recruit such idle individuals into criminality and violence.

• God has exercised subsidiarity by entrusting the earth to humans to keep, till and care for it; this makes human beings co-creators with God. Work should be inspired by the same attitude. If work is organized properly and if workers are given proper resources and training, their activity can contribute to their fulfilment as human beings, not just meet their material needs. It can uphold the full human dignity, the integral human development, of workers. The principle of subsidiarity is a mirror of God’s relationship to humanity.

• Proper practices of stewardship keep the natural environment and of human systems sustainable. The problem, Pope Francis notes clearly, is that the logic of competition promotes short-termism, which leads to financial failure and devastation of the environment. “We need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals” (§190).

The Holy Father is not anti-business. But what he decries is an obsession with profit and the deification of the market. Profit has its role in sustaining an enterprise and allowing it to improve
and innovate. Pope Francis calls upon business to lead by harnessing its creativity to solve pressing human needs. “More diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can prove very profitable (§191) as well as sustainable.

• God is the Creator of all—the entirety of creation, all people, all goods. Justice requires that the goods of creation be distributed fairly. This has the status of a moral obligation, even a commandment, for Pope Francis. “Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy,” he said last July in Bolivia. “It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment. It is about giving to the poor and to peoples what is theirs by right. The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church’s social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples.”

• Justice must also reign when the burden of environmental rehabilitation is taken up. Those who have contributed most to greenhouse gas emissions and have benefitted most from the industrial period, should now take the lead and contribute more to the solution than those whose standard of living is just beginning to rise. As a first step, they must be ever more honest about so-called externalities or spillover effects, since finally nothing falls outside of the accounts of our one shared common household.

In the light of Creation and our care for it, in the light of Catholic social teaching, let us now consider how the United States is responding to the great challenge of climate.

III. Climate and the U.S.A.

On 31 March 2015, the United States submitted its intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It expressed its strong commitment “to reducing greenhouse gas pollution.” It set “an economy-wide target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28 per cent below its 2005 level in 2025, and [it intends] to make best efforts to reduce its emissions by 28%.” It called the target “fair and ambitious”.

When Pope Francis arrived in the United States on 23 September 2015, his first public words—delivered at the White House—included the following: “Mr. President, I find it encouraging that you are proposing an initiative for reducing air pollution. Accepting the urgency, it seems clear to me also that climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to our future generation. When it comes to the care of our common home, we are living at a critical moment of history. We still have time to make the change needed to bring about a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.”

Meanwhile in December 2015, the nations of the world signed the Paris Agreement, promising to peak global greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, with the goal of reaching net-zero emissions in the second half of the century. This goal requires, as Pope Francis urged in Laudato si’, a “new and universal solidarity”. The United States, as one of the world’s largest carbon emitters—especially in per capita terms—has a special responsibility to act. The U.S. exercised leadership in the run-up to Paris, as evidenced by bilateral agreements with both India and China.
Building on its own 26-28 percent commitment, leadership was also shown during the negotiations at COP21. At the same time, Pope Francis realistically warned that economic and other special interests can “easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.” (LS § 54).

I understand that the Supreme Court has stayed implementation of the administration’s Clean Power Plan to reduce emissions from power plants. Let me only comment that greenhouse gas pollution already affects every man, woman, and child on the planet now, and more so in future generations. Law, as Thomas Aquinas said long ago, must always be oriented to the common good. I know that the great majority of Americans fully supports plans to reduce emissions and protect our common home. Let’s make sure that the dynamic set in motion by COP21 in Paris is not derailed.

At the beginning of this month, Abp. Thomas Wenski, head of the Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, wrote to U.S. Senators as follows:

The U.S. bishops have long spoken out on the importance of prudent action to address the growing impact of global climate change. In the past, we expressed support for a national carbon standard and offered moral principles to guide the EPA and states as they take steps to reduce carbon pollution. Among these principles are care for human life and all of creation, social and economic justice (including equitable distribution of costs and assistance to help mitigate impacts on affected workers), and a priority for the poor and vulnerable.

By now (mid-Feb 2016), over 160 parties have produced their own INDCs to reduce emissions. Here at Molloy College, I am happy to know that you are committed to “hold important discussions on issues of faith and society”. No facet of our world is too great or too small, too lofty or too plain, for us to take it on, to pray over it, and to bring it into constructive dialogue with others.

So I hope you will familiarize yourself with the U.S.’s INDC – it’s only 4 pages – and reflect on how the entire college community can follow what happens to it and indeed push for even more “fair and ambitious” targets to avoid or reverse environmental degradation and harm to all God’s people. What are the social and natural environment challenges on this campus, in its neighbourhood, on Long Island and the whole New York City region? How can you bring dialogue, with honesty and a real commitment to action, to bear on these challenges? How will you respond to the plea of Pope Francis: “That we may take good care of creation –a gift freely given– cultivating and protecting it for future generations.” A first impression might be that the Pope is talking about the Amazon rainforest or about desertification in Africa and Asia – but now realize that Laudato si’ is also about the endangered shorelines of Long Island.

IV. Capitalism

We turn now to the “Capitalism” in today’s title, “Catholics, Capitalism and Climate”. In fact, neither Evangeli Gaudium nor Laudato si’ mentions capitalism. Instead, Pope Francis joins Blessed Paul VI, St John Paul II and Pope emeritus Benedict XVI in asking deeply, “What is
development? What is progress?” In ch. III of Laudato si’, Pope Francis critiques that short-sighted confidence in technology and finance which he sums up under the term “technocracy”.

Allow me to add a great national historical voice. Marking Presidents’ Day two days ago at Seton Hall University, I quoted some very moving words of President Lincoln’s in his second inaugural address (4 March 1865). Recalling the beginning of his first term in 1861, he said that “One-eighth of the whole population were coloured slaves” from the sweat of whose faces some wrought “their bread”. Lincoln supposed that American slavery was “one of those offenses” which God “wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came.” Now everyone hopes and prays “that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword,” then still, “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

A wise American professor of law helped me to draw out an illuminating analogy and make Lincoln’s terrible words contemporary.

150 years ago, slavery, and the political “interest” that came from its profits, represented a profound “offense”. Today, irresponsible financial and commercial practices are the offenses that we now tolerate, because of the interests in the profits and lifestyle of excessive consumerism that they promote. These Pope Francis sums up as the dominant technocratic paradigm.

150 years ago, failure to provide a “fundamental and astounding” solution to slavery would lead inexorably, through the justice embedded by God in the nature of things, to the awful bloody cataclysm of the Civil War. Today, we must discover the “fundamental and astounding” steps we need to take to address global warming, environmental and social degradation, or else face cataclysms like the more frequent and higher coastal floods that are predicted here in New York.

Laudato si’ does comment on various ways in which business can hurt people and the environment. A key passage, for instance, states that it is naïve to expect markets to solve all problems of poverty; and as was mentioned above, “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (§109). By contrast, a healthy economy with free and fair markets climaxes in the role of business as a vocation to care for our common home.

V. Conclusion

The core social message of Pope Francis is that humanity is a single family, and we all share a common home to care for. In that home entrusted to us by the Creator, we must not repudiate our Father’s love by telling our sisters to scavenge for food and clothing in garbage dumps. We must not repudiate our Father’s love by letting our brothers lead unfulfilling lives while machines do most of the work. In his brief February video, the Pope pleads – and prays! – for us to “take good care of creation – a gift freely given– cultivating and protecting it for future generations.”
Laudato si’ welcomes the environmental awareness growing world-wide, along with concern for the damage that is being done. And in spite of the enormous offenses as decried by Lincoln, the Pope keeps a hopeful outlook on the possibility of reversing the trend: “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home… Men and women are still capable of intervening positively… All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start” (§§ 13, 58, 205).

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/02/17/cardinal_turkson_speak

February 23, 2016

Aboriginal activist fears B.C. dam project will destroy sacred land

Helen Knott hopes to halt construction of the BC Hydro Site C dam project, but B.C. Energy Minister Bill Bennett says it’s too late.

By Joanna Smith, Ottawa Bureau reporter
The Star

OTTAWA—Helen Knott, 28, believes the stories of her people are alive in the Peace River valley of northeastern British Columbia and fears they will be lost in the flood of a $8.8-billion hydroelectric dam project.

“When I think about the valley, I think about stories,” Knott said as she described the 107 kilometres of land the project would flood, destroying farmland, sacred burial grounds, as well as areas Treaty 8 First Nations use for hunting, fishing, gathering medicines and other cultural reasons.

They often gather to tell those stories around the fire at the Rocky Mountain Fort, a protest camp Knott and others — mostly young indigenous women — set up Dec. 31 to block the clearing of land to prepare for further construction of the BC Hydro Site C dam project.

“I see it and I feel it as a right to identity, that ability to tell those stories, that ability to connect with those lands and access the blood memories that exists, that would surface by being within that territory,” Knott, a social worker and community activist from Prophet River First Nation, B.C., said recently during a visit to Ottawa.

It is a way of viewing the world — and asserting rights within it — that is hard to fit within the bureaucratic box of environmental assessment processes, judicial reviews, circumscribed consultations with Aboriginal Peoples and the promise of 10,000 new jobs brought into the area.

Yet this view is what pushed Knott to set up the camp and become, quite literally, possibly the last thing standing between her land and the BC Hydro project.
And she has a question for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose government she and local landowners argue could intervene to halt the project in a number of ways, including by revoking federal permits.

“Where are you now?” Knott said.

The previous Conservative government gave approval to the project, as did B.C., in October 2014 following a federal-provincial joint review, concluding the environmental and other impacts the Site C dam would have were justified under the circumstances.

The new Environment Minister, Catherine McKenna, said Tuesday the project was already underway, but BC Hydro must meet requirements laid out by the environmental assessment.

“I have been and will continue to be engaged in discussions with indigenous leaders on how we can work together to ensure better consultation, environmental assessment and natural resource development,” McKenna said in the House of Commons during question period.

Meanwhile, Knott and the small group, allied with nearby farmers and other landowners whose homes and lifestyles are also at stake, could be cleared out in the near future if a British Columbia Supreme Court judge grants BC Hydro, a provincial Crown corporation, an injunction to do so.

The hearing began Monday.

“We took this step because we have an obligation to our customers to keep the project on-schedule and on-budget,” BC Hydro spokesman Craig Fitzsimmons wrote in an emailed statement Tuesday, adding he would not discuss further details while the matter is before the court.

B.C. Premier Christy Clark said last month that she wanted to push the Site C dam project “past the point of no return.”

That is exactly what Rob Botterell, the lawyer representing the First Nations and area landowners, fears will happen, noting BC Hydro plans to continue construction as challenges make their way through the courts.

“We are confident we are ultimately going to win, but that will be too late,” Botterell said during his visit to Ottawa with Knott last week.

B.C. Energy Minister Bill Bennett said the project already went through.

“We’re already past the point of no return,” Bennett said in an interview Tuesday, adding BC Hydro has already awarded $2.1 billion in contracts and will award another $1 billion by the end of the year.
“We’re well beyond a place where it would make any sense to consider not building the project,” he said, adding the province has done its due diligence and he does not expect the court to rule against the Site C dam.

“We are very confident we have done things right,” he said.


February 24, 2016

Eminent climate change scientist courts religion

Researcher Veerabhadran Ramanathan attempts to galvanize global action on climate change

By Joshua Emerson Smith
San Diego Union-Tribune

"The worst consequences of climate change will be experienced by the poorest 3 billion (people), largely living in villages, who had nothing to do with this.”

As Veerabhadran Ramanathan makes this prediction, Pacific waves shimmer through the window of his office at UC San Diego’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla.

He speaks softly but with conviction: “Not 100 years from now. Not 50 years from now. Ten to 15 years from now, they’re going to see major disasters.”

This ethical quandary haunts Ramanathan. The 71-year-old has garnered international acclaim pioneering climate research, but he believes his most important work lays ahead — and that he must act urgently.

He recently embarked on a highly unusual journey to court religious leaders from around the globe in an effort to reach audiences apathetic or dismissive of concerns linked to a warming planet. To galvanize the public, his campaign ventures into the ambiguous space between hard facts and personal advocacy — all while attempting to marry the unlikely bedfellows of religion and science.

Undisputed are Ramanathan’s credentials.

Early in his career, he made the shocking discovery that carbon isn’t the only human-produced greenhouse gas. And there’s his groundbreaking project with drones that has documented how noxious clouds of pollutants travel across the world, further highlighting climate change as an international issue. Later in his career, he advised Gov. Jerry Brown, federal officials and the United Nations on global warming.
“Ram has an incredible ability to explain very complicated scientific topics in very simple terms,” Brown told The San Diego Union-Tribune.

By most standards, Ramanathan could retire in comfort and prestige. He earns a base salary of about $250,000 a year, drives an electric car and lives with his wife in a hillside home covered with solar panels.

But in recent years, he has experienced something of a crisis of meaning. He has viewed his professional accomplishments, and those of his fellow climate scientists, as failing to adequately inspire a global transition away from fossil fuels.

Most of all, he fears for many of the world’s poorest people, whom he worries will likely become climate refugees of historic proportions as flooding, prolonged drought and extreme wildfires ravage their resources.

The idea of reaching out to faith leaders came to Ramanathan after he was invited more than a decade ago to join the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Coming to understand organized religion’s power to influence the masses, he has personally reached out to — and met — Pope Francis, top Hindu guru Mātā Amṛtānandamayī Devī and the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist who won the Nobel Peace Prize. The latest interaction was a meeting with the Dalai Lama this month in Minnesota.

Ultimately, Ramanathan envisions convening an interfaith meeting on climate change, to be held at the Vatican within a few years. But first, he’s attempting to court Christian leaders from the West for a future summit in Washington, D.C.

He recognizes that these efforts are not without pitfalls but said he’s generated a lot of support from colleagues and other professionals so far.

“When I started on this three years ago, I expected to be mugged when I walked in the hallway (at Scripps),” he said. “And I’m so surprised no one has come and said, ‘Hey, you’re taking us on a dangerous path.’ In fact, I’m besieged by people who want me to talk about this.”

Still, his strategy could backfire as he continues trying to engage groups traditionally more skeptical of human-caused global warming.

“There’s the danger that how evangelicals feel toward climate science is hardened by efforts to pull on their moral heartstrings,” said Tommy Givens, a professor of Christian ethics at the Pasadena-based Fuller Theological Seminary.

“We don’t like it when we’re made to feel like we’re an interest group that people need to pump up their own project,” he added.

As Ramanathan has waded deeper into the waters of politics and advocacy, he has made a number of wrong turns, learning the hard way how to navigate the media, lawmakers and even fellow scientists.
He’s become “more sophisticated about messaging,” said David Victor, a professor of global politics at UC San Diego who has written a number of opinion articles with Ramanathan for The New York Times and Foreign Affairs magazine.

“That’s the single biggest shift that I’ve seen,” Victor said. “He’s much more attentive to how different communities can see the same set of words and read something different, especially people who are opposed to your message.”

Ramanathan’s increasing savvy dovetailed nicely with what he calls the “biggest moment” of his career. In the final days of a workshop on environmental sustainability at the Vatican in 2014, he found himself talking to Pope Francis in a parking lot.

With just a few moments to make his point, Ramanathan told the pontiff that the world’s poorest contribute the least to climate change but will suffer the most. The following year, the pope delivered an encyclical that, among many things, called for major lifestyle changes to combat global warming and highlighted the plight of the poor.

“I don’t know of anyone else in the climate community who had that opportunity to communicate climate science because of access through the pontifical council,” said Marcia McNutt, editor in chief at the journal Science and president-elect of the National Academy of Sciences. “One might say this was an unheard-of opportunity to communicate climate science to the Vatican.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, Ramanathan denies being an activist, a label the scientific community seems to abhor. But he’s not cagey about his plans. While he said he routinely turns down community speaking events and refuses to tell people how to live, he’s open about his efforts to recruit others to do as much.

“It’s become a moral, ethical issue,” he said. “As a scientist, I have no business talking about that. So I need to inform faith leaders so that this is taught in every church, every synagogue, every temple, every mosque.”

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**Veerabhadran Ramanathan: A timeline**

1944: Born in Madras, India (now known as Chennai). At the age of 11, he moves with his family to Bangalore.

1960: Finishes high school as the Sino-Indian War broke out. Inspired by a patriotic call for combat engineers, he enrolls in a university program to learn the required skills.

1969: Graduates with a master’s in engineering from the Indian Institute in Science.

1974: Receives a Ph.D. in planetary atmospheres from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He immediately goes to work for NASA studying ozone depletion.
1975: Discovers that chlorofluorocarbons or CFCs — gases that had been only associated with the destruction of the ozone layer — were also powerful drivers of the greenhouse effect. For nearly 100 years, scientists believed carbon dioxide was only human-produced greenhouse gas.

1976-86: Works for the National Center for Atmospheric Research located in Boulder, Colo., developing cutting-edge climate models.

1986-90: Teaches and researches climate science at the University of Chicago. By this time, he had predicts that global warming would likely have catastrophic impacts.

1990: Joins Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. He brings with him The Center for Clouds, Chemistry and Climate funded with a $20 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

1999: Publishes his first major paper on Atmospheric Brown Clouds, toxic plumes of climate pollution hanging over large swaths of Asia. The clouds, large enough to cover the continental United States, are also believed to alter critical monsoon patterns necessary for subsistence farming, as well as contribute to glacial melt.

2004: Pope John Paul II invites Ramanathan to join the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Over the next decade, he would attend and convene numerous conferences on climate and the environment at the Vatican.

2007: Helps craft a landmark United Nations report on global warming as a member of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The report calls the evidence that the planet is warming “unequivocal.”

2009: Writes the first of numerous mainstream articles calling for action to curb short-lived climate pollutants found in the brown clouds. Motivated by his writing, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launches the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, which today has more than 50 member nations.

2014: Meets with Pope Francis in the parking lot of the Vatican and used the opportunity to tell the pontiff that 3 billion of the world’s poorest people will suffer the worst consequences of climate change.

2015: Attends the United Nations climate talks in Paris as a science adviser to the pope’s delegation. The pledges to reduce reliance on fossil fuels agreed to by nations at the summit have been widely hailed as a turning point in efforts to curb global warming.

A desire to succeed

Ramanathan grew up in India with a father who worked as a traveling salesman for Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. His family moved around a lot, but one constant were his father’s brochures filled with pictures of 1950s-era cars.
At the time, the United States was seen as the “land of milk and honey,” he said. “It shocks people because they think I came to America for doing science, pursuing higher education. No, I just wanted to own an Impala car.”

His family ended up in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, where he attended an English-speaking high school. Used to communicating in his native language of Tamil, he did poorly but cultivated a deep sense of self-reliance.

“I didn’t understand a word of what these guys were saying, so I lost the habit of listening to my teachers,” he said.

As Ramanathan finished high school, the Sino-Indian War broke out. Like many, he responded to the Indian government’s patriotic call for young men to become combat engineers. By 1965, he had graduated with a degree in engineering, but the war was over.

After about two years spent working on refrigerators, Ramanathan grew bored. Despite making a robust $14 a month, he quit to go back to school.

In 1969, he graduated with a master’s degree and his father tried to get him a job with Goodyear in the United States. When the deal fell through, Ramanathan scrambled to realize his dream of going to America.

“I think I finally discovered what I was good at: research, generating knowledge,” he said.

By the next year, Ramanathan was admitted to the State University of New York at Stony Brook (now Stony Brook University) on Long Island. He entered as an engineering student, but immediately transitioned to atmospheric sciences. In particular, he studied greenhouse-gas models for Mars and Venus.

By 1974, he had earned his Ph.D. and was working at NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., studying the effects of Earth’s ozone depletion.

While there, Ramanathan stumbled on research about how chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, had eaten away at the ozone layer. The research caught his eye because of his scientific expertise — and because he had worked on refrigerators in India that leaked the chemical coolant.

Laboring at night after his regular NASA work, the 30-year-old developed a theory within a few months that these complex molecules were potent contributors to the greenhouse effect. Specifically, he found that a ton of CFCs trapped more heat than 10,000 tons of carbon dioxide.

In 1975, this was a startling claim. For nearly 100 years, the world community had agreed that the only greenhouse gas to worry about in terms of human activity was carbon dioxide.

Reputable scientists called Ramanathan’s finding “dangerous, wrong and idiotic,” he recalled. “That paper was a defining moment. Until then, I was an unknown, obscure guy from India.”
Eventually, his theory became accepted. His discovery led to subsequent identification of other human-produced greenhouse gases.

During the next decade, Ramanathan helped develop cutting-edge climate models for the prestigious National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo. Then he spent about four years at the University of Chicago teaching and conducting climate research.

By the mid-1980s, he had publicly predicted that a warming planet would become one of the greatest threats to humanity. Around this time, he had a telling experience with the politics of making such assertions.

He remembers that on a radio talk show, he was introduced as a “spice-eating scientist” who had come to “dismantle the American economy.” The accusation caught him off-guard.

“I was really livid,” he said. “This is something I cannot control: If somebody says something like that, that charges me to be even more vocal.”

Similarly, an unwitting Ramanathan remembered speaking before Congress a few years later during a series of landmark hearings on global warming. Those sessions included then-Sen. Al Gore and NASA climatologist James Hansen, who made headlines when he said it was 99 percent certain that humans were causing global warming.

“I was being invited by Republicans to testify because I was talking about uncertainties,” Ramanathan said. “The public understood uncertainty means errors. It took me some time to catch on to that.”

In the early 1990s, he moved to Scripps.

With about $20 million from the National Science Foundation, he launched research into atmospheric brown clouds. In the course of a few years, the project grew to include six aircraft and roughly 200 scientists from half a dozen countries.

Flying offshore along the Indian subcontinent, Ramanathan and the research team found thick clouds of pollution large enough to cover the continental United States. They tracked the source of the haze to soot generated by cooking with wood and cow dung, the burning of fossil fuels and industrial aerosols.

“No one knew that the pollution was so widespread,” he said. “The air pollution was thought to be locally concentrated, like over cities. What we found is that this pollution stayed in the air long enough, a few weeks, that it covered the entire northern Indian Ocean.”

The brown clouds are primarily a mixture of what are called short-lived climate pollutants, including black carbon or soot, methane, ozone and industrial gases such as hydrofluorocarbons and chlorofluorocarbons. Scientists have estimated that these pollutants are responsible for as much as 40 percent of human-caused global warming.
Ramanathan’s team first published its brown-cloud findings around the turn of this century. The conclusions provided a significant opportunity to quickly combat climate change. While carbon remains in the atmosphere for hundreds of years, this cocktail of pollution could start to clear up within weeks and dissipate completely within a decade.

However, talking about the discovery would prove vexing.

First dubbed “Asian Brown Cloud,” the name was quickly overhauled after governments in Asia felt unfairly targeted. Then the science community became anxious when he suggested that cleaning up brown clouds would “buy time” for dealing with cutting carbon emissions.

“I think a lot of people misread our earlier work as saying you shouldn’t pay attention to the the long-term climate pollutants,” said Victor at UC San Diego, who has publicly advocated with Ramanathan for governments to aggressively target climate pollutants beyond carbon dioxide.

“One thing we learned along the way was how to talk to policymakers about what you can do now, while also making sure that the full range of the science is accurately conveyed,” he added.

Around this time, Ramanathan, then 60, started to get depressed. He watched as the brown clouds floated across oceans, contributed to rising temperatures, melted glaciers and caused respiratory diseases linked to the premature deaths of millions of people a year.

“I have seen my grandmother cooking with firewood and suffering from the smoke,” he said.

“It’s like watching a crime scene, and you know who committed it but you’re not able to do anything about it,” he added. “It was just stewing inside me.”

His scientific calculations also showed that millions of subsistence farmers in his native country and elsewhere faced an increased likelihood of prolonged drought due to a complex set of events triggered by the brown clouds.

“I started feeling like my entire life was such a failure,” he said. “Every time I take my instruments and go, I come back with bad news. It did get me promotions and career recognition, but I was more getting interested in action in the field.”

He was reluctant at first to venture too far outside of his traditional role as a scientist, said Giri Ramanathan, his wife of more than 40 years.

“He was feeling let down and frustrated,” she said. “He wanted to be a scientist. He didn’t want to go into this arena of mitigation or policy or telling people what they should do.”

That gradually changed as he continued to see the impacts of climate pollution outpace action on the ground.

“What he cared about was the truth,” Giri Ramanathan said. “Wherever his research led him, he went.”
Taking action

In 2007, Ramanathan had something of an epiphany. During a United Nations International School conference on climate change, a student from Africa asked him what he was doing to counter global warming.

“She said, ‘Professor Ramanathan, you made us cry with your story, but you didn’t tell us what you’re doing about it,’” Ramanathan remembered.

“I couldn’t tell her anything I was doing about it,” he added. “I didn’t answer. She dumbfounded me.”

Within a year, he started making lifestyle shifts such as commuting via public transportation and installing solar panels on his home. He eventually bought an electric vehicle.

Later that year, he launched a project to bring specialized stoves to India that reduce emissions linked to cooking with wood, cow dung and crop waste by 50 percent to 90 percent. So far, the initiative has provided these eco-friendly stoves in more than 4,000 homes.

While the cook stoves directly help clean up the air, they also could have a political impact. If the project can expand significantly, Ramanathan hopes it would make enough of a dent in brown-cloud formation to grab the attention of government leaders who have the power to enact sweeping environmental reforms.

“If you cut (short-lived climate pollutants) globally just using technology already available in California, we can bring down the warming by 50 percent,” he said.

Ramanathan made this point in a 2009 article in Foreign Affairs magazine that caught the eye of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. A few years later, she held a news conference — with him in the front row — to announce the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants.

The campaign now includes about 50 countries, as well as dozens of groups such as the United Nations and the World Bank.

While Ramanathan continued to write opinion pieces for mainstream newspapers and magazines, he also started to more fully appreciate the reach of the Roman Catholic Church. As a member of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences, he regularly attended or convened meetings with scientists and Catholic leaders.

“It became clear to me that bringing science and religion together on the issue of environment could have a transformational impact,” he said.
Over this time, Ramanathan became a trusted adviser to the Vatican. Archbishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the academy, referred to him in an interview with the Union-Tribune this month as “sort of like an apostle” for climate change.

After his parking-lot pitch to Pope Francis and the subsequent papal encyclical, Ramanathan became more determined to inspire an even broader audience. That conviction crystallized when he traveled to Paris in November for a United Nations summit on climate change as part of the pope’s delegation.

“The Paris agreement is a watershed, but it’s a toothless agreement,” Ramanathan said. “The actions we need to take are so drastic, no leader in the world has the support to take these actions.

“Religious leaders taking it down to their parishes with have a transformative effect,” he added.

Still, the change in zeitgeist that Ramanthan advocates would require people to go beyond just acknowledging the science of climate change. Of the 53 percent of Americans who think humans are causing global warming, only about 16 percent say they are “very worried” about it, according to a study last year from Yale and George Mason universities.

“The challenge is the depth of the crisis is still not perceptible, not only to evangelicals, but to the wider public,” said Givens at Fuller Theological Seminary — adding that he and nearly all of his colleagues acknowledge human-driven warming.

And one wrong step could compromise Ramanathan’s public standing. In recent years, some scientists have thrown their objectivity into question in their zeal to address the issue, Victor said.

“I think Ram has been more careful about the line between fact and opinion,” he said. “Other folks have not been so careful and are so seethed by the idea that we’re in a climate crisis that (they believe) the ends justify whatever means.”

For Ramanathan, the ends do not justify the means. For him, people don’t need to be tricked into action. They simply need to pay attention to the facts.

“Climate change is such an important, potentially catastrophic problem, you don’t need to exaggerate it,” he said.

If he’s right, those best poised to communicate the implications of climate science will be those who have rejected many previous findings.

However, it’s these moral leaders, he believes, who are now best situated to cut through ideological divisions on climate science.
"We need to use this alliance to break this schism we have in America where climate change has been a political thing," he said. "It’s not a political issue. It’s a scientific issue, and the future is at stake."


February 24, 2016

On climate issue, Catholics urged to 'feel pain of the planet, the poor'

By Tom Tracy
Catholic News Service

MIAMI (CNS) -- Pope Francis' right-hand man on the environment and climate change issues urged Catholics attending a local academic conference to let Christian spirituality guide their thinking and actions toward preserving the full range of God's creation.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, spoke Feb. 19 in Miami at St. Thomas University as part of the school's two-day International Conference on Climate, Nature & Society. The event was spearheaded by the university's Institute for Bioethics.

The conference tackled the science and social impact of ecological change with talks from leading experts in the field along with Cardinal Turkson, who recently made several U.S. stops last week in the Vatican's efforts to promote Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

In addition to being a scriptural scholar, Cardinal Turkson is credited with helping to draft "Laudato Si'," the first papal encyclical in the 2,000-year history of the Catholic Church devoted solely to environmental and mankind's collective responsibility to pass along a clean and safe planet to future generations.

"It is urgent that we change our sense of progress, our management of the economy and our style of life," Cardinal Turkson said at the outset of his remarks, echoing Pope Francis' appeal for a "new ethical and spiritual itinerary to reduce our footprint and reverse the deterioration of the natural and social environment."

Cardinal Turkson has been likened to a touring "rock star" bringing forward the concepts discussed in "Laudato Si'" and the "the way the encyclical challenges human, social conscience."

The document touches on such important areas related to human activity such as urban planning, overconsumption and human trafficking and they affect both humankind and the environment.
Changes require shifts in thinking, the cardinal told the audience, which included students from several local Catholic high schools along with Miami Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski and several clergy and religious leaders of the Miami Archdiocese and of St. Thomas University.

Pope Francis has a very deep sense of trust and belief in the ability of humanity to do things for the better, according to Cardinal Turkson. "To make such change will require major shifts in our thinking and commitments, indeed a conversion of every individual and of groups and institutions at every level from local to global and all of us in humanity."

"Pope Francis asks us to consider what is happening to our common home, and he proposes an integral ecology that is natural but is also human and even social, and then bring this home to see what is happening in the United States and in Florida and what can be done by a university like St. Thomas University," the cardinal said, noting the role of the church and Catholic academia.

"Pope Francis invites us to feel the pain of the planet and of the poor, and to resolve to change, calling us to a certain amount of compassion to what is happening to our home and to the poor ones in our midst," he said. "Our sins do impact on the earth and the earth's surface as a result of the way we treat the environment."

The cardinal touched on a list of fragile global communities and shorelines -- including that of Miami Beach along with rainforest, desert and Pacific island communities -- which scientists have identified as being under threat of environmental changes, rising sea levels and changes in precipitation.

On the correlation between our own spiritualities and our treatment of the environment, Cardinal Turkson said our conscience is the "seat and home" of a conversion.

"The care of our common home, as Pope Francis sees it, can never be achieved by individual initiatives or by the united efforts of men bred in an individualist way. It calls for a union of skills and unity of achievement of that can only grow from a quiet and different attitude," he said.

"Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of good ideas, which means that for Pope Francis ecological conversation becomes community conversation undergirded by a very sound and profound spirituality," Cardinal Turkson said.

"Pope Francis recognizes that a commitment to this lofty idea cannot be sustained by mere doctrine, it must be sustained by spirituality, that interior impulse that encourages, motives, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activities."

In a separate conversation with local media, Cardinal Turkson said the Vatican is welcoming a dialogue with U.S. industry and business leaders who are interested in furthering Pope Francis’ conversation and challenge to protect the environment, including U.S.-based solar companies.

Plans are the works, he said, for a gathering at the Vatican in April for business and church leaders to discuss ecological issues.
The conference organizer was Father Alfred Cioffi, a Miami archdiocesan priest, who holds the university's Florida Blue endowed chair in bioethics and is director of St. Thomas' Institute for Bioethics. He said he hopes the conference educates people, but more importantly, unleashes actions and ideas to curb global climate change.


February 25, 2016

Connecticut Program Makes Solar Affordable for Low-Income Families

Faith groups and churches are working with a third-party solar provider to spread renewable energy to people who normally could not afford it.

By Zahra Hirji
InsideClimate News

Churches, synagogues and mosques across Connecticut are supporting a groundbreaking program that aims to make solar power affordable for all homeowners.

Residents who sign up to lease a rooftop solar system through this initiative will not have to pay a deposit or go through a credit or background check, some of the biggest barriers to going solar for many low- and moderate-income families. The solar leasing costs—initially $20 a month, in some cases—are likely the lowest currently available in the state, and the country.

"It's stellar," said Rev. Carl McCluster of the Shiloh Baptist Church in Bridgeport, one of the churches participating in the program. "In communities where there are low-income households like Bridgeport and like most urban areas...sometimes you are stretched to make ends meet." Credit checks and deposits are often impossible for these families, he said.

McCluster is also the managing director of the national network of religious groups called Faith Restoration Empowerment & Economic Development Outreach Ministries, Inc., or FREEDOM. For this solar offering, FREEDOM members in Connecticut teamed with the solar provider PosiGen and Connecticut Green Bank, an organization devoted to growing local clean energy and climate-friendly opportunities.

In the coming weeks, FREEDOM members will host informational sessions about the solar program to their communities. Anyone who signs up at those meetings, whether a member of the faith organization or not, can take advantage of the deal.

Soaring Solar

Connecticut has one of the smaller solar markets in the country, ranking 16th nationwide in 2014 for total installed solar power. But with this new program, Connecticut is striving to be a leader.
on solar accessibility. It also helps the state get closer to its goal of generating 27 percent of its electricity through renewable energy sources by 2020. And it does so in a way that makes solar power available to families across income levels.

It's not just Connecticut looking to boost solar—it's a nationwide phenomenon. Last year for the first time, more generating capacity for solar than natural gas went online in the United States, according to the market analysis group GTM Research and industry trade group Solar Energy Industries Association. Their report said 7.3 gigawatts of solar were installed in 2015—enough to power more than 5 million homes. The boom is largely driven by plunging solar costs. The average installed price for residential solar systems dropped 9 percent between 2013 and 2014, continuing a downward trend.

Even with the steady drops in price, coupled with programs such as solar rentals or leasing aimed at homeowners and small businesses, solar remains inaccessible for less affluent families. "It's important to recognize that we aren't there yet in universal access to solar," said John Rogers, a senior energy analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a Massachusetts-based science advocacy and research group.

Connecticut's program, which has bipartisan support from state officials, hopes to change that by offering even better deals.

"Solar energy is a win-win for our environment and our economy—providing clean, renewable energy and cutting utility bills for families, businesses, and even houses of worship," U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, said in a statement. Blumenthal is one of many Connecticut politicians from every level of government who have endorsed the program.

Heavenly Power

PosiGen, a solar company of about 200 people, launched in New Orleans in 2011 and has since spread to four states, including Connecticut. In its program,"Solar for Everyone," PosiGen offers the same package to homeowners whose roofs can handle solar: a 20-year contract to lease a small solar system of 6 kilowatts for $79 a month with no deposit, no credit check and no background check.

Similar to other so-called third party solar providers, the company owns the solar panels and will pay for maintenance or replacement. But unlike other solar competitors' plans, the monthly cost does not increase yearly. The price will stay at $79 for 20 years, regardless of inflation. Also baked into the monthly cost is a free energy efficiency audit and household upgrade.

"We just thought it made sense," Tom Neyhart, CEO of PosiGen said to InsideClimate News. "The savings from solar alone...it wasn't substantial enough," he said. But the savings are greater when you are not only generating at least some of your own power, but also getting more mileage out of that power with energy efficiency upgrades, Neyhart said, such as installing new thermostats and light bulbs, insulating pipes and hot water heaters, and reducing attic leaks.
The program being offered through the Connecticut congregations goes a step farther. Starting in a few weeks, faith organizations that support the program will host informational sessions that are open to anyone in their community. People who attend and sign up at one of those meetings over the next year can lock in a cost of $20 per month for the first three months.

PosiGen, along with the Connecticut Green Climate Bank, ran a similar promotion for the entire town of Bridgeport last year. An identical initiative was launched in New Haven, and will run through March. More than a hundred people have already signed up with PosiGen in the state. Even more Connecticut towns are set to adopt the program this year, according to Beth Galante, vice president of business development at PosiGen.

PosiGen can keep its costs down by providing only one size solar panel, of 6 kilowatts, as well as hiring workers and contractors locally. The company also reaps the benefits of state or federal incentive program or tax credits, such as the federal tax incentive for the solar industry that has been extended past 2020. While the 6-kilowatt system is not expected to meet the each home's entire electricity needs, it can help lessen the load dramatically, according to PosiGen.


February 26, 2016

Pope Francis should win this year’s Nobel Peace Prize

By Robert Christian
National Catholic Reporter

Critics of the Nobel Peace Prize often note its glaring omissions, perplexing choices, and selection of those with pasts that are checkered at best. But the award has gone to many extraordinary champions of human rights and genuine peace: Martin Luther King, Jr., Lech Wałęsa, Elie Wiesel, Wangari Maathai, Shirin Ebadi, Malala Yousafzai, Liu Xiaobo, and Jody Williams are just a few of the many worthy recipients.

While Mother Teresa won the award in 1979, no pope has ever received the honor of being a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. That should change this year.

For his leadership in confronting climate change and the degradation of the environment, Pope Francis should win this year’s Nobel Peace Prize. He has had a transformative impact on the public’s consciousness of the grave threats facing creation, including the growing menace of climate change. He described these threats in stark terms, saying, “If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us.” And with this searing critique of the status quo, he has also offered a vision of a better future: sustainable development that is rooted in respect for creation and the dignity of the human person.
Pollution, climate change, and other environmental threats pose a serious risk to international and human security. They threaten future generations with inhumane living conditions and diminished resources, while prematurely ending the lives of millions of people around the world today. The World Health organization estimates that over 7 million people die each from air pollution alone. The degradation of the environment will intensify competition for resources in ways that will spark future conflicts. To care about peace is to care about creation.

The environmental movement (however unfair the characterization may be) has a reputation among many Americans for being secular, technocratic, and more concerned with the plight of obscure insects than human welfare. Pope Francis is changing this reputation.

His concerns about climate change center less on the risk to polar bears and more on the human impact. He has elevated the critical point that confronting climate change and protecting the environment are necessary for the full protection of human rights. The destruction of creation cannot be separated from the throwaway culture that Francis has denounced again and again.

The pope has framed these issues in moral terms, asking for all of the world’s people and governments to reflect upon and live out their moral responsibilities to creation and the vulnerable people of the world.

By enlisting the Catholic Church in this fight, Pope Francis’ encyclical has been a game changer. But Pope Francis has not limited his outreach to just Catholics or even Christians. In Laudato Si, Pope Francis is addressing every person on the planet, knowing that we have a responsibility to respond as one human family to the crisis facing our common home. He has provided real global leadership on these critical issues. And we may already be seeing positive outcomes linked to this leadership.

The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference was a critical test to see if the world would heed Francis’ advice and respond to the challenges posed by climate change. Pope Francis did not sit on the sidelines or let his past remarks stand. Instead, Pope Francis expressed confidence that the Paris conference would “secure fundamental and effective agreements.” His encouragement and the moral framework that he provided helped to push the conference toward a successful outcome. Dr. Alison Doig of Christian Aid called Pope Francis’ impact on the talks “transformative.”

Pope Francis has also taken on the challenge of upending the status quo in American politics on climate change. Many conservative parties in Europe and elsewhere are shaped more by Catholic social teaching than social Darwinism and therefore have a strong commitment to protecting the environment. It seems entirely fitting that a conservative would recognize the wisdom and morality of conserving the environment and protecting God’s creation. Even in the United States, it was the Republican administration of Theodore Roosevelt that most dramatically reshaped our nation’s commitment to conservation. And many still remember President George HW Bush’s pledge to be “the environmental president,” which he made in his campaign for the presidency.

But there now exists a sharp break between the GOP’s approach to the environment and the approach taken by the center-right parties of other affluent countries. Roosevelt Republicans are
almost entirely absent from elected office. Climate change skepticism and denialism permeate the Republican Party, setting it apart from mainstream conservative parties around the world.

The casual dismissal of scientific consensus, reckless disregard for the responsibilities of good stewardship, and extreme devotion to a free market fundamentalist agenda have shown that the Republican Party is more reactionary than conservative. Given the necessity of American action when it comes to truly tackling climate change and the difference that bipartisan support would make, the party’s spiral into collective indifference is a serious problem.

But Francis did not shy away from this problem in his trip to the US, directly emphasizing the need to respond to climate change. During his trip, Francis said, “It seems clear to me also that climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to a future generation. When it comes to the care of our ‘common home,’ we are living at a critical moment of history.” Millions of Republican voters agree. And Pope Francis’ trip seemed to inspire a few Congressional Republicans to break ranks and affirm their belief that climate change is real and that this should not be a partisan issue. This shift is slight, but real.

Pope Francis’ global leadership on climate change and the protection of the environment is making a real difference. When Nobel voters cast their ballots, they should reflect upon the serious threats posed by climate change and environmental degradation and recognize the efforts of Pope Francis, who has persuasively and persistently challenged the world to respond to this great challenge to justice and peace.

[Robert Christian is the editor of Millennial. He is a doctoral candidate in politics at The Catholic University of America and a graduate fellow at the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies.]

http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/pope-francis-should-win-year-s-nobel-peace-prize

February 29, 2016

At Catholic Worker house, Sr. Elizabeth Johnson explores human kinship with God's creation

By Beth Griffin
National Catholic Reporter

New York -- While it may come as a shock, humans are neither central nor supreme in the grand scheme of creation. Humans have a place among other beloved creatures of the same living God, and it’s more humble kinship than dominion.

On Friday evening, St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, distinguished professor of theology at Fordham University, shared thoughts on the idea of such kinship with nature and described new ways to understand how humans fit into God’s work of creation during a well-attended talk at Mary House, a Catholic Worker house in New York’s East Village.
The talk, titled “Creation: Where Do People Fit?”, was part of a regular Friday evening meeting series held at Mary House.

The natural world and its creatures are in crisis as a result of consumerism and greed, as well as their diminished place in contemporary religious imagination, Johnson said. The remedy is a 180-degree conversion to the earth by focusing on God who loves the earth.

Johnson said that Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home” offers a religious vision of environmental coexistence that is different from the traditional picture. It calls for a new way of being human that will enhance and not diminish those with whom the planet is shared.

As a theological extension of the option for the poor, Johnson said nature becomes the new poor and “our love of a neighbor needs to extend to include the poor natural world diminished by an elite group of humans.”

Johnson said the longtime Catholic understanding of creation was of a pyramid with humans at the pinnacle and all other creatures as a neutral backdrop. “There’s a hierarchy and we’re on top and others are meant for our use,” she explained.

“I find it daunting to realize how deeply this sense of human beings as the rulers of nature has shaped Christian belief and practice and has largely erased creation from the faith experience,” she said.

Johnson said the theory developed from ancient Greek philosophy that valued spirit over matter, leaving rocks and plants farthest from the divine and angels the closest.

In Laudato Si’, Francis points out that Jesus Christ rejected such a notion of hierarchy:

Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination. When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus. As he said of the powers of his own age: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:25-26). [Laudato Si’, Paragraph 82]

An alternative to the pyramid of privilege metaphor is the circle of life that embraces evolution and a biological history shared among all creatures on the planet, Johnson said.

“We have to conclude, very radically, the living breath in us has the same source as the living breath in the animals. Because we are all created by God, we have more in common than what separates us as creatures,” she said.
Francis is contributing something new to the long-running discussion by emphasizing the community of creation. There is no justification for domination over other creatures, because they also have intrinsic value and share in the love of God.

Moreover, mistreatment of nature and creation is profoundly sinful, and contradicts the will of the creator that the world should flourish, Johnson said.

The conversion to the earth includes intellectual, emotional, ethical and spiritual components. Intellectually, the shift away from a human-centered view of life will honor the presence of God “in, with and under the ecological community of all species,” Johnson said.

Emotionally, there is a need to turn away from the delusion of the separate human self and isolated human species to a felt kinship and affiliation with all creatures. If the effort is successful, Johnson said images such as “Brother Son, Sister Moon” -- central characters in St. Francis of Assisi’s “Canticle of the Creatures” -- become felt truths and not poetry.

Ethically, conversion requires society to “relate to the earth with respect, not rapaciousness,” she said. “A moral universe limited to the human person is no longer adequate. Attention must re-center on the whole communion of life.”

“Being converted leads us to weave the natural world back into our religious imagination with prayer, art, music, justice and charity. Our challenge is to develop a spirituality that makes loving the earth and its creatures an intrinsic part of faith in God, rather than an add-on,” Johnson said.

She continued: “Ecological conversion is falling in love with the earth as an inherently valuable living community in which we participate, and bending every effort to be faithful to its creative well-being because we love God who loves the earth unconditionally.”

“We’re not talking simply about a moral mandate. This is a call to a deeper relationship with God that transforms us to a greater-heartedness in resonance with the love who made and empowers us all,” Johnson said.

“How could God create the whole world and let only one species make it through death?” she concluded.

[Beth Griffin is a freelance journalist based in New York.]


February 29, 2016

Bishop urges all to 'redouble' prayers, efforts to help people in Flint
Lansing, Mich. -- Especially during the Lenten season, everyone should "redouble both their prayers and their generosity" for the people of Flint still struggling with unsafe drinking water through the city's water crisis, said Lansing Bishop Earl Boyea.

"It is gratifying to see that Catholic communities in Michigan and beyond have come forward to assist the remarkable efforts of Catholic Charities," he said in a statement.

Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee Counties, based in the heart of Flint, "is on the front lines of the relief and recovery efforts" in partnership with many other community members, the Lansing diocese noted in a news release with the bishop's statement.

"The roots of Flint's difficulties are deep, and it will take years of courageous, difficult, loving effort to rebuild this community," Boyea said Feb. 15. "During this holy season of Lent, please take time to ask the Lord, in a particular way, to guide those seeking to help and to protect the children and the vulnerable."

CNN reported Feb. 28 that newly released emails show that "a year before the seriousness of the crisis became clear," some top aides to Gov. Rick Snyder urged state officials to switch Flint's source for drinking water away from the Flint River.

In April 2014, when the city was under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager, a decision was made to switch the city's water source from Detroit's supply to the Flint River to save money.

According to several news accounts, the water from the river contains eight times more chloride than Detroit's water and that the chemical, which is corrosive to metals, ate away at old lead-lined service pipes that connect to residents' homes. It allowed lead to enter people's water supply because officials put no controls in place to prevent that from happening.

In March 2015, the Flint City Council voted to do whatever was needed to return to purchasing water from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. In mid-October, Flint reconnected to the Detroit water supply. This year, Snyder declared a state of emergency in Flint on Jan. 5.

Besides lead, residents have been exposed to chemical byproducts, E. coli and Legionnaires' disease in the water.

In an earlier statement, Boyea said the city of Flint "has undergone many trials in recent years."

"Often, its people have faced the temptation to lose hope, to surrender to despair. The water crisis again presents that temptation, but again the answer must be to find strength in the love of God and the support of men and women of good will," he said in a statement.
"In this Year of Mercy," he continued, "I also urge Catholics, and all people of goodwill, to continue praying for the people of Flint. With prayer and fasting, let us call down the power of God on this city."

About 40 percent of Flint’s residents live in poverty; the average household income is $25,000.


March 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=703aecdce0&e=709fe41ec4

March 2016

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute Newsletter

http://us6.campaign-archive2.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=a6c520957b&e=a758405790

March 2016

Voices for Earth Justice Newsletter

http://us11.campaign-archive1.com/?u=9eb850d03ad7bc11a3bb09576&id=6041ff0647&e=ac77c0dfe

March 2016

An Integrating Story for a Sustainable Future: A Way toward New Human-Earth Relations

By Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker
Center for Humans and Nature

We know that the obstacles to the sustainable development and flourishing of life’s ecosystems are considerable. To meet these challenges, the next stage of evolutionary history will require an expansion of our worldview and ethics. The human community has now for the first time a scientific story of the evolution of the universe and our planet that shows us our profound connection to the evolutionary process. We are only discovering its larger meaning as evolution
continues to unfold. This is why we created the Journey of the Universe, namely a film, book and educational series to tell the story of cosmic, Earth, and human as an evolutionary epic.

We are realizing, too, that evolution moves forward through transitions—the movement from inorganic matter to organic life, for example, or from single-celled organisms to plants and animals. All such transitions come at times of crisis, involve tremendous cost, and result in new forms of creativity. We are in such a transition moment.

Surrounding this moment is a challenge to older paradigms of the human as an isolated being in a random, purposeless universe. Peter Raskin has called this the Great Transition, while Joanna Macy named it the Great Turning. Our consciousness is shifting from valuing individualism to embracing interdependence on a vast scale. The Enlightenment values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are being reconfigured so that life includes the larger life of the Earth, individual freedom requires responsibility to community, and happiness consists of more than acquiring material goods. We are moving from an era dominated by competing nation-states to a sustainable, multicultural planetary civilization.

Over the past century, science has begun to weave together the historical story of our cosmos, which emerged some 13.7 billion years ago. At the same time, we are becoming conscious of the rapid destruction of species and habitat taking place around the planet. As we realize the vast expanse of time that distinguishes the evolution of the universe, we see how late our arrival in this process is and how quickly we are foreshortening the Earth’s future flourishing.

We need, then, to step back to assimilate our cosmological context. If scientific cosmology gives us an understanding of the universe’s origins and unfolding, then philosophical reflection gives us a sense of our place in it. As science reveals to us the intricacy of the web of life, we realize that we are not only unraveling it through our economic progress and rapid industrialization, but that we are destroying our own continuity as a species.

Two major permanent exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History clearly demonstrate our cosmological context and environmental crisis. One is the Rose Center, which houses the Hall of the Universe and the Hall of the Earth, and the other is the Hall of Biodiversity.

The Hall of the Universe is a monumental glass cube with a globe containing a planetarium at its center. Suspended in space around the globe are the planets of our solar system, which are juxtaposed in a fascinating mingling of inner and outer worlds against the garden plaza and streets of New York beyond the cube’s walls. After passing through a simulation of the originating fireball, visitors move up an elevated spiral pathway through our twelve-billion-year cosmic journey, from the formation of galaxies to the emergence of our solar system. When they reach the Cenozoic period, which encompasses the last sixty-five million years, they end at one human hair under a circle of glass. The breadth of the hair represents all of human history.

The Hall of Earth reveals the birth of the planet, the evolution of the continents, and the eventual emergence of life. It presents the theory of plate tectonics, not widely accepted just fifty years ago, as well as deep-sea geothermal life forms discovered only a decade ago. Thus, this exhibit illustrates how new our knowledge of Earth’s evolution is.
The Hall of Biodiversity displays the extraordinary range of life forms that our planet has birthed—a panoply of animals, fish, birds, reptiles, and insects. A plaque observes that we are now living in the midst of a sixth extinction period. It notes that while the five earlier periods of extinction were caused by a variety of factors including meteor collisions and climate change, humans in large part are causing the present one. This prompts us to question not only our role, but our viability as a species. We are the first generations of humans to actually imagine our own destruction, and—while this may be extreme—some suggest this may be necessary for other life forms to survive.

The exhibition notes that we can stem the loss of species and habitat. It offers an arresting series of pictures: current destruction is recorded on one side, and restoration processes are highlighted on the other. The contrasting displays suggest the choice is ours—a bold step that shows that scientists no longer try to stand completely apart from what they study.

These powerful exhibits illustrate how science is ushering us into a macrophase understanding of the universe and of ourselves as one species among others on a finite planet. The fact that the Rose Center presents the evolution of the universe and the Earth as an unfolding story in which humans participate is striking in itself. Indeed, the introductory video in the Hall of the Universe observes that we are “citizens of the universe” born out of stardust and the evolution of galaxies, and that we bear responsibility for its continuity.

Environmental ethicists and religious scholars are being called to re-examine our role as humans within both the larger context of the universe’s evolution and the closer context of life on Earth. What is humankind in relation to 13.7 billion years of universe history, or to 4.6 billion years of Earth history? These critical questions underlie our new consciousness of the universe story not simply as a narrative, but as a transformative cosmological story.

Since the earliest expressions of culture, humans have developed cosmologies to describe where we have come from and where we are going. The religious and cultural traditions we have honored for millennia all bear witness to our deep desire to find meaning around us. Over the last two centuries, however, the scientific paradigm has dominated. Some scientists and science-minded philosophers have concluded that while the universe appears to follow certain natural laws, it is merely a random accretion of objects with little meaning and no larger purpose. Scientific and religious cosmologies have thus co-existed uneasily. But the best of modern science shows how we are part of the universe’s ongoing journey and how we shape its future form. This can be an important context for ecological, economic, and social transformation in our emerging planetary community.

The integrated story of the origin and development of the universe, of Earth, and of humans could become an inspiring vision for our time. It gives us a sense of common evolutionary heritage and shared genetic lineage that could establish the foundations for sustaining the future. Carl Anthony, one of the leaders of the environmental justice movement, has said this perspective has profoundly transformed his life and work. We, too, can be inspired by it, recognizing that ecological, economic, and social change is not only necessary, but inevitable.

http://www.humansandnature.org/to-be-human-mary-evelyn-tucker-brian-swimme
March 1, 2016

The Urgent Need to Slow Down

A Conversation with Elizabeth Kolbert and Matthieu Ricard

By Sam Mowe
The Garrison Institute

Journalist Elizabeth Kolbert and Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard each had big books in 2015. Kolbert’s The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History—winner of the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction—takes an unflinching look at the history of extinction and the different ways that human beings are negatively impacting life on the planet. Ricard’s Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World explores global challenges, such as climate change, and argues that compassion and altruism are the keys to creating a better future. Together these books—filled with grief and hope—feel like two sides of a coin, each necessary for understanding what it means to be alive during humanity’s greatest crisis.

I recently spoke with Kolbert and Ricard to discuss emotional responses to distressing environmental news, the importance of slowing down, and the role of art in environmental solutions.

Sam Mowe: Elizabeth, we’ve talked about this before, but The Sixth Extinction is a devastating book. Was it emotionally challenging for you to report on these issues?

Elizabeth Kolbert: Well, when you set out to write a book, on some level you have some sense of what you’re getting into. Otherwise, you wouldn’t write it. So on some level, I’d say I had already absorbed the message. It is a very grim message. If you’re not devastated by it, then the book has not done its job.

But one of the ironies that I experienced in the process of writing this book about how humans are really effective at destroying life on the planet is that I went to all of these amazing places and saw just how fantastic the world is. Carl Safina has said something like, “The more I sense the miracle, the greater I sense the tragedy.”

Sam Mowe: Matthieu, I know that you are also aware of the bleak facts, but you’re often described as the happiest person in the world.

Matthieu Ricard: That’s completely exaggerated. [Laughter]

Sam Mowe: Even so, in your book you quote somebody as saying, “It’s too late to be a pessimist.” How are you able to stay optimistic in the face of distressing environmental news?
Matthieu Ricard: It’s interesting that you mention this emotional reaction to climate news, because, actually, the problem is precisely that it is very hard for us to be emotionally moved by something that will happen in the future. Of course, the worst of climate change is coming closer and closer, but it won’t happen tomorrow. The reason for this emotional disconnect is quite simple: evolution has equipped us to react to immediate danger. If there’s a rhinoceros coming at a group of people full speed, everybody gets up and runs. If you say, “There’s a rhinoceros coming in 30 years,” people will ask, “What’s the problem?”

Sam Mowe: The reason I’m interested in this question of emotional responses is because behavioral scientists say that people are frozen by bad news and motivated by positive messaging. This creates a challenge for those working for environmental change.

Matthieu Ricard: All my photographic work is about showing the beauty and the wonder we have in terms of nature—implying, of course, how incredibly sad it would be if it was all destroyed. We need to inspire. But we also need to be honest about what’s going to happen in the future if we don’t put our full energy, ingenuity, creativity, determination, and decision making towards solving this crisis.

Elizabeth Kolbert: I think that also gets to this question of messaging. I hear that all the time, that people don’t want to hear negative messages. To a certain extent, I think that is a construction of our consumer culture, which is precisely the problem. We don’t want to hear negative messages because they’re not part of this affirming culture that we live in that tells us all, to quote McDonald’s, “You deserve a break today,” or whatever. That is part of this whole communications apparatus that’s been built around actually trying to prop up consumerism. And if that’s the problem, then maybe we really need to examine all of the precepts behind that.

Also, the idea that people are only motivated by good news is clearly not true. If something is coming at you—say, a rhinoceros—you get out of the way. Clearly, we’re very much motivated by fear, and fear has mobilized us many times.

Matthieu Ricard: When there is genuine fear because of real danger, to ignore it is stupid. What we don’t need is unreasonable fear or fear that comes as lagging anxiety—sometimes the fear alarm is on for reasons that are not justified. Sometimes what we call fear, is simply common sense. If you were walking towards a cliff, you would not be taken by fear and emotion. You would just decide that you should stop before you fall over.

Sam Mowe: It seems that a lot of this consumer culture that Elizabeth was just speaking about is also driven by fear—fear of not having enough or being good enough as you are.

Matthieu Ricard: Yes, we need the ability to recognize when a fear is reasonable.

Sam Mowe: Let’s talk about time scales. Elizabeth, one of the points that you make in The Sixth Extinction is that humans have been altering the planet for a really long time, sort of like it’s in our DNA to do so. So it’s going to be challenging to change our behavior overnight. And, Matthieu, you talk about the value of slowing down. So there seems to be this tension between
the urgency of the moment and then the long-term project of changing human nature or at least slowing it down.

Elizabeth Kolbert: I think that the idea about slowing down very much gets to the heart of the matter. To the extent that we are a world-altering species—and I do think it’s pretty clear that we’ve been at this project for a very long time—what makes us very destructive, unfortunately, is our capacity to change things on a time scale that is orders of magnitude faster than other creatures can evolve to deal with.

But there is a difference between what we were doing when we were hunting some mastodons and what we’re doing today. Our impact on the planet has been called “the great acceleration.” Becoming aware of our capacity to change the planet could be a good thing and could potentially lead us to reassess a lot of the things we do. However, I try to never say, “Things are going to change,” because I don’t see any evidence of that. But I certainly think that there’s a possibility for change.

Matthieu Ricard: It’s not contradictory to speak of an emergency to slow down. It’s not like you are frantically nervous while slowing down. It’s just that it is time to slow down. All of those terms—slowing down, simplicity, doing more with less—people respond to them by saying, “Oh, I’m not going to be able to eat strawberry ice cream anymore.” They feel bad about that. But, actually, what they miss is that voluntary simplicity that turns out to be a very happy way of life. There have been very many good studies showing that again and again. Jim Casa studied people with a highly materialistic consumerism mindset. He studied 10,000 people over 20 years and compared them with those who more put value on intrinsic things—quality of relationships, relationship to nature—and he found the high consumer-minded people are less happy. They look for outside pleasures and don’t find relationship satisfaction. Their health is not as good. They have less good friends. They are less concerned about global issues like the environment. They are less empathic. They are more obsessed with debt.

So I think we have to realize that we can find joy and happiness and fulfillment without buying a big iPad, then a mini iPad and then a middle-sized iPad.

Sam Mowe: Do you think that contemplative practices can help people come to that realization?

Matthieu Ricard: For me, contemplation means to cultivate skills, inner strength and determination to better serve others and to serve causes that are worth serving. It’s like gaining the inner resources to deal with the ups and downs of life and to deal with the adverse circumstances, the sheer determination and compassionate courage. So, yes, I think contemplation can help set priorities.

Sam Mowe: Elizabeth, do you think spirituality has a place in climate discussions or do you see it as more of a policy and financial issue?

Elizabeth Kolbert: I do think spirituality has a place in the discussions, understanding spirituality very broadly here in terms of thoughtfulness and self-control. Changing our energy systems is obviously a huge technological challenge, but I think the mistake that is often made is
that people think we’re going to change our energy systems, and then we’re going to just continue to live as before. But if you just give people more energy—and it might be a carbon-free source of energy—and they’re going to use it to cut down the rainforest, then you have potentially solved or ameliorated one problem only to worsen another problem. So how we use these technologies that we deploy makes a huge difference, and I don’t think that without any form of self-control that we’re going to get out of this mess. So we’re going to need massive amounts of both technology and self-control simultaneously.

**Sam Mowe:** How can we achieve that level of self-control as individuals and as a society?

**Elizabeth Kolbert:** Well, I don’t have a good answer for that, and I don’t claim to have any expertise in this area. I can barely control my three kids. But right now in the U.S., you know, one of our favorite phrases is “the sky’s the limit.” I think there are possibilities of different social norms that have very different values.

**Matthieu Ricard:** There are many ways to do this. But, yes, the idea is that we need to cultivate some fundamental human values and that are different from our current ways our life.

**Sam Mowe:** Do either of you think that art can help us reset our views of nature and help us change our values in the way you’re talking about?

**Elizabeth Kolbert:** I think art potentially has a huge role to play, and part of that is because so many of us are living in urban settings and we can’t all go off and visit the Amazon. And we shouldn’t be doing that anyway, to be honest. So I think that reaching people through all sorts of different media—and breaking through that inattention to what many people would consider to be unpleasant, unhappy news—is useful. There is the great Emily Dickinson line, “Tell all the truth, but tell it slant.” There are many people working on this, and I’ve worked with a couple of different artists on this sort of thing. Whether any of this is having any success in the sense of actually motivating action, as opposed to just being good art or bad art, I can’t really comment on that.

**Matthieu Ricard:** I try to do this through my photography. I think of it as a way to be witness to the beauty of nature and to share it with people who live in cities, to remind them of the beauty of the world. So I think that can be a major source of inspiration for positive change.

**Sam Mowe:** I ask that question partly because I sometimes experience information overload and it seems like art might be a way to cut through the information and connect your heart to the issues.

**Matthieu Ricard:** Yes, but I think we must go directly to the issue and not naively hope that by listening to Bach we will somehow realize we need renewable energy instead of fossil fuels. I’m not sure there’s too much of a direct connection.

**Elizabeth Kolbert:** Yes, I really agree with that. I think that there’s room for all sorts of creative efforts, and I applaud them, but I think there is a problem when people mistake some kind of
presentation or artwork or discussion for action. You can say they both have utility, but you cannot confuse them.

**Matthieu Ricard:** If you are on a boat that is going straight towards a big waterfall, it’s of no use to play soft music.

**Elizabeth Kolbert:** [Laughs] Exactly. Or maybe there is, but you shouldn’t convince yourself it’s going to prevent you from going over the edge.

https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/the-urgent-need-to-slow-down/

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**March 2, 2016**

Muftis in Perlis Issue a Fatwa against Pollution

Clean Malaysia

First came a fatwa by Islamic authorities against the poaching of protected species in Terengganu. Now comes another equally welcome religious edict issued by the Perlis Fatwa Committee: a ruling against polluting the environment. Through that fatwa, the committee has made it “haram,” or forbidden, for Muslims to pollute Malaysia’s environment because doing so would cause harm to humans, animals and plants alike.

“The act of polluting the environment which directly affects nature’s ecosystems causing harm to living things is in conflict with the teachings of Islam,” State Mufti Associate Prof Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin said apropos the religious reasoning behind the new Islamic edict, which has just been passed by the local Fatwa Committee in the state of Perlis, in northwest Malaysia. “Islam is a religion that calls upon its followers to preserve the wellbeing of human life and the universe, and not perform harmful acts,” he added.

Here’s hoping that Muslims across Malaysia will heed that insight and do their best to stop or avoid polluting the country’s much-polluted environment any further. Fatwas can be issued only by qualified religious authorities in Islam on any specific issue, but as a rule they are not automatically binding on individual Muslims. The rulings generally seek to influence the conduct of believers.

“Every Muslim is obliged to refrain from doing any activity and action that may cause environmental pollution, thus disturbing lives and the ecosystems directly,” explained Dr Asri Zainul Abidin, the mufti of Perlis popularly known as Dr Maza, citing the extensive harm that pell-mell surface mining in Kuantan, in Pahang state, has inflicted on local ecosystems and the lives of people. “Any effort to safeguard the environment is encouraged by the religion (of Islam) and is considered as a good and pious practice.”

Then again, you don’t have to be a Muslim to consider it good practice to safeguard the health of natural environments. We should all be aiming to do just that regardless of our religious
March 3, 2016

Interfaith community to discuss protection of coastal waters

By Rick Snizek, Editor
Rhode Island Catholic

PROVIDENCE — Draped in hidden splendor beneath the shimmering blue waters of the Atlantic Ocean lie gorges deeper than the Grand Canyon and mountain peaks as tall as the Rockies.

In an area known as Cashes Ledge, located about 80 miles east of Cape Ann, Massachusetts, scientists continue to identify new species where rare, cold water coral reefs more than 1,000 years old are home to one of the most biodiverse areas of the Atlantic.

The area is home to the deepest and largest kelp forest along the Atlantic seaboard, as well as such rare species as the Atlantic wolfish and passing pods of highly endangered North Atlantic right and humpback whales.

It is in this area that Save the Bay, the Rhode Island Council of Churches, Creation Justice Ministries and Interfaith Oceans support the establishment of the first proposed marine monument in the Atlantic Ocean. The honor would raise awareness of the importance of protecting all coastal waters, including those where fishermen from across New England ply their trade, a vocation which tens of thousands of people depend upon for food.

On Sunday, March 12, from 1:30-3:30 p.m., members of the faith community are invited to attend “Protect God’s Creation: New England Ocean Treasures,” at Save the Bay, 100 Save the Bay Drive, in order to learn more about God’s wondrous creation off the state’s coast, and how to protect it for future generations by supporting its designation as a national marine monument.

The goal of the initiative is to permanently protect New England’s ocean treasure for future generations. The movement seeks the support of faith-filled people eager to heed the moral call to care for God’s creation.

Following a speaking program, Father Andrew George, protopresbyter at the Church of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Parish of Greater Providence, will perform a traditional Blessing of the Waters in an outdoor ceremony slated to last about 30 minutes.
Marybeth Lorbiecki, author of “Following St. Francis: John Paul II’s Call for Ecological Action,” and director of Interfaith Oceans, promoted the event last week in an interview on Boston’s Catholic TV.

“It will affect the generations of fishermen to come to preserve these treasures along the coast,” she said of the importance of establishing the monument for all who live near and depend upon the bounty of the ocean each day.

In an interview from her home in Wisconsin, Lorbiecki also spoke about how the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis and care for the environment are connected.

“One of the things the pope is really emphasizing is that care of creation is actually care of the poor,” she said, noting how the planet is a gift from God.

“We’re tenants on this land. God made it good and we’re not doing so well [with it],” Lorbiecki said.

She noted that it is the poor that are the first to be hurt by environmental degradation and devastation.

“They have no place to go. They become refugees,” she said.

Lorbiecki also stresses that climate change, which is producing a noticeable change in the world’s oceans, is not just about the future, it’s also about the present.

“The Year of Mercy is calling us to repentance, individually and communally, and saying to us ‘Let’s have a sense of God and Christ in creation.’”

Space for the program is limited and participants are encouraged to register early.

For more information, visit www.creationjustice.org/ocean-treasures.


March 3, 2016

Theologian contemplates environment and spirituality

By Pat Johnson
Vancouver Courier

The ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis, says a renowned theologian coming to Vancouver this weekend.
Douglas Christie, a professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, blames environmental degradation on human habits of consumption and a lack of feeling for other living beings, including other people.

“These can be understood in the deepest sense as reflecting a kind of spiritual alienation,” Christie said in a phone interview before his arrival here. “We are alienated from ourselves. We are alienated from one another. We are alienated from the world. To make ecological change and transformation have any chance of enduring, it feels important to examine the deeper sources of our alienation. You can use the word spiritual to describe that. You don’t have to, there’s other language you can use, but I think it’s useful.”

Christie’s forte is contemplative ecology, which he describes as having a consciousness of the larger reality ever-present in one’s life and the world around us.

“Contemplative practices show up in almost every major world religion, Christianity included, so there’s also a more specialized meaning that contemplative has,” he says. “It involves certain spiritual disciplines or practices. Sometimes it involves solitude, sometimes it involves silence, stillness, and often these practices are developed in communities, say monastic communities or other intentional communities, so that contemplative practices become a way of shaping a life, a human life, as well as the life of the community.”

But contemplative practice doesn’t have to be complicated.

“It has a simple meaning,” he says. “Paying attention, being aware and living out of that awareness, especially in relation to the natural world.”

Confronting climate change and other potential ecological catastrophes requires all sorts of responses, he says, but contemplative practices can be an important part.

“I think we need a full-blown social, political shift — and an economic shift, for that matter — that will help us reorient the way we live so we’re not doing so much harm to the planet,” Christie says. “I also feel it’s important, even as we’re trying to identify those shifts, that we pay attention to the deeper sources of our own unease, our own inattention to the world. So contemplative thought and practice is meant to be a help in that larger process.”

Christie’s recent book is The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology. The title reflects the words of Evagrius of Pontus, a fourth-century monk, who wrote, “If anyone should wish to see the condition of the mind, let him deprive himself of all mental representations, and then he will see the mind similar to sapphire or to the colour of Heaven.”

“Some people say that [Evagrius’] spiritual thought comes very close to Buddhism in some ways,” Christie says. “He advocated individualist prayer, for example, an approach to prayer that pushes beyond all images, all language, that pushes into something dark, that requires us to kind of stand in the unknown and the unknowable. He uses the expression that when the mind is transformed through spiritual practice, it comes to shine like sapphire.”
Christie clarifies that the ancient use of the term that we translate as “mind” goes beyond the contemporary meaning of our rational mind and means instead the deepest centre of our souls.

“We have this capacity to become luminous beings, open to the whole reality where everything is kin to us,” he says. “I just love that image, the blue sapphire of the mind, so that’s the image that I chose to ground the book.”

That will be the theme of a public talk Friday night. An all-day retreat Saturday at the Canadian Memorial Church and Centre for Peace (canadianmemorial.org) will address the topic “The Need for Roots: Cultivating a Sense of Place.”

The sense of place, which is relevant in ecology, is also significant, he says, in the struggle for 21st-century people to find a spiritual place. There are plenty of people who subscribe to a theology that is “spiritual but not religious,” which can make it difficult to situate oneself in a community of like-minded people.

“I’m very sympathetic to the kind of hunger that gets expressed in all kinds of new and interesting ways, not necessarily connected to religious traditions,” he says. “But I’m also aware – and you see this often and I feel myself sometimes — it’s hard to find a community sometimes if everything is moving in front of you, everything’s up for grabs, if everybody’s spiritual path is kind of self-invented. People do, I think, find that seeking and finding community can be challenging in that kind of climate.”

His own approach does not follow a straight line. It is rooted in Christian tradition, but is influenced by others as well.

“I made a great effort to open up the canvas as widely as I could and to listen to voices from far beyond the Christian tradition, who are, I believe, offering us a similar kind of contemplative orientation to the natural world,” Christie says. “The book is actually set up as a kind of sustained conversation or dialogue among and between Christian contemplatives and poets, writers, artists, natural historians, ecologists, philosophers who are not at all identifying themselves as Christians but who are trying to see the world deeply and carefully. I’m creating what I hope is a contemplative space that is infused with Christian thought and imagination but not limited to it.”


March 4, 2016

Murder of Honduran environmental activist sparks outrage

By David Agren
Catholic News Service
MEXICO CITY (CNS) -- An outspoken environmental activist in Honduras was murdered in her own home, sparking outrage and offering another example of the impunity and violence in the Central American country.

Berta Caceres, who won the 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize -- an award considered the Nobel for ecological actions -- was murdered at around 1 a.m. March 3 in what police initially called an attempted robbery, but family members denounced as politically motivated murder, according to media reports.

"A strong, dangerous message was sent today," said Mike Allison, an expert in Central American politics at the Jesuit-run University of Scranton, Pennsylvania. "It's outrageous that after several years of international scrutiny and, at times, condemnation, that some people had no qualms ordering her murder."

A Lenca indigenous leader, Caceres attracted international attention for her opposition to a hydroelectric dam on the Gualcarque River in western Honduras, where construction crews arrived unannounced almost a decade ago. A court order banned her from the area and she endured death threats, but successfully led protests that thwarted the project.

"She was a woman committed to fighting for the protection of the environment and indigenous people's territories and the common struggle," said Jesuit Father Ismael Moreno, director of Radio Progreso and the Jesuit-run Team for Reflection, Research and Communication.

"This has been what she was known for," since founding the Council of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras in 1993, Father Moreno added. "It's been 25 years of perpetual struggle. ... She was the woman with the most recognition in all of Honduras" and well-known abroad.

Caceres participated in the 2014 World Meeting of Popular Movements at the Vatican but was not considered close with the Honduran church hierarchy.

Her actions had angered elites in Honduras, one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere and home to the highest homicide rate in the world. Father Moreno said she protested against concessions granted to foreign mining companies and was perhaps the best-known critic of a concept known as "model cities," which creates areas within Honduras that have laws and institutions different from the rest of the country, in an effort to attract international investment.

Mostly, though, she protested against proposed mines and hydroelectric projects, which were planned by foreign firms -- and, her supporters alleged, she dealt with threats from landowners and the authorities.

"We're heartbroken," said Father Moreno, who considered Caceres a close friend. "She was constantly under threat."

The murder brought international condemnation and calls for investigation.

President Juan Orlando Hernandez condemned the killing and promised a thorough investigation.
"This act causes mourning for all of us," he said via Twitter.

Police initially attributed Caceres' death to robbery, but later said she was shot four times, according to media reports.

The crime again confirms the problem of corruption and impunity in Honduras, where mass protests filled the streets in 2015 after it was discovered money embezzled out of the state social security system ended up in Hernandez's successful presidential campaign.

An international commission against impunity has been created in Honduras, following the example of neighboring Guatemala, where the president and vice president were impeached on corruption charges. Observers say it may not be as easy in Honduras.

"(The commission) and the international community should have no illusions about the environment into which they are operating," Allison said.


March 6, 2016

A Buddhist tradition guides seekers to live in harmony with nature

By Manjula Narayan
Hindustan Times

It’s -19 degrees C and you are trudging back to the hotel after a sumptuous thukpa dinner at the Amdo Tibetan restaurant on Leh’s main market street. Your companions are much younger, not given to wheezing as they traverse the frigid streets, not given even to the debilitating episode of altitude sickness that kept you in bed for a whole day, your heartbeat booming in your ears like a murderous foghorn.

You notice too that they are still keen on quizzing religious figures like Gyalwang Drukpa, head of an order of Mahayana Buddhism popular in the Himalayas, about the BIG questions: “Explain tantra to us; How come there’s a picture of Shiva outside?” and are generally full of a liquid enthusiasm for life that, in you, has congealed into the bland all-knowing soul borscht of the middle aged.

Still, there are some mysteries that continue to intrigue you. Like, why would a woman willingly opt for a life of self abnegation, one that steers away from the firm pleasures of the flesh, unhears the quiet shout that urges most to be fruitful and multiply, resists the clutching of tiny arms?

“I was interested in spirituality from a very early age,” says 27-year-old Jigme Tingdzin Zangmo, a kung fu-practising nun attached to the Drukpa sect, when you meet her in late
February at the 386-year-old Hemis monastery, where crowds in traditional dress have gathered to celebrate the Winter Hemis festival, that marks the advent of spring.

“I became a nun when I was 14. Even before that, whenever I thought about what I should be doing in my life, the instant answer was always: ‘You shouldn’t just be ordinary in this life because this life is very precious,’” says Jigme as we queue up to ladle helpings of rice and light mutter paneer onto our plates. “If you just study and have an ordinary life, of course, you can have money or become famous but there is not much point in that life,” she says with absolute conviction. As a novitiate, Jigme studied at the Tia nunnery where she learnt English and Hindi and “the most important – the preliminary practice”. This involved executing 4,000 prostrations a day. A single set of preliminary practice includes “100,000 prostrations, followed by 100,000 vajrasatva practice, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guruyoga.”

“It’s quite tough,” Jigme says with classic understatement. You can only nod and chew thoughtfully on bits of paneer and attempt to get closer to the wood chip fired bukhari at the centre of the room.

Did she ever miss her family? “Though we can visit our families, we are not fully involved with them. As a spiritual practitioner you shouldn’t get too attached to your family because, from the point of view of spirituality, from the vajrayana point of view, all of life, everything, is an illusion,” Jigme says. “Your judgement is clouded by your attachments; that’s why you shouldn’t be fully involved in samsara. The main intention of being a nun is to be alone and to be a practitioner.” Jigme believes she has a karmic connection with her guru, the Drukpa, who named her as a child.

As an agnostic who appreciates religious belief without ever being able to commit to it, you are constantly surprised at how Ladakhis – from Jigmet, a sometime teacher at the Rancho school made famous by Aamir Khan’s Three Idiots, whom the monastery has assigned as your guide, to the Drukpa himself – speak in a matter-of-fact way about karma and their own multiple births.

“In my life, in this life, I have done this mela (the traditional Naropa festival to be celebrated as ‘the Kumbh of the Himalayas’ on the banks of the Indus in July this year) only in Ladakh; I have not yet done it anywhere else though people are requesting me to,” says the Drukpa, who wears his power as a spiritual leader very lightly. Dressed in robes that expose his arms to the elements while his audience of nonplussed big city journalists shivers in three layers of woolens and windcheaters, he laughs easily and answers even the most inane questions sensibly, and presents abstruse philosophical concepts in digestible nuggets.

“What is the winter Hemis festival and did it always exist?”

“It’s the circle of the year, the circle of day, circle of moon and sun; we do certain practices like Mahakali practices, Mahakala practices. Most of these practices need to be done at the end of the year; it’s a very deep kind of thing to understand for commoners like us,” the Drukpa says, and you think of the thousands who had gathered on the vast grounds adjacent to the Rancho school, for a glimpse of him and to participate with deep devotion in the Hemis festivities. “These are practices connected with Shiva, Avalokiteshvara and Mahadev. Practices connected with tantra
should be done in the upper part of the year. That is connected with physiology, the physical body, the cyclic existence, the human body has circulation too you know; it’s something to do with astrology and all these things,” he says.

Despite being an inveterate skeptic, you are impressed by this cheerful guru who speaks of both spirituality and the very worldly need to care for the environment. “The Naropa ceremony, which is held once in 12 years, is considered as a side liberation according to religious belief. The ceremony is not specifically for the environment but the philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism is to help the environment. I am more excited by the environmental issue than the ceremony itself, which is just a religious ceremony... which is just me,” the Drukpa shrugs and you receive an unbidden insight into what it must feel like to be perceived as holiness incarnate.

The spiritual leader’s interest in protecting the environment, and the general Ladakhi sense of impending doom brought on by climate change and the melting glaciers – no doubt worsened by the cloudburst of 2010 that left great destruction in its wake – has led to the launch of many initiatives. One is the use of filtered instead of mineral water by trekkers in the Hemis national park. The Drukpa is also encouraging eco-friendly means of transport like walking and bicycling through padyatras and cycle yatras. “Ladakh is on the top of the Himalaya and 75 percent of all people depend on Himalayan waters so we have to really look after them. The environment is a big issue,” he says.

This concern for the natural world extends to animals and the cheerful Padma Tashi, president of the Young Drukpa Association points you to the Live To Rescue Stray Animals Care and Management Centre (SACMC), which rehabilitates injured animals and shelters even aggressive stray dogs. “The government wanted to cull the dogs but that’s not a real solution so this centre was started,” Tashi says. There’s much that states like Kerala that recently opted to decimate its strays could learn from Ladakh.

There is much that the rest of India too can learn. Sadly, the ‘ugly Indian tourist’, who only really discovered the region after the stupendous success of Three Idiots, leaves a trail of trash in his wake. “They throw plastics about even if you tell them not to and clean their cars in the lakes and rivers,” Jigmet, the guide, laments.

You try not to be the embodiment of the ugly Indian tourist at the Shey nunnery where you’ve chatted with 40-year-old Jigmet Palden Lamo, originally from Choglamsar, who has been a nun for 20 years. One of five children and the only one in her family to opt for the religious life, Lamo never wanted children or a family of her own. “You can’t think if you do that,” she says pointing you towards the outhouse. Trudging there in the bright Himalayan sunshine even as the crisp air makes your teeth chatter, you wonder about the nuns traversing this distance to relieve themselves in the middle of the subzero night. Then, once you get there, you gawk at the dry composting native toilet, that strangely enough, brings to mind the outhouse of long-dead relative’s home in Kerala, a pit in the ground where he, frightened that he’d be accused of violence in his dotage, disposed a stray heirloom sword at the height of naxalite activity in the 1970s.
Crouching over that eco-friendly but fearsome loo, you think about mortification of the flesh, the environment, man’s place in the world, Time, the Himalayas, climate change and end-of-the-world neurosis. Is it real you wonder or is it all maya? When you arise, you see the snow covered mountains framed perfectly in the toilet window. Agnostic you might be but in that moment of oxygen-deprived relief, your blood once more thrumming in your ears as the Diamox wears off, you think giddily that this is the best of all possible worlds; that perhaps in this life and in the ones to follow, and the ones left behind, you haven’t been to a place quite as unsettlingly beautiful as this; and that perhaps, just perhaps, Divinity does exist.


March 6, 2016

Cardinal Turkson addresses GR 2030 on Catholic social teaching, integral ecology, sustainable development

Independent Catholic News

The President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson, delivered an address to the Global Responsibility 2030 conference meeting in Bad Honnef, Germany on Saturday. The full text of Cardinal Turkson's address follows:

In the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I am very happy to participate in this year's conference "Global Responsibility 2030" co-sponsored by the academic association Ordo Socialis[2] and the Katholisch-Sociales Institut of the Archdiocese of Cologne.[3] Also in the name of the whole Council, let me wholeheartedly congratulate Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga for so deservedly receiving the Ordo Socialis prize for his faith-filled Christian commitment and for the many valuable ways in which he has addressed problems of exclusion, poverty and governance.

In addition, please join me in looking ahead for a moment to next year. It will be an auspicious double anniversary. The Katholisch-Sociales Institut was founded in 1947. Then in 1967, Blessed Pope Paul VI founded the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. As we celebrate such special birthdays in the same year, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is happy to honour the Katholisch-Sociales Institut as twenty years our senior!

At this point, I call on Pope Francis himself to introduce Laudato si’ briefly in a short video. Let us watch it now.[4]

Here are some key take-aways from the video and from Laudato si' itself:

Catholic social teaching, integral ecology and sustainable development
Our nature is created by God and surrounded by the gifts of creation
Our failures are that we over-consume and that we do not share the gifts of creation. We have
tilled too much and kept too little - with dire consequences for the poor and the planet. And so it is urgent that we change our sense of progress, our management of the economy, and our style of life. This coherent and sustainable approach to life is what we call integral ecology.

My contribution to today’s reflections is entitled Catholic social teaching, integral ecology and sustainable development, and what I hope to show is how the three elements of the title all converge in the ample proposals made by Pope Francis, especially in Laudato si’.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is one of the greatest challenges facing the human family. The main idea recognizes that it is no longer sufficient to measure human progress only in terms of a growing Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP was always an inadequate measure of well-being. As a gross measure, it ignored significant variations of outcomes among sub-populations - and we now have disastrous gaps between the super-rich and the utterly destitute. As a single measure, it always ignored other essential foundations of well-being. This is especially so in the current global reality. So today, we slowly but surely acknowledge that social inclusion and environmental sustainability are intrinsic to true development. True development must be sustainable development. It must rest on three legs--economic, social, and environmental. And if one leg is neglected, then the entire structure collapses.

In many respects, sustainable development is a response to a problem of scale. Since the industrial revolution, which began in the 18th century, the global population has increased ninefold, and the global economy is now more than 200 times larger. And the trend shows no sign of slowing down. By mid-century, global population is expected to surpass 9 billion, and--on best estimates--the size of the global economy could increase threefold. This is a staggering change in such a short period of time, and it is bound to create economic, social, and environmental challenges.

From the very beginning of these "new things" or res novae, the Church sought to grapple with all this dizzying change. This is how modern Catholic social teaching was born--in Pope Leo XIII's effort to align timeless Christian principles with the res novae of the modern industrial economy. And yet, when the great encyclical Rerum Novarum was written in 1891, the technological revolution was still in its infancy. The age of steam and railways was well underway, but the age of electricity had just begun, and the great advances in automobiles and petrochemicals--to say nothing of information technology--still lay in the future. Since 1950, the economic potential from the technological revolution has increasingly but unevenly benefited the various corners of the world. The process began with inequalities including colonialism and even slavery; and the process remains very unequal, unfinished and, in some places, much retarded if not blocked.

While Rerum Novarum focussed on the conditions and rights of workers, it also contained some seeds of current ideas about our natural environment. For example, it stated that those who receive God's bounty in the form of natural resources or property should exercise their responsibility "as the steward of God's providence, for the benefit of others".[5] Moreover, Rerum Novarum--and all subsequent papal social encyclicals--warned about the tendency of
modern capitalism to create stark divisions between rich and poor within countries, and between rich countries and poor ones. When the economic impulse is propelled primarily by self-interest, by greed, by zeal for material accumulation and unfettered consumption, the result is dysfunction and imbalance, and it leads to large numbers of human beings ignored, excluded, and discarded. With its relatively narrow focus on growth, it leaves economies prone to damaging booms and busts.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of "eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment".[6] This becomes the strong message of Pope Francis in Laudato si'. As the global economy expands in size and reach, so do its "short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production" (§32). This gives rise, says Pope Francis, to a "throwaway culture", which is the driving force behind the economy of exclusion. The excluded are not even considered part of society, the Holy Father decries, they are the outcasts, the 'leftovers'.

But there's more to it. When Rerum Novarum was written, the scale of the global economy was much smaller, as was its impact on the earth and its natural systems and cycles. This is no longer the case today. In writing Laudato si', Pope Francis consulted with some of the world's top scientists—including from here in Germany. The message is loud and clear—human beings are interfering with earth's natural cycles in an unprecedented and highly dangerous manner. The scale of human activity means that we are brushing against some vital planetary boundaries—including climate change; ocean acidification; deforestation; depletion of precious water resources; pollution from extensive use of fertilizers, and from the massive burning of fossil fuels; and the undermining of delicate ecosystems and the tragic loss of biodiversity.

Unique for a papal encyclical, Pope Francis references these dangers, especially in the first chapter, "What is happening to our common home". The reason is simple. If we do not slow down and re-assess our behaviour, we will destroy the bountiful earth given by God to all of us. In doing so, we undermine the conditions for human flourishing—especially for the poor and for future generations.[7]

This is why sustainable development is such a great challenge of our age. We must restore a proper sense of balance, and put the social and environmental pillars on the same level as the economic pillar. Sustainable development calls for a world in which economic progress is widespread, poverty is eliminated, the resources of the earth are shared fairly, the environment is protected from human-induced degradation, and all people can flourish.

In this spirit, the leaders of the world gathered in New York last September to endorse the 17 Sustainable Development Goals; and again at COP21 in Paris in December, to commit themselves to phasing out the use of dangerous fossil fuels. These goals are the right priorities for the world at this moment. They aim to make the economy work for everyone; to end the scandal of poverty and hunger in a world of plenty; to ensure clean water, accessible energy, health care and education for all; to protect the world's ecosystems and shift to a sustainable use of the earth's resources; and to build more inclusive, just and peaceful societies.
In this, the Sustainable Development Goals build on the momentum of the Millennium Development Goals. The earlier goals applied only to developing countries, and focused on a shorter list of priority areas including poverty, hunger, health, education, and gender equality. Yet they show what can be done when the world unites around a set of urgent moral priorities. Thanks to these goals, poverty fell precipitously, and health outcomes improved dramatically.[8] The new goals are for everyone in every part of the world, and they encompass the full range of challenges facing our human family. So yes, the SDGs are more ambitious. Nevertheless, we have learned that, when people and especially their leaders focus on a concrete framework for action, success is possible.

The market system is certainly capable of generating wealth and delivering economic growth. We can see that. But it cannot really go beyond this. We can see that too. The market does not guarantee social inclusion, and it certainly does not seek to sustain our limited natural resources. So the market alone will not be able to bring about sustainable development.

The problem, says Pope Francis, is not so much the market economy itself, but the ideology that too often lies behind it--the "deified market" or the "magical conception of the market" which resist the necessary political oversight and regulation. "Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy" (§189). The solution, according to Catholic social teaching, is to choose solidarity over self-interest, the common good over profit maximization, integral human development over materialism, and sustainability over short-termism. That does not mean rejecting the market; it does mean recognizing its clear limits, and keeping it under human and ethical control.

Speaking of solidarity, let me note the wonderful stance of contemporary Germany in this regard. This country's reception of refugees is a dramatic, concrete exercise of compassion towards those who are excluded and marginalized. Here too, sustainability is vital. As Pope Francis spells out:

With regard to migration, there is a need for mid-term and long-term planning which is not limited to emergency responses. Such planning should include effective assistance for integrating migrants in their receiving countries, while also promoting the development of their countries of origin through policies inspired by solidarity, yet not linking assistance to ideological strategies and practices alien or contrary to the cultures of the peoples being assisted.[9]

The plight of migrants and refugees has been an impassioned element of the current papacy; your response in Germany is truly an exercise of Misericordia within this great Year of Mercy.

Integral human development, integral ecology and Catholic Social Teaching

So far, I have focused my remarks on sustainable development. In Laudato si’, however, Pope Francis is calling for something broader and more encompassing than what the world means by sustainable development. He is calling for "integral and sustainable human development". This might seem like merely adding the extra word "integral", but that extra word makes all the difference! In Catholic social teaching, integral human development refers to the development of the whole person and every person. Such multi-faceted development goes well beyond an ever-expanding GDP, even a better-distributed one, and merely economic or material progress. It
encompasses the cultural, social, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and religious dimensions. It is an invitation for each person on the planet to flourish, to use the gifts given to them by God to become who they were meant to be.

This more encompassing and holistic approach to development goes well beyond narrower reductionist ones. Development should not be conceived of in purely technocratic terms that set aside moral considerations. Laudato si' strongly condemns the dominance of the "technocratic paradigm". By this Pope Francis means the tendency to take efficiency and productivity as the benchmarks of success, and to see nature as something to be manipulated, mastered and controlled, with no concern for its inherent value or limits. In turn, this leads to a temptation to seek "infinite or unlimited growth" and an inclination to put individual benefit ahead of the common good. It leads to the tendency to define economic success based on profit and material calculation, which reflects a disordered desire for instant gratification. According to Pope Francis, it is precisely such a short-sighted and self-serving attitude that lies behind the social and environmental crisis. "The alliance between the economy and technology ends up side-lining anything unrelated to its immediate interests" (§54).

In practice, this calls for a re-assessment of our obsession with GDP growth and consumerism. Laudato si' notes that some countries will indeed need higher economic growth--namely, the developing countries who justifiably hope to improve their living standards. This is a matter of justice. But just as important, the richer countries might need to reconsider their own lifestyle and the role of merely economic growth. They (we!) must re-assess the whirlwind of consumerism that drives their growth.

Pope Francis is calling on all people to pursue a kind of progress that is more integral, more sustainable, and ultimately more worthwhile. This is one facet of the Pope's integral ecology: the value of integration and harmony of our lives with the natural world (§225). It comprehends "our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings" (§15), in the varied aspects of our life, in economy and politics, in various cultures, in particular those which are most threatened, and in every moment of our daily lives.

In particular, we must not forget the poor of today "whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting" (§162). In the contemporary world, where "injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable", working for the common good means to make choices in solidarity based on "a preferential option for the poorest" (§158).

The common good also regards future generations: "We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity" (§159). Here, in the context of integral ecology, Pope Francis invokes care for our children to formulate his pivotal question about the environment: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?"(§160).

Conclusion
I have spoken about supplanting traditional market thinking that distorts the full notion of integral and sustainable human development. But this is not a call for pre-industrial romanticism. Rather, I would wish to see the tools of the market and the skills of its experts applied to achieving full human flourishing and sustainable development. Rapacious profits are not intrinsic to well-functioning markets; corruption, bribery, and cruelty are not intrinsic to well-functioning markets. Indeed, the opposite is true. Better governance means greater genuine prosperity. Both classical and contemporary theorists point to the basis of well-functioning markets in certain virtues such as trust, honesty, solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation. If anything is intrinsic to markets, it is not vice but virtue. So there is nothing strange about challenging the markets to produce virtuous outcomes such as common good, sustainability and solidarity. This is the best of what the former MDGs and the new SDGs hope for and strive for.

Such hope echoes the magisterium of Pope Francis. Overcoming the interrelated social and environmental crises will require a wholly different attitude--a cultural revolution, he says. By this, the Holy Father does not mean a naïve rejection of technology and the benefits of modern society. No, he means putting human ingenuity in the service of a better kind of progress--one that is healthier, more human, more social, and more integral. In turn, this calls for us to overturn what he calls the myths of modernity--individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, a market without rules. Pope Francis is calling for sustainable development, yes, but ultimately for a deeper vision of what is to be served by that development: the Earth returned to its health and beauty, home for all our future generations. For this we must pray to work with each other, guided by God, in order to make the Earth worthy once again of comparison with Heaven. Dein Wille geschehe, wie im Himmel, so auf Erden. - Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven!

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

President

[1] With gratitude to Anthony Annett (New York) and Robert Czerny (Ottawa) for help in drafting and editing this address.

[2] ORDO SOCIALIS for the Promotion of Christian Social Teaching
http://ordosocialis.de/en/wir-ueber-uns/


[7] Easter Island is an illustration of reckless practices leading to near-extinction.
[8] The following are significant improvements since 1990:

- people living in extreme poverty almost halved, from 1.9 billion to 836 million
- undernourished people in developing countries almost halved, from 23 percent to 13 percent
- deaths of children under five down by more than half, from 12.7 million to 6 million
- maternal mortality rate has declined by 45 percent
- new HIV infections fell by 40 percent between 2000-2013. 13.6 million have anti retroviral treatment, up from just 800,000 in 2003


2 billion people have gained access to better sanitation.


March 7, 2016

What If Animals Believe in God?

By Andrew Aghapour
Religion Dispatches

Chimpanzees believe in God. This news, widely reported last week, is only a slight exaggeration. Using hidden cameras, scientists have indeed captured footage of chimpanzee behavior that resembles religious ritual. In the footage below, groups of chimps can be seen throwing rocks into the crevices within trees:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=38&v=_W_VGnp-4bg

The rocks pile up to create something resembling an altar. This “ritualized behavioral display” apparently has no evolutionary function, and instead resembles religious rituals from humanity’s archaeological past.

This isn’t the first discovery of animal behavior resembling religion. Elephants and dolphins, for example, have burial rituals for their dead.
More importantly, if animals were conclusively shown to have religion, this would represent yet another blow to the longstanding notion that humans are, somehow, fundamentally different from other animals. Octopi use tools. Capuchin monkeys have symbolic language. Orcas have culture. Dolphins have self-awareness. Is religion, too, something that we share with beasts? If animals can in fact have religion how might this change our ethical obligations towards them?

To pursue these questions further, the Cubit reached out to religion scholar Aaron Gross, author of a 2014 book, *The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretic Stakes, Practical Implications*. Gross, an Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego, and the founder of Farm Forward, met with Cubit co-editor Andrew Aghapour at a coffee shop in Chapel Hill, North Carolina to explore how religion applies to elephants, dogs, chimpanzees, and factory farming.

*This interview has been edited for clarity and length.*

**As a scholar of religion, why do you think it’s wrong see religion as exclusive to humans?**

I think most of us have the sense that whatever religion means, it’s not obvious. It’s complicated, perhaps beyond words—similar to a concept like God, which is, within classical theology, always something you can’t quite describe. So the first thing I would say is that to utterly exclude animals from the phenomenon of religion is to pretend we know what it is more than we do. That’s bad scholarship. It’s also bad theology.

**I can imagine skeptics saying that religion requires belief, and beliefs are made up of symbols. If so, why would it be wrong to say that religion requires symbolic language and that it therefore doesn’t occur in animals?**

It may not be wrong to say that religion requires something like symbolic language. But then the question becomes, “What is symbolic language, and can we really deny it to all animals?” Based on what we have learned about primates, elephants, dolphins, whales, we know that [they engage in] cultural transmission. We know that, for example, there are particular ways of using tools which are passed from grandparent to child, parent to child, that are specific to particular primate groups—or even particular crows.

Some of these [unique transmitted behaviors] appear to be utilitarian. But some of them are not, like where there are specific places of beauty that particular animal groups will go to. For example, chimpanzees go into particular waterfalls, dance in front of them, and sit on rocks afterwards, apparently just marveling at it. And the scientists who observe this tell us they have no utilitarian explanation for this—it seems to be aesthetic appreciation for the beauty, some kind of awe experience.

I don’t think we want to say in advance there’s nothing symbolic about that waterfall for them—that, “it’s just H₂O that helps their bodies function.” That seems implausible. So when we look really carefully at the richness of animal behavior, it’s not so easy to exclude them from [religious] categories.
Another direction we might take is, well, who else gets excluded if we say religion is primarily about something like symbolic language? Can children have religious experiences then? Do we have to say religion is something that only adults or teenagers can have? I think many people have the intuition that there is something spiritual to childhood. One of the things we foreclose when we cut animals out of this picture is the ability to acknowledge our own deep intuitions that, say, my four-year-old is in touch with something that’s not just material, but is something we’d want to call religious.

**So excluding animals from religion amounts to a kind of intellectual gerrymandering?**

Yeah, I think that’s a good way to put it. Excluding animals, when we look carefully, ends up forcing us to conclusions we don’t necessarily want to accept. It is a kind of gerrymandering, and it’s an ingrained habit. We keep repeating what we’ve been told, but when we pause and reflect, it’s not so clear. Then, the next step is that people go back to their authoritative sources—Christians and Jews, for example, can look at the Bible. And it’s astonishing to see that the Bible, in particular, does not exclude animals from religious life. And I mean this in very straightforward ways.

In the drama we have in Genesis of creation, sin, the Flood, and recreation: it’s all flesh that becomes corrupted, not just humans. Animals seem to participate in that problem. When the Covenant with Noah is formed in Genesis 9, it is repeated seven times that that Covenant includes all creation, so animals seem to be able to enter covenants with God. Which is maybe the central metaphor of Jewish and Christian traditions.

So when we look into our intuitions and find it’s hard to exclude animals, and we look to our scripture and find some affirmation of this idea, we might begin to doubt the exclusion of animals [from religion].

**I wonder if religious concepts could therefore be useful for understanding animal behavior, or relationships between animals and humans.** Observed elephant burial practices, for example, are remarkably complex. Upon the death of a matriarch, her family will surround her body and lightly touch it with their feet and trunks. Family members cry out and weep. The group eventually covers her with leaves and dirt and stays there for days. How would a trained scholar of religion make sense of that?

Mourning is a very sophisticated thing, and it’s already a religious concept. We have a whole literature reflecting on the nature of mourning. Why do we need to mourn the dead? How does that, for example, preserve society? That moment when the elephants gather perhaps echoes something like what [French sociologist Émile] Durkheim called “collective effervescence,” which he thought defined religion by helping people draw boundaries between what was sacred and what was not.

What is sacred? At the most simple level, we can say sacred is something special in a particular way. There’s something special about the death of that animal. Presumably, that creates cohesion, which is important to a social mammal. There’s no reason to think that the cohesion
that’s created is fundamentally different from the cohesion that’s created in humans, when we [mourn].

Looking at [human and elephant burial rituals] in parallel is likely to lead to a richer understanding of what this phenomenon is. We might better know what it is to mourn.

What are the ethical ramifications of including animals in religion?

There’s a remarkable book called *A Dog’s History of the World*, by Laura Hobgood-Oster, which looks at the amazing amount of scientific information we now have about dog-human relationships. What we find is that humans did not domesticate dogs the way we domesticated pigs and chickens and cows. It seems to be a relationship that wolves chose as much as humans chose. And when you look even deeper, you can see that the success of human beings depended on their relationship with dogs, which, for example, allowed them to hunt in ways that expanded their successfulness and range. The species *Homo sapiens* co-evolved with dogs. Our very DNA has been shaped in an evolutionary relationship with them.

So what does this imply about our ethical obligations to dogs in the contemporary day? We all talk about loving dogs and cats—that’s a very felt affection—but I would not want to be a dog or cat in many places in the world. Huge numbers, as we all know, are confined in shelters for long periods of time where they likely have rather poor qualities of life. Millions are killed. Humanity was [evolutionarily] shaped by dogs, and we find ourselves treating these animals in a disposable kind of way.

When we start to think about it in this register, it’s not just about cruelty anymore. I think it challenges us to go beyond the simple anti-cruelty ethic, and to acknowledge [one of] the deepest features of what it means to be human.

What about farm animals, which we have a very different relationship with?

Farmed animals are an even more extreme example. We, as a nation, have basically said that anything human beings want to do to farmed animals is acceptable. We do have anti-cruelty laws, which people will invoke with the honest hope that these protect farmed animals, but virtually every state has “common farming exemptions.” [According to this] legal principle, if something is a common farming practice, it is legal regardless of any consideration for the animals’ suffering.

Is this the relationship we want to have over life? That anything goes, so long as somebody can profit from it? That is what our current law says, and it means that people who want to do terrible things—like force chickens to live in spaces the size of a legal size piece of paper, with chopped off beaks and genetics so messed up that their very physiology causes them to suffer—are protected by the law.

This isn’t the vision of the Good Shepherd we have in mind. If the shepherds of today extract profit for corporations at the expense of animal suffering, what kind of religious vision are we putting forth?
Farm Forward helps empower religious communities to go through their own process of discernment about what they believe about animals and to then get active. The most developed project of this is called the Jewish Initiative for Animals, which just launched in January. We provide resources to Jewish institutions to allow them to look at where their food comes from and then ask, collectively, about what counts as “ethical food.” What does it mean to treat a chicken well? Do you want to be eating this many animals or should it be reduced? When you raise these kinds of questions, people light up.

This recognizes the way in which religion is present in everyday life. It not only does something really good for the animals by supporting a movement towards more humane farming, but it empowers people to live their values and in a most community-building way. Because nothing is more community-building than breaking bread together.

http://religiondispatches.org/what-if-animals-believe-in-god/

March 7, 2016

Living in a wavy universe

By Ilia Delio
Global Sisters Report

From the dawn of our species, what we know about the universe has come from the power of observation, that is, what we can observe in a light-filled universe. In the 13th-century Oxford theologian Robert Grosseteste described the beginning of all physical life from light. One of his major works *De Luce* begins with God's creation of a single point of light which, through expansion and extension, he claimed, evoked the entire physical order into existence. The expansion of light replicating itself infinitely in all directions, he speculated, is the basis of the created world.

Grosseteste was not too far from modern physics. In the early part of the 20th century, Albert Einstein announced his theory of general relativity (1916) in which he rewrote the rules for space and time that had prevailed for more than 200 years, since the time of Newton. Newton's physics stipulated a static and fixed framework for the universe based on concepts of absolute space and absolute time which were considered independent of one another. Instead, Einstein showed that space and time form a continuum and are part of the physical fabric of the universe. Einstein's revolutionary discovery was based on light and the equivalence of matter and energy which permeate the universe.

A year after Einstein announced his theory of general relativity, he predicted that the speed of massive objects would distort space-time, sending out gravitational waves or tiny ripples reverberating in the cosmos that can both stretch and shrink; however, until September 2015 the existence of gravitational waves had not been directly detected. Their recent discovery is truly remarkable because they were not seen but heard! Using powerful laser electromagnetic wave
detectors, scientists could amplify the noise of the waves and measure them. Scientists were listening to nature, like a stethoscope on the heart.

Black holes are collapsed giant stars which become like cosmic sink holes that trap light and matter. They have been known to exist in the universe but until now there has been little evidence of their existence. The gravitational wave discovery is based on the cosmic peregrination of black holes. Scientists speculate that about 1.3 billion years ago two black holes swirled closer and closer together until they crashed in a furious bang. Each black hole packed roughly 30 times the mass of our sun into a minute volume, and their head-on impact came as the two were approaching the speed of light. The staggering strength of the merger gave rise to a new black hole and created a gravitational field so strong that it distorted spacetime in waves that spread throughout space with a power about 50 times stronger than that of all the shining stars and galaxies in the observable universe. This is what scientists at the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) detected last September. They actually heard and recorded the sound of two black holes colliding a billion light-years away, producing a fleeting chirp which was recorded. This was the first time in the history of the cosmos that the human ear could actually listen to the secrets of nature; a new hotline to nature. Dr. Kip Thorne, one of the leading scientists in the discovery, said that until now scientists had only detected warped space-time when it is calm. The detection of the black hole collision revealed another side of nature’s gravitational waves that could be likened to the ocean roiled in a storm with crashing waves.

The discovery of gravitational waves is truly awesome. The fabric of the universe is like a trampoline that can stretch or shrink due to massive objects like black holes colliding or like a mattress shaking when a sleeper rolls over, producing ripples of gravity or gravitational waves. This is no static, mechanistic universe; rather, our universe is a mysterious ocean of energy and matter in which space and time are interwoven and dynamic, able to stretch, shrink and jiggle. Even more incredible is the confirmation of black holes, the bottomless gravitational pits from which not even light can escape. The discovery of gravitational waves now gives scientists a new opportunity to understand the early universe and the powerful cosmic events that created them.

But what does this mean for us? Well, on the macro level not much. Life goes on with its ups and downs, births and deaths, good days and bad days, failures and achievements. But on a deeper level the discovery of gravitational waves tells us that science is living between mystery and discovery. It is as if astronomers are listening in on cosmic oracles and not yet quite knowing what to make of the strange sounds. The elastic nature of space-time almost makes time irrelevant in the vast universe, which means searching for the origin of the universe may not be, as we conceived on the human level, looking back; rather it may mean looking forward. The existence of black holes or massive star collapse, also points to the eerie presence of death in the universe from which mysteriously new elements of life emerge and converge.

Einstein did not believe in a personal God, but he did maintain that mystery permeated the universe. Reportedly he said to one of his skeptic acquaintances, "Try and penetrate with our limited means the secrets of nature and you will find that, behind all the discernible laws and connections, there remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion. To that extent I am, in fact, religious."
The more we comprehend the universe, the more we see how truly incomprehensible it is — which leaves room for religion — but not a religion of the past or religion based on ancient cosmology. The mysterious new universe calls for new religion, a renewed sense of divine mystery in the cosmos, a new religious myth, a new narrative that draws us into these cosmic waves that are, in some fundamental way, the source of our lives. We need a new religious sense of time and eternity as operative in the moment of occupied space, not as future events but possible events. As Christians in this vast, dark, wavy universe, what do we hope for? It is time to take a few cues from science, namely: 1) change the religious paradigm when the right time comes, 2) let go let God and 3) trust nature to generate new life. Scientists try to collapse mystery into data, but we believe in the divine mystery at the heart of matter and, for this reason alone, we should be the most trusting of nature because we believe that God is in the waves.

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March 9, 2016

Eco-theologian Fr. Sean McDonagh: Don't let this 'Laudato Si'' moment pass

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

On Sunday eco-theologian Columban Fr. Sean McDonagh wrapped up a three-city, 10-day speaking tour of the East Coast focused on his new book on Pope Francis’ encyclical, “Laudato Si’”, on Care for Our Common Home.”

The book, similarly titled On Care for Our Common Home and published by Orbis Books, takes the encyclical’s full text and adds McDonagh’s reflections on its various themes: among them, climate change, biodiversity, water scarcity and threats to the oceans, and the food crisis. In addition, McDonagh recaps the development of Catholic theology on creation of the past half-century, and offers ideas on how to transform Francis’ vision in Laudato Si’ into meaningful action and a central piece of Catholic theology.

The tour, which ran Feb. 26-March 6, took him to parishes, monasteries and college campuses in New York, Washington D.C., and Boston. McDonagh spoke with NCR on Monday, weighing in on his tour, the encyclical and what comes next for the document that he said marks “an exciting moment for the church.”

“There’s just extraordinary possibilities in this document,” he said.
Central to that, the Irish priest said, is a three-year synodal process aimed at taking the new teaching, “a new spirituality” that Francis offers in *Laudato Si’* and finding ways to put it into practice of the faith.

“It's new for a lot of us. Most of the people who go to seminaries and into theology didn't actually deal with any of these issues, so there's a difficulty,” McDonagh said, pointing in particular to Francis’ quoting of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in his frequent discussion of sins against creation, be it human-caused climate change or the loss of biodiversity due to pollution and deforestation.

“None of us here believe those are sins,” he added.

The first year of the synod would start at local parishes and dioceses, and ask people how they come to know the natural world, experience it and see their proper place within. Year two would shift to the national level, examining practices in each country, from energy usage to consumption to treatment of the oceans. In that process, he said, the church “would start to begin creating prayers and liturgies that support this new engagement and new spirituality and new ethics with creation.” The third year would take those efforts internationally.

“I think this would be a great service. It would be a catalyst, the church would be providing a catalyst. Because whether you like it or not, we’ve got to take these issues seriously. We haven’t taken them seriously for the last 50 years. If we don’t take them seriously, they don’t stop; they just continue, and we become less ready to deal with them into the future,” McDonagh said.

Francis’ encyclical offers the church an opportunity to become facilitators in the larger discussion of protecting the environment, the climate, the common earthly home. While the church has written and spoken of the need to care for creation before *Laudato Si’*, it was largely insufficient in depth -- he notes that the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, published in 2004, included half paragraphs each on climate change and biodiversity, and nine graphs on biotechnology -- or ultimately overlooked.

“This is potentially an extraordinary moment for the church,” he said. "… Now do we take it or do we go back into our burrows? I hope we take it.”

Below are excerpts from the McDonagh interview, which has been edited for clarity and length.

**NCR: During this speaking tour, what were you hearing from people you encountered?**

**McDonagh:** I was hearing from people that they would like to see the Catholic church giving leadership [on ecological issues], and particularly the theological side of things. There isn’t a Catholic institute here that actually has taken on board the theological side, with interdisciplinary approaches to this that would include physics, biology and chemistry and cosmology.

And the resources are there, and we need this. This is a huge effort, it’s not a simple thing into the future. We have an opportunity. If you would’ve asked me 10 years ago -- I’ve been at this since 1978, so I’ve been at it a long time -- if you had asked me six years ago, in my lifetime
would something like this emerge, I would have no, there’s no possibility for this emerging. And it has emerged, but it’s 99 percent ahead of where most Catholics are. And it needs to be not 99 percent, it needs to be our lived doctrine and our lived practices from here on in. Now you need good theology to do that.

**You were involved in the development of this encyclical. What was that process like? Were you focused on a specific aspect of the text?**

Well, I was asked by Cardinal Peter Turkson in November 2013 to write a document for the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and I wrote it up, like 30,000 words … now eventually, in 2014, that kind of morphed into the beginning of the encyclical itself. So that whole section, basically, on what’s happening in our world, those were issues I developed.

**You’re not the first theologian or church official that has made a point of talking about the encyclical in the U.S. -- for instance, Cardinal Turkson has given numerous speeches on the document. Do you see a particular importance of raising this conversation around Laudato Si’ in the U.S.?**

Sure. [Francis] quotes the New Zealand bishops saying 20 percent of the global population use up 80 percent of the resources of the planet. Now that’s not just the United States, that’s also Europe, that’s also Japan, that’s also 350 million people in China. So yes, he’s very strong on that. One of the things he’s very strong on he takes in from Centesimus Annus, in which Pope John Paul II talks about how, especially in the United States and Europe, we have a love affair with science, particularly with technology, because we think it’s great. And we actually do think that some technology is going to solve the issue of climate change for us. And [Francis is] very strong on that: He says, No, that’s not going to happen. He’s not saying that technologies are not important -- and there’s wonderful work being done in the United States, particularly on alternatives sources of energy and on batteries -- but he’s saying we need lifestyle changes.

… So, yes, there’s a huge message here. But I don’t think the church here, the episcopal church here -- and that’s true of Ireland, too -- have actually taken on board the profound message that it is. Because we’re focused on the culture wars, all those things they come easier to us. We think we know more about that side of moral theology. But like with this, you’re talking about making the planet a less livable place then for future generations -- that’s the alternative. We could bring about geologic disorder, changes of magnitude within a hundred years if, for example, greenhouse gas emissions continue the way they do, the average global temperature rises to 4 degrees above what it was [before the Industrial Revolution]. That would be in 200 years, humans would have caused a geological change that is irreversible; most geological periods are 20 or 25 million years or 40 million years. So we don’t take those on board as part of our pastoral. Now I think we got to start doing it.

**Beyond lifestyle changes, Are there other messages you see of particular importance for an American audience?**

Two areas that will be most difficult is the new understanding of ethical imperatives. The people who opened up the prairies here in the 19th century did not think they were doing wrong. The
people who destroyed the tropical forests in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s and ‘80s in the Philippines didn’t think they were doing morally wrong things. So that is a huge change. So how do we now develop the moral imagination that includes those things? That’s number one.

And then number two, from a theological and spiritual perspective, [Francis has] now come with an extraordinary new teaching that species have intrinsic value … and so a new spirituality has to include our understanding and intimacy with the natural world. So here in Boston College, how many trees actually have you named outside, and have you named how supportive they are of other species? That’s the kind of intimate understanding that will become part of an ecological theology.

Now, it’s challenging. I’m not saying that it’s going to be easy, but that’s what he has laid out for us, that we should be doing. And it’s going to take different kinds of spiritual and theological work to do that, but the most certain thing it’s going to do is we’re going to have to work with other people. We’re going to have to work with the scientific community, to work with other religious traditions, so we can’t do it alone. But we will also need very good rituals, very good prayers, very good concerns for our moral life: How do we actually assess this new change? So all of that would need to emerge from the pastoral world.

Your book tour arrived in the midst of a U.S. presidential election. How might reflection on Laudato Si’ relate to how someone may view the issues that arise this election season?

Very easy. I mean, you had one candidate the other night in Detroit telling us that he would take apart the Environmental Protection Agency. Now can you think of anything more irresponsible? So what he wants to do, he wants to give back to the corporate world the permission to pollute everything, with PCBs [man-made toxic chemicals banned from U.S. manufacturing in 1979] that continue in our system and the system of all creatures and actually poison and are toxins to our children and their children.

So I would say be seriously real about what people are saying to you. If they’re not saying anything to you on climate change, they’re living in cloud cuckoo land. And it’s your children that are going to face it, and your grandchildren. The reality of climate change is not the end of the next 1,000 years. We now know if we continue as is, even after the Paris Agreement with the things we’ve put in there we’re willing to do, it would still be a 3.8 degrees Celsius rise, which would be close to a geological order magnitude change. We’re only at the beginning, and anyone who tells you different is just not telling it as it is, and they’re fooling you.

You’ve said Laudato Si’ is not a policy document, but that it could help in that realm. What types of policies might develop from this encyclical?

Fundamentally, one is in power and energy. … In the United States and Europe we give billions, billions, billions of dollars to the fossil fuel companies. So we got to start a different way of actually creating energy. And to a fair assessment, a lot of it is beginning to be here, but it needs to be supported. And then we need to be extraordinarily critical of people of toxify our planet. … So we have to be careful that we don’t allow this planet to become more and more toxified. And
the pope is very good on that. I mean, he studied chemistry himself, so he knows the persistent realities of toxins in the atmosphere.

How do you transition Francis’ vision in the encyclical to consideration by policymakers?

To a certain extent, that transfer is beginning to happen. I’ve been at a lot of the United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change. … The first time that the church ever made, on policy levels, an impact that I felt was actually at the Paris one in December. Many, many people quoted Laudato Si’ as the beginning of creating new policies in terms of the whole era of fossil fuel, reducing it -- mitigation -- and then also the alternatives, and how to support the alternatives and the kinds of economic policies that are necessary to do that. So here was a document that was being used and quoted for that. …

We’re beginning to come of age and this is a great era for us. Don’t let it pass -- that’s my thing to anyone I talk. This is a wonderful time but wonderful times can be let pass. And I keep pointing out what Pope John Paul II said: “Concern for the environment is an essential part of our faith.” He said that in a 1990 document [World Day of Peace Message], which is 35 years ago, so it hasn’t actually percolated with the people because we didn’t actually teach them that. And that’s my great fear will possibly become of Laudato Si’, that if we don’t actually now address them in these couple of years with a good tool like the synodal process, 25 years from now, someone could be back here and say, ‘Sorry God we never got around to implementing these.’ That’s my concern.

In the period between Benedict’s resignation and Francis’ election, you wrote in NCR that the church’s teaching on the environment was “still light green.” How would you assess it now?

I think we’ve at least passed our master’s, and probably getting up to doing our Ph.D. It’s huge! It’s extraordinary, every aspect of [Laudato Si’] is extraordinary. And it’s only when you begin to think what was there beforehand, like the Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church, a half a paragraph on climate change -- and not serious. And you could say, ‘Well that’s not important,’ but it’s totally important. A half a paragraph on biodiversity? That is totally irresponsible.

So this is wonderful. It’s real, it’s of an age and the man has the courage to do it and write it well. So we have gone from just post-kindergarten to our master’s degree.

How do we get to that Ph.D. level?

We have to actually, when we’re reading it and we come to this thing from Bartholomew [sins against creation], we need to put the boots down to the floor and say none of us believes that, how are we going to do that here in this community? How am I going to get close to the oak tree? How am I going to know that? How am I going to know what the insects are doing in my community? How am I going to know the birds -- there are 9,000 species of birds, 3,000 of them are on the red list, are they here in my community? Is there anything we’re doing? Add it to the theology that needs to be done and the prayers and the spirituality.
It’s a totally exciting, totally open world into the future. And I think it’s a great time to be a Christian. I say of *Laudato Si’*, everyone says, well, it’s about climate change; well that’s not it, it’s 10 other things. It’s a good ecological document. It’s a good social [document], he’s really good on the impact of the destruction of the earth on the poor, he’s very good on that. But it really is an evangelical document. If someone asked me, ‘Look could you give me a book, how to be a Christian in the 21st century?’ I’d say, take this book, and you can have the Bible, as well.


March 9, 2016

An Evangelical Movement Takes On Climate Change

By Tik Root

Newsweek

John Muir was a fervent believer. Not just in science or conservation or the National Park Service, which he championed. The founder of the Sierra Club and father of American environmentalism also believed in God. “The forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God,” Muir wrote in his 1897 essay “The American Forests.” “[For centuries] God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools.”

This sort of religious language was “very much present in early conservation movements,” says Evan Berry, an associate professor at American University and author of *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*. George Bird Grinnell, founder of the Audubon Society, also invoked faith, and many of the environmentalist leaders in the late 19th and early 20th century were Congregationalists, a traditional Protestant sect, says Berry.

But then God abandoned the forest. During the Great Depression and two world wars, environmentalism took a backseat to what felt like more pressing issues, only to re-emerge in the 1960s in more secular forms, like Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*. The new wave, Berry says, “wanted to build practical, policy-driven solutions to environmental problems without getting caught up in the messiness of religious ethics.”

For years, conservationist and faith-based views on the environment progressed on separate tracks, but in 1986 Prince Philip, then president of the World Wildlife Fund, organized a summit where leaders of the five major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism—discussed how their faiths could help save the natural world. By the 1990s, religious groups such as the World Council of Churches were participating in international climate debates and conferences.
In the late 1990s, the Evangelical Environmental Network helped shepherd the Endangered Species Act through Congress, characterizing it to The New York Times as the “Noah's ark of our day.” In 2002, the network launched a headline-grabbing “What Would Jesus Drive?” campaign to call attention to fuel efficiency. In 2006, the group organized the Evangelical Climate Initiative, which released a statement making a moral argument for climate action. Dozens of evangelical leaders signed, including Rick Warren, Leith Anderson and Joel Hunter, whose megachurches have tens of thousands of members. Meanwhile, the Regeneration Project’s “Interfaith Power and Light” campaign, which launched in 2000 as “a religious response to global warming,” rapidly expanded its membership. According to the campaign’s president, the Reverend Sally Bingham, the organization comprised 14 congregations in California in 2001; today, it is in 40 states and includes some 18,000 congregations.

The interfaith section of the 2014 People’s Climate March in New York City saw thousands of people from more than 30 faiths—Baptist, Zoroastrian and everything in between—rally for climate action. The World Council of Churches, representing hundreds of millions of Christians, has committed to divesting its multimillion-dollar endowment from fossil fuels. At December’s historic climate summit in Paris, there were morning worship groups, Vatican negotiators and an exhibit at Notre-Dame Cathedral called “Ode to God's Creation.” “None of this was really on the horizon 20 years ago,” says Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University. “There has been an explosion.”

Still, America’s attitude toward climate change continues to be characterized by apathy. According to a 2014 Gallup poll, Americans rank the environment and climate change near the bottom of their priority list; putting the concerns at 13th and 14th (out of 15), respectively. By comparison, a September CBC poll showed that Canadians rank the environment second (out of 13) on their list of most important issues, ahead of education, jobs and foreign policy. And caring in the U.S. breaks along political lines. A 2014 Public Religion Research Institute poll shows that while 65 percent of Democrats believe climate change is manmade, only 22 percent of Republicans do.

As faith-based environmental activism—“creation care,” as many call it—continues to grow, it hopes to help America break through some of these barriers. Whether that means reaching conservative politicians through faith or prompting action from the pews, the idea is that religion can move those unconvinced by the science.

Blown Off the Commode

On February 23, 1980, at age 16, Charlotte Keys was born again. “It gave me the strength and the ability not to have fear,” she says of her Pentecostal faith. It also led her to see homosexuality as a sin, evolution as dubious and abortion as violating the sanctity of human life. That’s the word of God. And for the same reason, she’s an environmentalist.

Keys found her calling about a decade later. She was working in the county clerk’s office, where she came across documents detailing a chemical spill in the Web Quarter neighborhood of Columbia, Mississippi, where she grew up. “When I discovered that we had a lot of health
problems going on, the Lord just moved in my spirit,” says Keys. “God's people don't deserve this.”

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Reichhold chemical plant was home to turpentine, diesel, the now-restricted pesticide pentachlorophenol and countless other chemicals. In March 1977, it exploded, and the Web Quarter took a direct hit. One local recalls her neighbor across the street being blown off the “commode.” Residents say chemicals seeped down the runoff ditches and into the ground, and for years the grass would spontaneously burst into flames. The EPA declared the area a Superfund hazardous waste site. Workers in protective suits cleaned up what they could, and activists say the company disposed of the rest. Although the EPA took the site off its priority list in 2000, many in the community believe the Web Quarter remains contaminated. “I'm scared I won't wake up one morning,” says Mack Oatis, who has lived in the neighborhood most of his life.

Appalled, Keys founded a nonprofit called Jesus People Against Pollution in 1992, and for more than two decades that’s been her mission. She calls it her “kingdom assignment” from God. Gradually, her work has grown to include not only the Reichhold spill but also clean air and clean power legislation, issues she collaborates on with organizations such as WE ACT, an environmental group based in Harlem, New York. Still, her main goal is to relocate as many people as possible from the Web Quarter to a small community on the other side of town to be made up of a church, 16 housing units, a snack bar and her own house. With time and financial support from her husband, Willie, she’s amassed about 9 acres of land and poured a 1,800-square-foot concrete pad upon which she plans to build the American Temple Apostolic Church.

In the meantime, her ministry is in a small conference room at a Comfort Suites off U.S. Highway 98. It has a lectern that doubles as a pulpit, and there’s a continental breakfast in the lobby. “Whoever shows up, shows up,” the Reverend Keys says on her way to service one Sunday. The three rows of tables can get cramped when 15 people come, but sometimes only one or two attend. After a quick stop to pick up one of her congregants, she heads to the hotel.

Once inside the conference room, she passes around a handout with “God creates” at the top. Aside from the one man who came with Keys, there is a couple, Lakeidra and Maurice Keys (no relation), and their four children. To begin the morning, they all join in a rendition of the gospel song “What a Mighty God We Serve,” which is followed by an opening prayer and a bit more singing. Then it is time to focus. “Look at your scripture.” Lakeidra says, separating Kyliah, 7, and his brother, Jyisiah, 5. “Pay attention.” Distractions dealt with, Keys opens to the Book of Genesis. “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth,” she booms. “But do you think God created this stuff for us to mess it up?” “No,” comes the response in imperfect unison.

Keys is far from the only religious figure fighting for environmental action. The Reverend John Rausch in Kentucky is going after Big Coal. The Reverend Jeffrey Allen is drawing attention to polluting practices such as mountaintop removal in West Virginia. And Katharine Hayhoe, director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University, is breaking the climate activist mold. She used to rely solely on science to make the case for why we need to deal with climate change, but she frequently sensed a disconnect with her Texan audience. Trying a new tact, Hayhoe started to bring her evangelical beliefs into the conversation. Initially, she says, it felt
like “pulling down your pants in public,” but she and her pastor husband went on to author the book *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions*. The book’s creation care message took off and landed her on *Time*’s list of “The 100 Most Influential People” and Showtime’s *Years of Living Dangerously*, a program about global warming. “Until we connect all those [scientific] facts to our hearts,” says Hayhoe, “we lack the motivation to act.”

Momentum for this moral approach to climate action reached new heights when Pope Francis made environmentalism a pillar of his papacy. The effort began with his choice of namesake—Saint Francis of Assisi, who is considered the unofficial patron saint of ecology—and reached a crescendo this past summer with the release of a nearly 200-page encyclical, “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home.” In it, the pontiff argues that we need to accept climate change as real and recognize that if we don’t do anything about it, it will soon cause devastation to the poor and disadvantaged across the world. Speaking from the South Lawn of the White House this fall, Francis issued a call to action: “Climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to our future generation. I would like all men and women of goodwill in this great nation to support the efforts of the international community to protect the vulnerable in our world.”

It appears his people may be listening. Polling from the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication shows that between March and October the number of American Catholics who say they believe in climate change rose from 64 to 74 percent; the number who say the issue is very or extremely important to them personally jumped from 15 to 23 percent.

*Sierra Club Weirdos*

Keys remembers the 1990s fondly. She says Jesus People Against Pollution had 500 members, held rallies and marched. Residents remember her coming around and asking them to sign a petition demanding restitution from the chemical company. Decades later, though, many of the houses in the Web Quarter are run-down, and people still complain of a litany of ailments they believe are linked to the chemical plant—from cancer to super-sized mosquitoes. Some direct their frustration at Keys, accusing her of hoarding settlement money or being driven by ego. More often, they’re sullenly indifferent. When Keys organized an October community meeting about the Clean Power Plan at a neighborhood church, only a handful of people showed up. One girl, wearing an orange T-shirt that read, “Be the change you wish to see in the world,” spent much of the time staring at her phone. Another man fell asleep, snoring.

“It's a process,” says Keys, standing on her front porch. “And the process is not easy.” She steps inside briefly and comes back out dabbing tears. Having sunk all of her resources into her kingdom assignment, she and her husband live in a double-wide trailer on Friendship Church Road. Its blue paint is peeling, the floor is so swollen with water from a 2014 tornado that the door doesn’t quite shut, and the roof sometimes leaks when it rains. “I never thought in a million years I would be doing what I'm doing and seemingly to be stuck,” she says.

Keys’s struggles point to some of the hurdles facing the creation care movement. Declining church attendance, for one, has limited the reach of some faith leaders. Perhaps more problematic, however, is that religious donor bases have been historically tied to the fossil fuel
industry or the political right—entities hardly eager to finance climate awareness. That often pushes activists toward more secular environmental groups, which in turn can put them in the difficult position of choosing between funding and their beliefs.

“I pray that my faith-based belief doesn't drive help away,” says Keys. “To some extent, it may.” But for her, separating religion and the environment is impossible. “This earth belongs to the Lord, whether we like it or not,” she asserts. Evangelical Environmental Network President Mitch Hescox is in a similarly sticky situation. “We consider creation care an aspect of the pro-life movement,” he says. That’s why he steers clear of “the far left” and groups like the Sierra Club, which he calls “a bunch of weirdos.”

The problem is that many powerful Christian groups toward the right of the political spectrum are wary of—if not outright hostile to—creation care. “As soon as the [Evangelical Climate Initiative] was launched, a network of Christian right leaders forcefully attacked,” writes sociologist Lydia Bean in a paper titled “Spreading the Gospel of Climate Change.” Unlike the Endangered Species Act or “What Would Jesus Drive?” efforts, the creation care push in the mid-2000s both affirmed human-caused climate change and called for federal legislation to lower greenhouse gas emissions. “[This went] directly against the anti-big-government, anti-regulation ideology that keeps the GOP coalition together,” says Bean. In the face of stiff resistance, many of the initiative’s signatories went quiet, support wilted and progress slowed.

At the center of the backlash to creation care is theology professor Calvin Beisner. He’s the founder of the Cornwall Alliance, a nonprofit that argues the evidence for catastrophic anthropogenic climate change is not convincing, that humans hold “godly dominion” over the planet and that free markets are the best engine of ecological stewardship. Through media campaigns and advocacy—like Resisting the Green Dragon, a set of 12 DVDs and a book outlining the “Christian response to radical environmentalism”—Beisner has rallied the Christian right. By making creation care controversial, he’s been able to keep risk-averse evangelical leaders away and undoubtedly made it easier for establishment GOP politicians—such as Jeb Bush—to stand against it as well. “I don’t get economic policy from my bishops or my cardinals or my pope,” said the former presidential candidate, one of many Republicans who have dismissed the “Laudato Si’” encyclical.

Nevertheless, creation care appears to be adapting and growing. After the Evangelical Climate Initiative stumbled, leaders of the campaign realized they needed widespread, on-the-ground support. “We did not have a strong grassroots movement,” says Hescox. The group, he says, has since increased outreach efforts and grown from about 15,000 people to over 800,000 in the past six years. The aim is to reach 3 million within the next two.

If that’s to happen, certain demographics will likely be key. Public Religion Research Institute polling found, for example, that Hispanic Catholics are much more likely to agree that global temperatures are rising primarily as a result of human activity than their white counterparts (61 versus 40 percent). The creation care message is also much more likely to resonate with younger Christians. “We are willing to vote for people who are willing to take action on climate,” says Rachel Lamb, 26, the spokeswoman for Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, a nonprofit focused on mobilizing evangelicals under 30. They have people on the ground in roughly a
dozen states, with a focus on conservative swing districts. By starting from a Christian foundation, Lamb says, the organization is able to visit campuses (like Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma) unlikely to host traditional environmental groups. If they can get Christian youth on the side of environmentalism, then it won’t be long before religious and conservative leaders have no choice but to listen.

That Triggering Moment

It was a youth group that convinced former Senator Bob Inglis to shift his stance on climate change: his kids. When they reached voting age, they asked the South Carolina Republican to reconsider the issue. Driven by science and faith, Inglis has gone on to propose conservative solutions—like pairing carbon pricing with tax cuts—that led Slate to dub him “America’s best hope for near-term climate action.” “We are now stewards in this wonderful creation,” he said in an interview with the Evangelical Environmental Network. “Part of being faithful, it seems to me, is coming up with a way so that our society can really respond to this challenge of energy and climate.”

Reverend Gerald Durley is another creation care convert. The retired pastor at Atlanta’s Providence Missionary Baptist Church once scoffed at the idea of prioritizing polar bears, preferring to emphasize topics such as racial justice or health. Then, in the mid-2000s, he saw a screening of The Great Warming, a documentary that used both science and evangelical thinking to talk about the dangers of global warming. “After that, I began to connect the dots,” Durley says. He now believes climate change is one of the most urgent issues he can address from the pulpit.

“This will be the civil rights issue of our time,” says Durley, an International Civil Rights Walk of Fame inductee who marched alongside Martin Luther King Jr. He points out that in the 1950s and '60s “there were hardcore skeptics who said, ‘You'll never vote’”—that African-Americans might march but would never make it to the polls. Durley says faith was integral in proving that prediction wrong, and the lesson still applies today. Churches can be a powerful organizing tool, and religion offers a moral backbone and motivation to supporters. Another key, says Durley, is a flashpoint that brings a movement to the masses. A major catalyst in the civil rights movement, he notes, was the 1963 bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, that killed four young girls and injured numerous people. The incident led to national outrage, action and eventually change.

Once people form a personal connection to the issue, religion can be a strong motivator, says Cybelle Shattuck, a University of Michigan researcher who has been looking at the factors that influence faith-based environmental action at the community level. People she’s interviewed have told her “their faith gives them the ability to try something even if they don't know they can do it.” And former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, an environmental advocate, says faith is pushing the climate movement closer to real change. “Political tipping points do come,” he says, “and they change us overnight.” Police violence against minorities is a recent example. Following a string of high-profile incidents, Gallup polls show that the percentage of Americans who report caring “a great deal” about the broader issue of “race relations” has jumped from 17 to 28 percent in just the past year.
These days, Christian environmental advocates like Keys are crisscrossing the country, hoping to bring about a similar shift in support for sustainability and conservation. That often means long stretches on the road, dwindling bank accounts and plenty of visits to Washington, D.C., including stops at the White House. Keys doesn’t know where all of this running around will ultimately take her or the creation care movement, but she’s heartened by the community of supporters and colleagues steadily growing around her. “I've never seen this magnitude of effort from the religious community placed on environmentalism,” Keys says. “It's going to take the Christians who have the fear of God in them.”

Chris Berdik contributed reporting to this article, which was supported by a grant from the Society of Environmental Journalists.


March 10, 2016

A Guide to the New Thomas Berry Website: It Will Not Disappoint

By Allysyn Kiplinger
Center for Ecozoic Societies (CES)
CES Musings -- March-April 2016

The new Thomas Berry website, http://thomasberry.org/, will not disappoint, be you a veteran scholar or a new disciple. It is a good tool for understanding Thomas Berry, his contribution, and his influence.

The site has a number of parts and functions: book store, summary of his contribution to our current moment, original source audio-video library, and highlight of others carrying on his Great Work. It is beautiful and easy to read. I encourage you to experience it yourself.

Seemingly designed for a touch-screen hand-held device—with big splashy cosmic introductory photo images on the home page—it also works well on my Windows 8 system with a 32-inch monitor. I especially like the “Next” button in the lower right-hand corner of many pages that keeps me moving in the right direction.

The many Thomas Berry-related hyperlinks scattered here and there will take you to interesting places around the web. These are fun to discover. What it does not have is a good ol’ fashioned table of contents or index, as a book does, to help understand its content and organization. You have to open each page to see the full contents of that page. That seems to be the nature of websites these days and is not necessarily the fault of this particular website. I somehow wish that were not true…but alas.

Besides the homepage, it is organized by four tabs: Biography, Publications & Media, Quotes, and The Foundation. The home page is activated automatically upon arrival or by clicking the
“Thomas Berry and the Great Work” button in the top left corner of the site. It features a rotating collection of seven of Thomas’s pithy and well-known statements complete with book and page number for reference. These statements are set against gorgeous NASA photos of Earth and the universe. I feel the home page acts as an overture to Thomas’s work.

The design choice to set Thomas’s words over photos of the universe on the home page is perfect: it reiterates and reinforces Thomas’s philosophy that the universe must be our starting point. It is our context. It is a simple and profound performative support of his philosophy, ultimately congruent with all his work. It is a brilliant, insightful design choice.

The home page has links to a complete list of his books for sale (Books), an audio library (Audio), a video library (Video), and a collection of his essays (Essays).

The Biography tab leads to a 12-part overview of his life and thought, a brief biography, an impressively long list of his awards, the text of his Memorial Service Program, a list and biography of Berry Award recipients, and a long list of most of his published works.

The Publications and Media tab leads you to 77 sources (as of this writing) for his books, essays, secondary sources, videos, audio recordings, poetry, translations, and lectures. This was the most exciting part of the website for me, since it has original source material—various YouTube videos of Thomas, for example—now collected in one place. This is wonderful. Not necessarily obvious, you’ll find the videos about a third of the way down this page/tab with a repeating photo icon of Thomas. The videos are followed by audio archives represented by a different repeating photo icon of Thomas. I would have liked some sort of index for this page, in particular. A lot of the videos were made by the most wonderful Lou Niznik who followed Thomas for years with his home video recorder capturing Thomas on film and tape. It was Lou’s Great Work to do this, for which we benefit today. Lou’s widow, Jane Blewett, generously donated Lou’s videos of Thomas to the Foundation.

The Quotes tab contains quotations from four books: The Dream of the Earth, The Great Work, The Universe Story and Evening Thoughts. This collection is a useful resource for creating a ritual, liturgy, sermon, or lecture. It is a great place to “take off” from, as you activate your own Great Work. Artists and teachers could also use the list in an infinite number of ways. It’s a great review as well as a starter kit, or a re-kick-start for yourself if you’ve been away from these books for a while. For example, a friend and I have recently picked up The Universe Story to great re-discovery. (Wow, what a great book! I’d forgotten!)

The final tab is called The Foundation. It offers background for the Thomas Berry Foundation that runs this site, along with its many initiatives, associations, and affiliations. I always find this kind of information interesting, to know how things are linked together and who is involved. Here you will find the all-important “Donate via Paypal” link, a link to photos on Flickr, as well as a link to subscribe to the affiliated newsletter from the Forum on Religion and Ecology—an easy to read, straight-forward, and very important monthly newsletter. You must sign up for it.

Peppered throughout the website are lovely photographs of Thomas over the years, some familiar, many new to me. Can you find the one of Thomas with an elephant?
I hope you visit the website and find your own way through it. It is a tremendous resource. Great thanks to the Thomas Berry Foundation for this gift to the world!


March 10, 2016

India: Asian Buddhist and Christian clergy talk ecology and faith

Vatican Radio

An interreligious workshop in the eastern Indian state of Bihar focused on ways religions can work together to create a healthy and peaceful planet.

The Jesuit Conference of Asia-Pacific Region organized the three-day workshop on Buddhist-Christian dialogue, which concluded March 7 in Bodh Gaya, the town linked with Buddha's enlightenment.

"Gone are the days of individual salvation. One can no longer today attain salvation without the community and the entire creation, that is why we need to mend our ways and heal the wounded planet," Jesuit Father Jose Kalapura said at the workshop.

Quoting Pope Francis, the Indian church scholar contended that those who have destroyed the common home must rebuild it.

The workshop, held under the Interreligious Wisdom Sharing Program and organized by the Indian Buddhist Jesuit scholar Lawrence Eucharist, dwelt on the theme — ecology and religion.

Jesuits from Korea, Indonesia, Thailand and Japan and more than 100 Buddhist monks and nuns from the monasteries in Bodh Gaya took part in the event.

Jesuit Father Cyril Veliath, coordinator of the Dialogue Commission of Asia-Pacific Jesuit Conference, said that the Catholic Church teaches that every religion includes elements of truth and "that is why we should reach out to other religions and dialogue so that humanity improves."

Noel Seth, prominent Jesuit scholar on religions, stressed on the need for a multireligious identity.

"One needs to go beyond one's own religion and learn to treat all with respect, which is the only way to reach our destination," he said.

Buddhist monk Kabir Saxena argued that "we have still not discovered nature and the creation."
"We have become self-forgetful, imitative and artificial. The call is to become original and thus restore the true creation," he said.

Father Lawrence Eucharist said that, "in an age of religious violence and exploitation of nature, the enlightened believers should come together to appeal to the world about the essence of religions, which is love, compassion and peace and also jointly care for mother earth."

Father Bernard Senecal, a French-Canadian Jesuit who teaches a course on Buddhism at the Sogang Jesuit University in Seoul, South Korea, considers himself lucky to visit Bodh Gaya because of its importance to the Buddhist religion. "What touched me most was the deep personal sharing by some monks as to how Buddhism has changed their lives," he said.

Father Ingun Joseph, a Korean Jesuit working in Cambodia, shares the same feeling. "This was the sixth such workshop held in various parts of the world, but the first in India. Dialogue of this kind is very enriching and ennobling." Father Joseph said.

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/03/10/asian_buddhist_and_christian_clergy_talk_ecology_and_faith/1214442

March 10, 2016

Sustainability Central to International Women’s Day

Environment News Service

NEW YORK, New York, March 9, 2016 (ENS) – International Women’s Day is officially celebrated every year on March 8, but this year, so much is happening that the day has expanded to a week-long series of events throughout the world.

The 2016 theme for International Women’s Day is “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality.”

The United Nations observance on March 8 focused on how to accelerate the 2030 Agenda, building momentum for the effective implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals, SDG. These 17 goals and their 169 targets balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.

The UN observance focused on new commitments under the Step It Up initiative undertaken by the internal UN agency, UN Women, and other existing commitments on gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s human rights.

Wednesday morning in New York City, film stars with United Nations and New York City officials kicked-off the inaugural HeForShe Arts Week, a new initiative by UN Women to leverage the arts for gender equality.
UN Women Goodwill Ambassador actress Emma Watson, SDG Advocate and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador actor Forest Whitaker, First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, The Public Theater’s Artistic Director Oskar Eustis, among others, took part in the launch.

The HeforShe Arts Week runs from March 8-15, with more than 30 partners throughout the city of New York: ballets, operas, Broadway shows, music concerts, theatres, cinemas, galleries and museums. They are highlighting gender equality and women’s rights and donating a percentage of their proceeds to UN Women.

In Washington, DC, First Lady Michelle Obama marked the one-year anniversary of Let Girls Learn, a project that brings together U.S. government agencies to address the challenges preventing adolescent girls from attending and completing school.

Speaking to an audience of girls and women, Obama told of how she first got engaged in the issue of girls’ education.

“For me, it was the drumbeat of horrifying stories: Malala Yousafzai shot in the head by terrorists just for speaking the simple truth that girls should to go school. More than 200 Nigerian girls kidnapped from their school dormitory by a terrorist group determined to keep them from getting an education – grown men trying to snuff out the aspirations of young girls. Little girls being brutally assaulted on their way to school, being forced to marry and bear children when they’re barely even teenagers. Girls in every corner of the globe facing grave danger simply because they were full and equal human beings worthy of developing their boundless potential.”

“It’s not just about access to scholarships or transportation or school bathrooms,” said Obama. “It’s also about attitudes and beliefs – the belief that girls simply aren’t worthy of an education; that women should have no role outside the home; that their bodies aren’t their own, their minds don’t really matter, and their voices simply shouldn’t be heard.”

Obama spoke of girls’ “burning determination” to get an education in the face of this discrimination. “These girls risk everything – the rejection of their communities, the violation of their bodies – everything, just to go to school each day,” she said.

From day one, the U.S. government has been leading the way with State, USAID, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, investing hundreds of millions of dollars, Obama said. “They’re providing scholarships for girls in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. They’re doing leadership training for girls in Afghanistan. They’re building school bathrooms for girls in El Salvador. They’re taking on female genital mutilation in Guinea, forced child marriage in Bangladesh.”

American Peace Corps volunteers are now running more than 100 girls’ education projects in 22 countries.
And through Let Girls Learn, dozens of major companies and organizations have come forward to support this work, said Obama, including Lyft, Jet Blue, Proctor & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson and Starwood Hotels.

In Boston, the non-profit organization Ceres, which advocates for sustainable business practices and solutions to build a healthy global economy, is saluting “the innovative and often painstaking efforts of women working to create systems change in the name of sustainable business, investment, and policy.”

*Ceres honored*, among others, the new president of the UN climate change process (COP21) and French Minister of the Environment, Energy and the Sea Ségolène Royal, calling her “a climate heavyweight champion whose career has made unimaginable leaps and bounds for climate action.”

In Ecuador, indigenous Amazonian women leaders of seven nationalities and their international allies took action in the Amazon jungle town of Puyo, in a forum and march in defense of the Amazon, Mother Earth and for climate justice.

They gathered to denounce a newly signed oil contract between the Ecuadorian government and Chinese oil corporation Andes Petroleum.

By plane, foot, canoe, and bus, some 500 women mobilized from deep in their rainforest territories and nearby provinces, marching through the streets of Puyo.

Chanting, “Defend the forest, don’t sell it!” and carrying signs reading “No more persecution against women defenders of Mother Earth,” the march culminated in a rally in which each nationality denounced the new oil threat and shared traditional songs and ceremonies.

“Right now the oil company is trying to enter our territory. That is our homeland, this is where we have our chakras (gardens), where we feed our families. We are warriors, and we are not afraid. We will never negotiate,” declared Rosalia Ruiz, a Sapara leader from the community of Torimbo, inside the Block 83 oil concession.

“Although we are from three different provinces, we are one territory and one voice,” said Alicia Cahuiya, a Waorani leader.

As the march unfolded, the Ecuadorian government and Andes Petroleum held a meeting in the nearby town of Shell to organize an illegal entry into Sapara territory, knowing that key leaders would not be present.

Outraged, a delegation of Sapara delivered a letter to the meeting, underscoring their opposition to the oil project and government tactics to divide the community. They successfully thwarted the government and company plans, and returned to the streets, victorious.
International allies including the Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network, Amazon Watch and Pachamama Alliance shared messages of solidarity and calls for immediate action to keep fossil fuels in the ground in the Amazon.

A tribute was held in honor of Berta Caceres, the Honduran indigenous environmental leader who was killed last week for blocking a dam project in indigenous territory.

The women of the Amazon were joined by Casey Camp Horinek, WECAN delegation member and indigenous leader of the Ponca Nation of Oklahoma, who shared her traditional songs and stories of how her people have been impacted by fracking.

The March 8 forum, action and press conference was followed by a March 9 event, “Women of Ecuadorian Amazon and International Allies Stand For Protection of the Amazon Rainforest” at the library of FLACSO university in Quito.

Belen Paez from Pachamama Alliance declared, “It’s a unique and historical moment to have the experience of solidarity and connection between indigenous women and activists from all over the world standing up for the rights of the Amazon rainforest and its people, we have all been waiting for this moment for so long, and that moment is now.”

In India, the first all-women crew completed their maiden voyage on the Indian Navy sailing vessel Mhadei, traveling from Visakhapatnam to her home port, Goa, after participating in the International Fleet Review.

These women officers are training to form an all-women crew that would attempt to circumnavigate the globe in 2017.

In Nakorn Pathom, Thailand on March 7, UN Women, the Police Cadet Academy, Thailand Institute of Justice and the Embassy of Sweden came together to organize the Youth Dialogue on Gender Equality with Police Cadets.

UN Women has partnered with the Royal Thai Police and the Office of the Attorney General in training police cadets and police investigative officers to protect women, end violence against women and implement the Domestic Violence Law.

Since 2012, UN Women has helped train 555 police officers.

And back in New York, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka of South Africa, UN under-secretary-general and executive director of UN Women, said in her message for International Women’s Day, “Women and girls are critical to finding sustainable solutions to the challenges of poverty, inequality and the recovery of the communities hardest hit by conflicts, disasters and displacements.”

Mlambo-Ngcuka (say mlam-bo hu-ka) is living proof.
A member of the first democratically elected South African Parliament in 1994, she rose to serve as deputy president of South Africa from 2005 to 2008, the first woman to hold that position.

The UN agency she heads today was created in 2010 to direct UN activities on gender equality.

She said, “The participation of women at all levels and the strengthening of the women’s movement has never been so critical, working together with boys and men, to empower nations, build stronger economies and healthier societies.”

That work will be continued during the upcoming 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the single-largest forum for the advancement of the women’s empowerment agenda.

Running from March 14-24, this session is the first to take place within the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The priority theme will be women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development, and the review theme is ending violence against women and girls.

This year over 8,100 NGO representatives have registered for the meeting, and a record 208 events are scheduled. NGOs will organize 450 parallel events in the vicinity of the United Nations Headquarters.

http://ens-newswire.com/2016/03/10/sustainability-central-to-international-womens-day/

March 11, 2016

A Humanist and a Theologian Reimagine Nature

Professors Jedidiah Purdy and Norman Wirzba begin an ecological conversation they believe we all should have

By Andrew Park
Duke Magazine

On an overcast morning in December, Jedediah Purdy pulls his gray Subaru hatchback into a small gravel parking lot at the base of Occoneechee Mountain, a high bluff about fifteen minutes from Duke’s campus. Purdy, Robinson O. Everett Professor of law, is running a few minutes late and hops out of the driver’s seat carrying only a glass jar of water. The label reads “NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION”—it had originally held the unpasteurized “raw” milk favored by people who believe in getting closer to the sources of their food.

Purdy is one such person. His earnest manner and intellectual interests seem tailor-made for these farm-to-table times, but in fact, the times have simply caught up to him. It has been seventeen years since he burst onto the intellectual scene with For Common Things, a book urging Americans to give up the irony and apathy of contemporary culture in favor of authentic
community. Just twenty-four at the time, he would follow that with two well-received books on American political identity. His latest, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, traces the political, cultural, and legal history of Americans’ environmental imagination and has been called “the Silent Spring of the twenty-first century.”

Waiting for him at the trailhead is another Duke scholar whose personal and intellectual pursuits converge in the outdoors: Norman Wirzba, professor of theology, ecology, and agrarian studies in the divinity school, teaches and writes about the connections among faith, food, and the environment. Like Purdy, he’s prolific. He has published six books, including two in the past six months, *Way of Love: Recovering the Heart of Christianity* and *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World*. The latter also argues for a new “environmental imagination.” But Wirzba’s approach is rooted in theology. He sees the Earth not as a way station that Christians eventually will leave behind, but as “the good and beautiful world that God made, the object of God’s daily concern and delight.” The book counsels Christians to pay closer attention to the ways in which people are destroying the world and themselves, and to bring a religious perspective to the environmental movement.

Purdy and Wirzba have never taught or written together—or hiked together, for that matter—but their common interests frequently overlap. This year they will join colleagues from the law school, divinity school, and Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions to study “Religious Faith, Environmental Concern, and Public Policy” through an Intellectual Community Planning Grant from the provost’s office.

As they set off on a trail carpeted with damp leaves, their talk turns quickly to the immediate surroundings and the secret intelligence of plants and forests. It’s a language about which both men are curious, even if their areas of scholarship are miles apart. “There’s a conversation going on, a conversation conducted in the language of chemicals rather than words,” Wirzba says. “The connections between things are deep and profound.”

If the idea of a conversation between a couple of ferns seems fanciful, Purdy and Wirzba probably wouldn’t disagree. That’s the point, in fact. Both writers argue that the concept of imagination is crucial to our relationship to the environment, perhaps now more than ever. Scientific evidence—rising sea levels and real-time melting of glaciers, for instance—hasn’t inspired people to act with urgency or even to find consensus on the policies these realities demand.

“It’s pretty clear that data is not enough,” says Wirzba. “We’ve got so much data. More than we have ever had, more than we know what to do with. But it seems not to be doing the job we need it to do, which is to promote communities and habitats with healing and peace. That’s why imagination is so important. Because imagination is the capacity of people to move into positions of empathy and appreciation of things.”

By placing environmental concerns in a spiritual context, Wirzba invites Christians to embrace a vision of protecting the environment through how they live, eat, and work. Likewise, his premise asks secular environmentalists to open their minds to a vision of ecology that is “grounded in an appreciation of the sacred character of creatures,” he says.
Both men agree there’s a huge opportunity, some might call it an imperative, to bring new voices into the conversation about conservation and sustainability. But how?

“Goethe, who was writing in reaction to Enlightenment tendencies to separate the knower from the known, would say if you want to understand the plant, you can’t just take measurements,” says Wirzba. “You actually have to spend a good bit of time attending to the plant. When you do that, you start to see the thing as a living thing and not just an object. And once you see it as a living thing, then there’s the possibility for kinds of empathy that maybe wouldn’t be there otherwise.”

It’s what Thoreau did in Walden, adds Purdy. “There’s this amazing passage where he says, ‘I could almost turn to the pond and ask, Walden, is it you?’ Which is like this primordial act of looking in the eye of another, only of course, it’s a different kind of eye. It’s the pond. It’s an eye of the world.”

Purdy and Wirzba, who stray from the trail to sit atop a pair of small boulders jutting out of the hill, are rigorous observers. “[Thoreau] said that if he woke up in a swamp from a trance that he would know within three days what time of year it was,” says Purdy, eyeing the landscape before him. “He would know the date within three days, because of what was happening around him.”

While Purdy talks, he spots a bird in the sky above them. “It’s a turkey buzzard,” he says. “It’s curious about what we’re doing.” He and Wirzba both are troubled by the degree to which people see themselves as separate from the environment, distinct from the living things that share the Earth with us.

“As long as we talk about nature as an abstraction, I think we’re not going to get very far,” says Wirzba.

In the woods we’re reminded of our primordial, or at least pre-digital, selves. “People are sensing that there’s a kind of artificiality which deadens their life,” says Wirzba. “Or slowly degrades the sense that they are living beings.”

There’s a simple antidote on campus, a place that has drawn the involvement of both men: the Duke Campus Farm, a one-acre plot of land on which students grow fruits and vegetables for dining halls and local events. The purpose isn’t to feed the campus, of course, but rather to inculcate in the university community an appreciation for and understanding of healthy, sustainable agriculture.

Both Wirzba and Purdy grew up on farms. Raised by back-to-the-land parents on a small farm in West Virginia, Purdy spent his youth exploring trees and gullies. At ten or eleven, he took a microcassette recorder and grilled his neighbors for details about the natural mysteries in their midst. “Most people don’t know what you can find in the woods,” he says.

Wirzba grew up on a larger farm in Alberta, Canada, and planned on becoming a farmer until industrialized agriculture forever altered his family’s business. Instead, he pursued degrees in history, religion, and philosophy. “I was on a farm in which there was a conflict that was being
played out for me to experience, front-row seat,” he says of the period in which his grandfather’s traditional farming practices were overtaken by industrial methods. “It was small-scale agriculture. The emphasis on the care of every living thing was just paramount. The push from the bankers, however, was that you become industrial. It was a degrading form of doing agriculture.”

This conflict is ever present in the writings of Wendell Berry, the poet and novelist known for his environmentalism, who is a touchstone for both men. Purdy describes him as the first writer he ever met. Wirzba, editor of The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry, counts Berry as a friend and professional collaborator.

Berry’s writing inspired Purdy’s parents to set up their homestead. They grew much of their own food, hunted their meat, and logged oak out of the woods for outbuildings on the property. “They were really trying to bring—it’s an age of Berry’s—the lines of their interdependence as close as possible so they could actually know where everything was coming from and where everything was going,” he says.

Not one to romanticize harsh realities, Purdy is quick to point out that the landscape that so shaped him was itself “really a wrecked place.” Depopulated when white settlers arrived, and subsequently cleared and farmed in destructive ways. “The creeks are kind of sluggish, and the hills are pretty bare, and the trees kind of tip over. There are a lot of gullies.” And yet, he says, “it is my image of what it means for a place to be beautiful. It was just a place that had taken the boot so many times, and yet, it’s the place where I learned how to be in a place at all.”

Wirzba considers this, and says, “What’s interesting is that by committing to a place, your parents could take the time to learn the history of the place, to see the wounds. [Aldo] Leopold has this great line where he says, ‘The punishment or penalty of being an ecologist is that what everybody sees as a pretty landscape, you see as a place of wounds.’ ”

Purdy knows the exact reference and, without missing a beat, offers a slight correction: “The consequence of an ecological education is that you live alone in a world of wounds.”

“Yeah, yeah,” says Wirzba before returning to his point. “This is something which our screen culture doesn’t appreciate. Planet Earth and Winged Migration, they’re fabulous to look at, but they give you a sense that the world is a place where you come as a spectator to look. And hopefully it’s pretty. All the places of work are the places of wounds; those become forgotten and, as a result, we have a romantic vision of the world around us. It’s not realistic, it’s not honest, and it prevents us from doing the hard work of healing and repair.”

It’s not as easy to love the wounded places, but it’s unavoidable.

“We have no choice,” Purdy says. “No good choice.”

Wirzba nods. “We don’t have any other places to go, right?”
As they make their way along the two-mile trail, the surroundings come into view. Wirzba, who lives nearby and runs this hill with his sons, points out the the historic town of Hillsborough, the subdivisions of three- and four-acre homes that abut it, and, further out, the farmland that remains, albeit bisected by two interstate highways. It’s an area with which Purdy, who lives in Durham, is less familiar.

For all their similarities, he and Wirzba make their scholarly homes in two different worlds. Wirzba grew up in an Anabaptist church, and a major part of his work today is with pastors and churches.

“Faith communities have, within their own traditions, tremendous resources for talking about the world in ways that can promote health, repair, flourishing,” Wirzba says. “A large part of the work I do, when I write theologically, is to try to engage parts of Christian traditions that can be useful in the work of environmental restoration.”

Purdy interjects with a mischievous smile. “I always realize, at some point when Norman and I are talking face-to-face, that there is this deep difference,” he says. “That he’s a monotheist. I’m not even a theist.”

Nonetheless, he notes, “we come to many of the same places and are interested in many kinds of the same work and are going to say many of the same things, even when we turn in different directions, to different and overlapping populations.”

Purdy’s writing is aimed at those who may be despondent over the Earth’s ongoing destruction at the hands of humans. In After Nature he posits a vision for future political action that acknowledges that human life has now shaped every inch of the planet.

“It’s not just the fact that our fingerprints are on everything. And that, as a factual matter going forward, the world that we get to live in is going to be the world that we’ve, in significant part, made,” says Purdy. “But also, that talking about nature has been a way for people to talk to one another about how they were going to relate to the rest of the living world [and] how they were going to relate to one another.”

All the more reason, says Wirzba, to “recover the language of creation. I’m not saying we dispense with the word ‘nature’ altogether. What I want to dispense with is the idea that there’s something natural about the term ‘nature.’ ” Its true meaning, both men agree, has been degraded by whims of self-interest and the sharp turns of history.

Purdy argues that politics is the only solution to our environmental challenges, even as he acknowledges that politics right now is pretty ugly. Wirzba’s challenge is similarly daunting: He wants to revive the idea of Creation but admits that Christians are far from living out a scriptural vision in their relationship with the world.

“I’m not optimistic,” admits Purdy. “I think we are in a threefold crisis of ecology, economy, and politics, and that they are mutually interactive. Politics is the inescapable pivot point because it’s the only way of deliberately, collectively binding ourselves to a direction.”
But, he adds that he’s hopeful in general, because history is genuinely full of surprises. “People have pulled off transformations that were thought to be impossible before they happened, and which they emerged from as different kinds of people.”

Wirzba dismisses the language of optimism and pessimism as beside the point. “Christians might say that our hope is not simply in ourselves but in the power of [the Holy] Spirit, which is an active player in the creation of the world,” he says. “The spirit is a healing, beautifying presence in the world. It can take root in all sorts of surprising ways.”

We should prepare for the surprise, Wirzba adds. Embrace it. Promote it. “Because it’s going to take the creative powers of everybody to imagine a better world.”

The two men are back at Purdy’s Subaru at the base of the hill, but still in the thick of conversation. “Hope is not fanciful, because people are doing it,” continues Wirzba. “Or as Christians would say, ‘The Spirit’s at work.’ Right?”

“Amen,” says Purdy, the mischievous smile having returned.

Wirzba laughs and claps Purdy on the back: “All right. We got an amen.”

Park is executive director of communications and events for Duke Law School and author of Between a Church and a Hard Place: One Faith-Free Dad’s Struggle to Understand What It Means to Be Religious (or Not).

http://dukemagazine.duke.edu/article/a-humanist-and-a-theologian-reimagine-nature

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From the pope to the people: Emerging religious environmental movement faces challenges amid global economic pressures

By Dan Smyer Yü and Mary Evelyn Tucker
Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA)

The one bus to the village of Sambha in northeastern Qinghai Province in China leaves in the late afternoon. The setting sun serves as a backdrop as the county bus turns off the provincial highway, and winds along a narrow road between mountainous cliffs and the bluish waters of the Machu River.

Nearing the village, the driver honks his horn a few times to warn approaching travelers, and makes one final sharp 90-degree turn allowing travelers to see the entirety of Sambha, an awe-inspiring panorama of wheat fields and diverse flora and fauna embraced by large mountains and flowing water.
The setting created by geological forces, and cared for by centuries of human beings living in cultural and spiritual communion with the land, evokes the images of the myths of Arcadia and the Shire of the Lord of the Rings, in which self-sustainability, abundance and harmony are the essence of their eco-systems.

Just one element is missing: Young adults.

Many villagers from 18 to 45 have left to become construction workers or migrant laborers digging up wild mushrooms and tonic herbs for consumers outside the traditional Tibetan land.

And therein lies one of the greatest challenges of the modern environmental movement: The need to create a sense of urgency about the short- and long-term environmental dangers confronting the planet in the face of a global financial downturn that creates even more pressure to place a priority on economic development.

The economic miracle that has made China a financial superpower and lifted tens of millions of people out of poverty has also created such ecological havoc that many of those who can afford it are fleeing cities like Beijing, and in some cases even China itself, for healthier landscapes.

What it has not done is shaken faith in the mainstream belief in Chinese society in the primacy of economic growth as the path to happiness.

So, too, is there pressure elsewhere throughout the developing and developed world to make economic growth a priority over environmental stewardship.

Nine out of 10 respondents to the 2010 World Values survey said it is important to care for the environment. But when people were asked to identify the most serious problem facing the world, 56 percent said people living in poverty and need; just 14 percent said environmental pollution.

Religious groups, with their longstanding commitments to both the divine nature of creation and human development, are uniquely positioned to help seek ways to develop public policies that balance economic needs with the protection of the planet.

And if they have been somewhat late to the modern environmental movement, religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis, with his landmark encyclical calling on the world to engage in a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet, are making an impact.

In the end, there may be two key questions facing global religious communities as they seek to respond to a growing environmental crisis:

Do they have the will, and are people ready to listen?

**Power of religion**
Nearly every religion, from Daoism, Buddhism and Hinduism to Islam, Judaism and Christianity, has a reverence for creation.

The common values that most of the world’s religions hold in relation to the natural world might be summarized as reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility and renewal. The values were identified by international participants at a series of 10 conferences on global religion and ecology at Harvard University.

Yet there are clearly variations of interpretation within and between religions regarding these principles.

In Christianity and Judaism, for example, the scriptural passage in Genesis that human beings should have dominion over “every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” is viewed by religious environmentalists as meaning people have a duty to be stewards of the Earth, and not to take it as a blank check for human primacy over nature.

Religious communities also have their own external and internal conflicts over environmental politics, and the complex ethical questions involved in developing policies that promote ecological sustainability and reduce human suffering.

What is emerging, however, are signs of a global religious environmental movement that is broad-based, and committed to bringing its moral authority to bear on issues such as global warming, climate justice and sustainable development.

Consider these developments:

• Global faith leaders such as the Dalai Lama; the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew; and Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, have all spoken on behalf of the environment.
• Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato Si released last spring will have a lasting impact in insuring that the moral dimension of “climate justice” will be part of environmental discussions.
• Religious leaders and groups were well represented among representatives from 195 countries at the United Nations conference on climate change in Paris in December. Just as people of faith were visible in the People’s Climate March in Sept 2014 in New York.
• In the U.S. alone, more than 70 religious environmental movement organizations have been founded since 1997.
• Buddhist social activists and teachers such as Sulak Sivaraksa of Thailand and Khnepos Sodargye and Khnepo Tsurilim Lodro in the Tibetan regions of China have organized environmentally-engaged community programs throughout Southeast Asia.

There is a long way to go, however.

If we just examine our modern lifestyles and their demands on the Earth’s resources, it is not too difficult to see that the 21st century continues the Industrial Revolution-era practice of the unlimited extraction of these limited resources.
While significant, the environmental statements offered by religious organizations and leaders have not often translated to action on the ground.

And each religious group in its own country faces particular challenges from the powerful social, cultural, political and economic forces promoting unfettered development.

The Chinese example offers an illustrative case study.

**Ecological civilization**

Atheism remains official state ideology in China, but the government gave up its efforts to eradicate religion in the period of reform following the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s.

A constitutional provision for religious freedom in 1982 permitted temples, mosques and churches to reopen under state supervision. Five religions are officially recognized by the state: Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant).

The pent-up demand for spiritual expression outside the state has led to stunning growth for many groups. The [2007 Chinese Spiritual Life Survey](#) found that 85 percent of the population had some form of religious belief and practice, with many practicing some forms of folk religion.

About 18 percent identified as Buddhists. From 1950 to 2010, the estimated number of Christians in China increased from 4 million to 67 million. By 2030, China is projected to have some 225 million Protestant Christians alone.

But belonging to a religious group still can be costly in terms of educational, economic and political opportunities. Even greater penalties are faced by believers in groups not sanctioned by the state, such as Catholics who remain loyal to the international Catholic Church over the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association.

Christians, overall, face obstacles in entering public policy debates due to lingering cultural attitudes associating them with Western colonialism. For their part, many Christian groups are still focused on the practicalities of building places of worship to serve a growing population amid the state’s restrictive regulations.

Running an underground church does not leave much time for environmental discourse.

Buddhists and Daoists have more freedom as they are seen as a part of China’s cultural history. But they, too, are limited in challenging the state’s growth-driven economic policy and the rising consumerism, and the fact that Buddhists are institutionally less organized hinders their attempt to promote social causes. The attention in the nation’s media to sexual and financial scandals of some monks also undermines Buddhists’ credibility for making social changes.
Tibetan Buddhists, however, have been more active in promoting environmental action in China, setting up environmental organizations such as Nynambu Yultse Ecological Preservation Association and Snowland Great Rivers Environmental Protection Association. Quite a few Tibetan lamas travel in China advocating the oneness of humankind with other species and the Earth itself.

In addition, while many people in China do not view Confucianism as a religion, it exerts a pervasive influence as a cultural tradition holding key values that shape attitudes toward nature. The environmental dialogue in China is drawing on many ideas from Confucianism in conferences, books, and public meetings.

What gives hope that these seeds will fall on fertile ground is the rising popular dissatisfaction with environmental problems that reach into everyday lives with suffocating smog, respiratory illnesses and the destruction of natural landscapes.

More than four in five Chinese adults said air pollution is a very big or moderately big problem, the 2013 Global Attitudes Project found.

The government has taken notice. Chinese President Xi Jinping has said addressing pollution is a priority. The 2012 National Congress of the Communist Party of China made building “ecological civilization” part of the overall development plan.

The term ecological civilization is vague, and open to diverse interpretations in the public arena. This makes it possible for religious groups to be part of a coalition addressing China’s environmental issues.

The larger challenge in a state still committed to continuing economic growth that has lifted tens of millions of people out of poverty is framing the conversation in a way that integrates sustainable development with the short- and long-term environmental health of Chinese society.

So in addition to scriptural or doctrinal arguments, religious environmentalists also are finding it effective to speak about traditional ecological knowledge and focus on models such as Sambha in Western China where a reverential harmony between the land has existed for more than a millennium.

Moving forward also will take humility on all sides.

Religious groups have to be careful to work in broad interfaith coalitions, and not be seen as promoting their religions or posing a threat to the state.

State officials and other key public policy leaders, many of whom have been conditioned to associate religion with superstition, need to be open to viewing religious groups as key repositories of values and trusted motivators in conveying a moral vision of the necessity of caring for the Earth.

No one is going to build a base for sweeping environmental change on their own.
**Hopeful signs**

The tipping point of environmental awareness that can lead to action is not just present in China. Around the world, issues such as global warming and climate justice are becoming public priorities.

Forty-seven percent of respondents to the 2010 World Values survey said protecting the environment should be given priority over economic growth, even if it causes some loss of jobs. Just 43 percent said economic growth and creating jobs should be a higher priority.

The Comparative Values Survey of Islamic Countries found similar support for environmental care relative to economic growth.

Although religions have been slow to respond and do not immediately spring to mind as catalysts for environmental action, their moral authority and institutional power gives them the ability to help effect a change in attitudes, practices, and public policies in respect to sustainability.

It is a capacity they have demonstrated in many major social movements.

For example, while the Industrial Revolution from the beginning of the 18th century has run roughshod over the environment, religious groups have played key roles in addressing its excesses.

Religious groups have been at the forefront of successful campaigns to abolish slavery, institute child labor laws and other protections for workers and in advocating for economic justice in areas from living wages to an end to workplace discrimination.

As the pope made clear in his landmark encyclical, the ethical challenges of climate change go beyond environmental damage to encompass larger issues of injustice such as the inequitable treatment of the poor and those most affected by climate change.

But, as in China, their involvement in environmental issues must be undertaken with humility. The size and complexity of the environmental problems facing the world require collaborative efforts both among global religions, and in dialogue with other key domains of human endeavor, such as science, economics, and public policy.

“We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all,” the pope declared.

And, as is the case in China, one source of hope that it is not too late to address the environmental crisis lies in the many living examples of nature that can evoke awe and wonder.

Places like Gang Rinpoche (Precious Snow Mountain) in western Tibet, the five sacred Buddhist mountains in China, Machu Picchu in Peru and Uluru in central Australia speak to both ancients
and moderns as sacred sites of sublime integrity, reminding the world what is possible when humanity seeks to be in spiritual harmony with nature.

A religious-based approach to caring for the Earth is not a case of pitting concern for the environment against economic development, say Pope Francis and many other religious voices.

It is rather a case of speaking out against “a false or superficial ecology” that would dismiss the damage being done to the Earth to justify unfettered development that is unbalanced, unequal and exploitative.

“Today,” Pope Francis said in his 2015 encyclical that is now part of the canon of social teaching of the 1.3 billion-member Catholic Church, “we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

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*Mary Evelyn Tucker is a senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale University where she has appointments in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies. She directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim. Her special area of study is Asian religions.

Resources:

Association of Religion Data Archives: Search for terms such as the environment, climate change and global warming to find data on environmental attitudes from among several hundred leading surveys, along with references to scholarly articles and books on religion and ecology.

ARDA National Profiles: View religious, demographic, and socio-economic information for all nations with populations of more than 2 million.

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale: The forum is the largest international multi-religious project of its kind. The website offers an array of excellent resources, including an overview of world religions and ecology, many key official statements on religion and ecology, bibliographies of published works on global religious communities and the environment and news articles on religion and ecology.

Other Major Organizations: Leading groups on religion and ecology include The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, and Green Muslims.
ReligionandNature.com: The site features the work and projects of an international and interdisciplinary community of scholars investigating the nexus of religion, nature and culture. It is also the host site for the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture.

Articles:

Bhagwat, Shonil, Ormsby, Alison, and Rutte, Claudia, The role of religion in linking conservation and development: Challenges and opportunities. The article examines relationships among secular and faith-based groups in promoting sustainable development.

Lee, Chengpang, and Han, Ling, Recycling Bodhisattva: The Tzu-Chi movement’s response to global climate change. This article traces the emergence of climate change discourse and its related practices in one of the largest and globally most influential Taiwanese Buddhist organizations – Tzu-Chi (Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Association).


Jifang, Lou, Green development to play key role in supply-side reforms. Chinese President Xi Jinping stresses that development must prioritize ecology for China’s long-term benefits.

Books:

Grim, John, and Tucker, Mary Evelyn, Ecology and Religion. This primer explores the history of religious traditions and the environment, and the emergence of religious ecology. Ultimately, Grim and Tucker argue that the engagement of religious communities is necessary if humanity is to sustain itself and the planet.

Eds: Miller, James, Smyer Yü, Dan, and van der Veer, Peter, Religion and Ecological Sustainability in China. The book illuminates the diversity of narratives and worldviews that inform contemporary Chinese understandings of and engagements with nature and environment.

Smyer Yü, Dan, Mindscaping the Landscape of Tibet: Place, Memorability, Ecoaesthetics. This book evaluates divergent perceptions of eco-religious practices, collective memories, and earth-inspired emotions in Tibet with emphasis on the potency of landscape. It is written for readers interested in the religious, cultural, and ecological aspects of Tibet.

Ed: Taylor, Bron, Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature. The encyclopedia explores the relationships among human beings, their environments, and the religious dimensions of life. This wide-ranging work includes 1,000 entries from 520 international contributors.

Eds: Tucker, Mary Evelyn, and Grim, John, Religions of the World and Ecology. This series of volumes arose from a 10-part conference series at Harvard University that involved the direct
participation and collaboration of more than 800 scholars, religious leaders, and environmental specialists around the world.

Ecological Civilization. The book is a compendium of the talks and proceedings of the International Conference on Ecological Environment this past June in Beijing. Scholars, journalists, scientists, government, religious and business leaders, from China, the U.S., and other countries addressed the environmental challenges facing China and the world—and the role of religion and traditional cultures in finding sustainable solutions


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Women on the Front Lines Fighting Fracking in the Bakken Oil Shale Formations

In the rolling plains of North Dakota, companies like Halliburton, Hess, Crestwood Energy, Whiting Petroleum Corp. and Enbridge have crowned themselves king and are acting with a level of impunity beyond measure.

By Emily Arasim and Osprey Orielle Lake
Common Dreams

There are some crystalline moments in which the challenges we face as a civilization become brutally clear. Moments in which corrupt aspects of American democracy and the fractures in our social, economic and political systems are exposed with unsurpassed clarity.

Moments in which we are reminded of how fundamentally ruptured our dominant culture’s relationship with the Earth has become and in which we see before our eyes how this split has led to almost unfathomable acts of violence against the Earth, against women and against the original inhabitants of North America.

Standing on the sweeping, golden prairie of North Dakota with the noxious flames of the Bakken fracking fields visible in all directions, one such moment descended with heavy weight.

Rape of the Land, Rape of the Women

“The Bakken” is a shale formation that spans some 25,000 square miles and covers much of western North Dakota, eastern Montana and the southern parts of two Canadian provinces. Since the early 2000’s, a boom in oil extraction has taken place in the region thanks to newly available hydraulic fracturing technologies used to extract sticky, heavy oil from deep within shale rock. In less than a decade, North Dakota has become a fracking epicenter and the second largest U.S oil-producer after Texas.
For millennia before becoming the center of the fracking industry, northwest North Dakota served primarily as rich agricultural grounds and as the home of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara peoples.

For the Three Affiliated Tribes, the social and environmental destruction wrought by the fracking industry is but the latest wave of historic oppression and colonization. In 1947, the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara were forcibly moved from their traditional lands to make room for the construction and flooding of Lake Sakakawea on the Missouri River.

Of the 12 million acres promised to the Three Affiliated Tribes by an 1851 treaty, less than 1 million acres have been delivered in the form of the Fort Berthold Reservation and now these remaining acres are being eaten away by destructive development, cultural dislocation and irremediable ecologic damage cause by the fracking industry.

Williston, a mid-sized town just outside of Fort Berthold Reservation, has officially adopted the new town slogan “Boomtown, USA” and has been taken over by the industry to the point that it is almost unrecognizable to residents, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, whose families have lived there for generations.

The population of Williston has doubled, maybe even quadrupled since 2010, however exact numbers are too hard to track due to the transient flow of labor and utter inability of local government to keep up.

Law enforcement and social services have been stretched far past their limits, leaving many, especially Indigenous women and girls, exposed, vulnerable and without proper legal protection.

While there are some families and women moving to the area to partake in work on the fracking fields and sprawling hotels and strip malls that have popped up to service the workers, the majority of the tens of thousands of new residents are men. In recent years the demographic has changed to the point that there are now more men concentrated in North Dakota than anywhere else in the U.S outside of Alaska.

Workers are housed in ever-expanding mobile home complexes called “man-camps,” ranging from unregulated trailers in farmers’ fields to sprawling complexes housing and feeding more than 1,000 workers at a time.

Conditions for fracking workers are cramped and have proven to be breeding grounds for violence, drug use and sexual abuse. The population influx and housing demands had driven up rents to exorbitant rates rivaling New York City and San Francisco, squeezing out long-term residents and putting many at risk of homelessness.

According to the state’s Uniform Crime Reports, violent crime, including murder, aggravated assault, rape and robbery increased by 125 percent between 2005 and 2013.
In September 2013, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services identified two small towns in the Bakken alongside four major cities (Boston, Houston, Atlanta and Oakland), as the places in the U.S most in need of assistance to combat rampant sex and human trafficking.

In North Dakota, as in many places across the world, violence against women intersects with and is multiplied by deep racism and a legacy of exploitation, systemic violence and genocide of Indigenous peoples.

According to U.S Department of Justice records, one in three Native American women are raped in their lifetimes, a figure that is two-and-a-half times greater than the average for all U.S. women.

In an astounding 86 percent of cases of rape of Indigenous women and girls, the assailant is non-Native, which has proven to be a fatal catch-22 allowing many crimes to go uninvestigated by either U.S or Tribal officials.

Williston’s rape rate is now nearly four times the national average and in 2014, shelter workers reported a more than four-fold increase in domestic violence cases.

From the biggest industry supporter to the staunchest critic, everyone in the North Dakota Bakken is quick to admit that the region feels like an uncontrolled, “wild west.” This violent lawlessness bears down upon Indigenous women and girls with unmatched brutality.

In April of 2015, a coalition of Indigenous and women right’s organizations, led by Honor the Earth, filed a request with the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, demanding a UN intervention in the epidemic of sexual violence brought on by extreme fossil fuel extraction in Bakken fracking fields and the Alberta, Canada tar sands region.

While violence against Indigenous and other local women in the region continues to be pushed under the cover, the very visible rape of the Earth happening across North Dakota is harder to ignore.

The North Dakota Industrial Commission cites nearly 2,000 spills, leaks, ruptures, fires and blowouts over the past 12 months and the Associated Press recently uncovered at least 750 “oilfields incidences” hidden from the public since January 2012. More than 75 tons of oil waste is generated in the state every day, one third of which is highly radioactive.

Radioactive “frack socks,” used to filter solids from toxic fracking water, are produced by the hundreds of thousands every day. Waste disposal sites in North Dakota are not allowed to accept these radioactive materials, the result being that thousands of filters are being illegally dumped by industry workers, most notably on back roads, dumpsters and playgrounds of the Fort Berthold reservation.

While fracking is happening across the U.S, there are a several elements of the North Dakota industry that set it above the rest when it comes to devastation of the land and the health of local communities.
The massive worker influx and targeting of Indigenous communities are two such factors—flaring or the burning off of the natural gas extracted during the fracking process, is another.

Across the U.S, an average of just 1 percent of gas is flared, while the rest is captured and used as productive energy. In North Dakota, upwards of **26 percent** is burned off, creating an additional source of volatile pollution and waste and serving as a testament to the industries flagrant disregard for the health of people and Earth in North Dakota.

Carbon dioxide, methane and many other hydrocarbons and carcinogens have been identified in samples, however companies are not required to disclose the exact chemical composition of the flared gases, which compromise local air quality, have been linked to cancer, asthma and respiratory disease, and astonishingly, can be seen glowing from space in the previously dim, sparsely populated North Dakota plains.

Flares are highly toxic when lit, but even more devastating when the flames go out and gases pour out unseen, creating gas plumes over local communities for hours, days or weeks.

The global warming inducing methane and carbon dioxide released by flaring is a double threat not just for North Dakota, but for worldwide efforts to curb run away climate change.

Fracking is a violent assault on all of Earth’s vital systems, but most immediate and pronounced on the water cycle.

The process drills some 2,000 to 10,000 feet deep, often passing through and contaminating vital aquifers. For each frack well, **1 to 8 million gallons** of fresh water is mixed with undisclosed chemical “fracking fluids” and forcefully injected into the ground to break the rock and release the gas and oil.

Despite corporate secrecy, it has been established that more than **600 chemicals** and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene, are common components of the water/chemical concoction. Many of the chemicals used by the fracking industry have been exempted from the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Air Act and other environmental laws, despite the fact that they are being directly injected into the Earth and drinking water sources.

Elementary school science, which taught us that the water cycle is a closed loop—that no water is ever gained or lost—is no longer an ultimate truth, as water used in the fracking process is contaminated with oil and hydrocarbons, radioactive materials, carcinogens and biocides to the point of no return.

At a time of global water crisis, the fossil fuel industry is permanently destroying billions of gallons of pure water in a race to dig up non-renewable resources. The imperative of action to keep fossil fuels in the ground could not be clearer.

**Women Speak from the Frontlines**
In September of 2015, a delegation from the Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network traveled to Williston, North Dakota to take part in the Fifth Annual Stop Extreme Energy Conference, support advocacy efforts and bear witness to the conditions being experienced in and around the community of longtime Indigenous, women’s and climate justice activist, Kandi Mossett.

Mossett, native energy and climate campaign organizer with the Indigenous Environmental Network, was born and raised in New Town, a once small, close-knit community just inside the borders of Fort Berthold Reservation.

Mossett led a diverse group of educators and activists on a “toxic tour” of the region around New Town, Williston and Fort Berthold, visiting contaminated sites and passing seemingly endless open flares, oil derricks and drills, processing sites, train depots,”“man camps” and supporting infrastructure from hotels and truck stops, to strip clubs and liquor stores.

The phrase “national sacrifice zone” came to the lips of many of the witnesses, struggling to describe the dangerous deregulation, debase pursuit of corporate profit and callous disregard for the health and safety of local communities, and the soil, water, air and lives of future generations.

Driving just outside of Watford City, the group passed an elementary school and playground. Mere meters away from the school on the other side of the road, Mossett pointed out a torn up road and a newly constructed building, to serve as a radioactive storage facility for the fracking industry. According to Mossett, the permits for the building had been officially issued just weeks previously, however construction had been started many months before.

This is only one of many incidences involving direct threats to local children and their right to life. In the town of Mandaree toddlers were found playing with radioactive “frack-sock” filters dumped in a field, prompting residents to immediately begin campaigning and plastering nearby towns with flyers identifying the danger and making sure parents and children knew to stay away and immediately report dumping of radioactive waste.

With tears and heart-wrenching grief, Mossett also recounted the story of a young girl, less than five years old, found running, naked, away from a man-camp after having been sexually violated by a worker.

In the windswept, rolling plains of North Dakota, companies like Halliburton, Hess, Crestwood Energy, Whiting Petroleum Corp. and Enbridge, to name but a few, have crowned themselves king and are acting with a level of impunity beyond measure.

They are using the complex overlay of sovereign tribal, federal and state jurisdictions, as well as questionable webs of subcontractors, to evade responsibility for atrocious social and ecologic damages—however their air of confidence and inevitability is more and more in-question everyday.

There is a saying of the Global South that speaks to the change that must now come to the Bakken oil fields: Neither the land nor women are territories of conquest.
Hope Amidst Devastation

There are many compelling reasons for hope.

For one, the profitability of the industry is plummeting. In the first weeks of 2016, Flint Hills Resources LLC, the refining arm of the Koch’s brothers industries, offered to pay just $1.50 per barrel of North Dakota crude, down from $13.50 one year ago and $47.60 in January of 2014.

The same collapse is happening just north in the Canadian tar sands and investors are fleeing rather than risk stranded assets.

While the growing financial instability and risk facing the extreme energy industry in North Dakota and around the world, is a major victory for the global climate and #KeepItInTheGround movement—it was vividly apparent in travels around North Dakota that deep and sustained attention must be given to ensure that our transition away from fossil fuels is a just one and that those communities whose lives have been uprooted by the industry are not once again made disposable when the fracking boom collapses.

As the industry unravels towards its own demise, resistance movements, local initiatives and powerful narratives speaking out against the industry are also growing in strength.

After learning that their land was slated for industry expansion, the Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa people moved unanimously to ban fracking on their 77,000-acre reservation, located in the north-central part of the state, just 190 miles from the fracking epicenter in Fort Berthold.

The Standing Rock Sioux Nation in the southern part of the state have also issued a ban.

As on Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara land, the movement to ban fracking amongst the Chippewa was led by local women, acting in alignment with their traditional role as providers and protectors of water. Since their success in passing the initial ban, they have been taking the next steps to ensure continued protection and the development of systemic alternatives through the use of abundant solar and wind energy.

North Dakota has the sixth largest wind resource potential in the U.S., totaling 770,000 megawatts—which is more than that of all fossil fuel powered plants in the U.S. combined.

While still plagued by an unresponsive tribal council, Mossett’s own community is stepping up and taking action of their own accord.

In 2015, local grassroots women including Lisa DeVille and Theodora and Joletta Birdbear, founded Fort Berthold Protectors of Water & Earth Rights (POWER), through which they have been lobbying and directly pushing back against their local officials and the liable corporations.

They have no intention of stepping down in their campaign to stop fracking in North Dakota, bring an end to violence against local women and Indigenous communities and lift up respect for the vibrant Earth.
In December of 2015, Mossett was one of the leading activists and most prominent Indigenous voices present during the United Nations COP21 climate negotiations in Paris. She helped present the “Keep It In the Ground Declaration” with global allies, delivered a Frontline Women’s Press Conference with the Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network and led countless other workshops, conferences and stunning direct actions, including a high-profile demonstration to call out fracking inside of the so-called COP21 “Solutions 21” exhibition, where French fracking company Suez was promoting their business as climate friendly.

It should be well noted that at COP21 the U.S., along with 195 countries, pledged to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Scientists have stated that we must keep 80 percent of global fossil fuel reserves in the ground to avoid climate catastrophe. Continued fracking will thus contribute to the negation of the Paris agreement and the demands of science—underscoring the need for serious scrutiny and immediate action to halt this extreme extraction.

In 2016, Mossett will be working to document and expose the connections between fracking and asthma and other local health impacts and will be taking on the heroic task of founding a nonprofit to promote, teach and manifest food sovereignty and renewable energy on tribal lands across Montana and North and South Dakota.

Mossett is an inspiration not only in her fierce work to challenge brutal prevailing forces of environmental and cultural destruction, gender violence, compromised health and a dangerously dysfunctional legal system—but also in her tender work to heal and nourish alternatives.

She stands with countless other Indigenous women who are working not just to expose injustice, but to actively build the healthy world we seek.

Until we are accountable to the women and the communities on the frontlines of environmental impacts, there will be no social justice or climate solutions.

It is time to urgently end the injustice and racism of sacrifice zones in the U.S. Instead, we must build hope, build solutions and follow the guidance and experience of frontline women leaders like Mossett, as she and others work for a just transition to a clean energy future that works for the Earth and all it’s people.

http://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/03/14/women-front-lines-fighting-fracking-bakken-oil-shale-formations

March 14, 2016

Survival Under Threat, Canada's Indigenous Unite Against Tar Sands Pipelines

The Grand Chief of the Mohawk Kanesatake First Nation calls the proposed Energy East pipeline 'risky and dangerous' to indigenous peoples' survival
Indigenous people in Canada are rising up together in greater numbers than ever before to oppose tar sands pipelines on their traditional territory, forming fierce coalitions to oppose pro-oil regional governments and fossil fuel industry officials who are pushing for more tar sands infrastructure.

"An alliance of indigenous nations, from coast to coast, is being formed against all the pipeline, rail and tanker projects that would make possible the continued expansion of tar sands," Grand Chief Serge Otsi Simon of the Mohawk Kanesatake First Nation wrote to the Quebec premier in a letter dated March 9 and obtained this weekend by the *Montreal Gazette*, which reported on it Monday.

"The Mohawks of Kanesatake will not be brushed aside any longer."
—Grand Chief Serge Otsi Simon

The Mohawk First Nation, located in southwest Quebec, is leading the charge against the controversial Energy East pipeline. The TransCanada pipeline would transport 1.1 million barrels of dirty "dilbit" a day from Alberta's tar sands mines to East Coast ports, making it the largest proposed tar sands pipeline to date.

Simon's letter promised that the Mohawk nation would "do everything legally in its power" to block the pipeline's construction, according to the *Montreal Gazette*.

The *Montreal Gazette* reports:

Simon...argues pipeline companies are not to be trusted; their promised automatic spill detection systems have proven unreliable and the number of long term jobs created by such projects exaggerated.

“One need look no further than the Nexan pipeline rupture this past summer, which caused one of the worst spills in Canadian history,” Simon writes, adding sections of TransCanada’s Keystone 1 pipeline are 95 per cent corroded after only two years in operation.

Simon says the Energy East pipeline would pass directly through Mohawk lands including the Seigneurie of the Lake of Two Mountains and the Outaouais River in violation of treaty rights. The risk of toxic spill is significant, he says.

The Mohawk nation's opposition to Energy East might feel particularly resonant to Canadian observers, as the First Nation suffered greatly and made international headlines for its opposition to a private project on its territory over 25 years ago. The Quebec government had allowed a golf course to be built atop a sacred Mohawk burial ground and dismissed on a technicality the First Nation's attempt to go through the courts to protect its land. The resulting 78-day armed standoff, known as the Oka crisis, turned the inadequacies of First Nations consultation into a national concern for the first time in Canada's history.
Today, over 100 First Nations from all over Canada, including some as far away as British Columbia—who are deeply involved in their own pipeline battles—have joined the Mohawk Kanesatake in their fight against Energy East, according to social justice group the Council of Canadians.

"We unanimously oppose the Energy East Pipeline Project in order to protect our non-ceded homeland and waterways, our traditional and cultural connection to our lands, waterways, and air."
—Grand Chief Ron Tremblay, Wolastoq First Nation

"Besides the official opposition of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec and Labrador representing 43 Quebec chiefs," the Montreal Gazette reported, "the list against TransCanada’s pipeline now includes the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs...and the Iroquois Caucus regrouping Mohawk nations in Quebec and Ontario."

In February of this year, Grand Chief Ron Tremblay of the Wolastoq First Nation said that "As members of the Wolastoq Grand Council we unanimously oppose the Energy East Pipeline Project in order to protect our non-ceded homeland and waterways, our traditional and cultural connection to our lands, waterways, and air." The Walastoq Grand Council "asserts Indigenous Title over the lands and waters within the entire Saint John River watershed," the Council of Canadian observes.

"The Trudeau government has pledged to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," writes Brent Patterson, political director of the Council of Canadians. "That declaration acknowledges the right to 'free, prior and informed consent', which extends beyond the 'duty to consult' with Indigenous peoples. But just last week the Canadian Press reported that federal natural resources minister Jim Carr says he shares a 'common objective' with those who want to see the Energy East pipeline built."

Quebec has been holding a series of environmental hearings for the past week on the Energy East pipeline, during which TransCanada acknowledged that it would take five to 10 years to clean up a groundwater-contaminating spill from the proposed pipeline.

The Mohawks of Kanesatake have publicly opposed the pipeline for several years, and in his letter Simon writes that they have still not been approached or consulted on it by TransCanada.

"One thing for sure," Simon wrote in his March 9 letter, "we the Mohawks of Kanesatake will not be brushed aside any longer and we wish to press upon you that we reserve the right to take legal action if necessary to prevent the abuse of our inherent rights."

Simon discussed his First Nation's opposition to the project in depth in a video released in 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEpuxxLXqjU

http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/03/14/survival-under-threat-canadas-indigenous-unite-against-tar-sands-pipelines
March 15, 2016

Sisters of Earth seek planet literacy, look to indigenous wisdom at upcoming conference

By Sharon Abercrombie
Global Sisters Report

In the summer of 1994, 65 religious women gathered at St. Gabriel Monastery in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, to share their emerging environmental dreams with one another.

They named their new vision circle the Sisters of Earth.

The women pictured themselves opening retreat centers and study programs in earth literacy, based on the new cosmology as written about and taught by cosmologist Brian Swimme and "geologian" Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry. One sister dreamed of co-founding a green "ecozoic" monastery with Berry, her mentor. Another aspired to have her community open a green-ministry-of-the-arts shop where people could purchase calendars and posters with Earth spirituality themes.

Their shared vision was to heal both the human spirit and the planet's life-support systems, recalls St. Joseph of Carondelet Sr. Toni Nash, a Californian and one of the four founding members.

Originally, the dream was incubated by Nash, St. Joseph Srs. Mary Lou Dolan and Mary Southard, and Passionist Sr. Gail Worcelo. The four women knew they needed one another's encouragement in bringing their waking dreams to fruition. They had talked to other sisters with similar untested aspirations.

What they aspired to do, after all, was all so very new. "And we didn't have the energy to reinvent the wheel," Nash said.

Were they being impractical? Indulging in fantasies? Well, hardly.

The women, whose networking membership now includes both religious and lay, have continued to meet biennially in the summer for weekend conferences throughout the U.S., with attendance growing from those original 65 to now 150 participants. Their dreams have successfully played out.

Southard, a working artist and a teacher of the universe story, founded the Ministry of the Arts center at her community's motherhouse in Ogden, Illinois, the same year as the first Sisters of Earth conference. To this day, one of the center's most popular items is a yearly calendar Southard creates that features Earth and cosmological themes.
Dolan launched a master's program in earth literacy in 1997 at St. Mary-of-the-Woods College in Indiana. Two years later, Sr. Gail Worcelo co-founded Green Mountain Monastery in the Burlington, Vermont, diocese with Berry, Sr. Bernadette Bostwick and Sr. Rita Ordakowski.

Nash, who has had a long teaching career in ecological centers, recently completed her doctoral studies in philosophy and religion at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco.

"I would give all of these talks on the new cosmology, and I couldn't just keep hoping I had everything together," she said.

Nash's latest project has been writing a series on ecological conversion for her St. Joseph Carondelet community in California based on Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

The Sisters of Earth membership includes teachers, gardeners, artists, writers, administrators, workshop and retreat presenters, mothers, contemplatives, and activists around the globe, in North and South America as well as Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

The Sisters of Earth are set to next meet this summer (July 7-10) at the Presentation Retreat and Conference Center in the mountains of northern California near Los Gatos. When they gather, their circle will feature stories of activism from four indigenous women who are standing up against the damaging effects of extractive industries in their communities; among them, oil, gas, uranium, nuclear, gold and forestry.

The conference brochure states that "indigenous wisdom is most likely the closet to true Earth wisdom that we have." Here are profiles on each of the four women set to speak:

• Melina Laboucan-Massimo, of the Lubicon Cree (one of Canada's First Nations) from Little Buffalo, Alberta, Canada, has had firsthand experience of the impacts of Alberta tar sands mining on her homeland. A Greenpeace activist since 2009, Laboucan-Massimo helped lead the public outcry two years later, when 28,000 barrels of crude oil leaked from a pipeline near Little Buffalo in one of the largest oil spills in Alberta. An outspoken advocate for indigenous rights, she has authored many articles on the tar sands, as well as produced documentaries on water issues and indigenous cultural revitalization.

• Jihan Gearon, of mixed Navajo and African-American heritage, hails from Flagstaff, Arizona, where she directs the Black Mesa Water Coalition. She organizes and speaks in both North American and around the globe on issues of climate justice, the impacts of energy development and climate change on indigenous peoples and people of color. The environmental news site Grist named Gearon among its Grist 50, a list of sustainable leaders to expect to be talking about in 2016.

• Beata Tsosie-Pena has lived with the devastation of her pueblo in New Mexico caused by the manufacturing and testing of nuclear weapons in Los Alamos. In addition to her role as coordinator of the Tewa Women United environmental justice program, she is a poet, musician, wife and mother who teaches writing workshops for teens.
• Medical Mission Sr. Birgit Weiler works with indigenous Awajun and Wampis who are struggling to defend their land from exploitation of oil, gold, lumber and the use of their river water in the construction of huge plants for generating energy. For more than 20 years, she has lived in Peru, where she teaches at Jesuit University Antonio Ruiz de Montoya in Lima.

The conference will feature local indigenous leaders, as well, said Sr. Maureen Wild, one of the organizers. Women from the local Mutsun Ohlone tribe of the Los Gatos area will conduct a special entryway ceremony on the conference's first day.

Nash said the conference hopes to also feature updates on the Flint, Michigan, water crisis. Other breakout groups are set to discuss a variety of topics, including contemplative activism, environmental justice and the rights of minority cultures, transition towns and urban ecology, and divestment from fossil fuels.

Registration is still open. For further information, contact Wild at maureen@paxgaia.ca.


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March 17, 2016

Holiest of times for water worshippers in Sydney

By Brendan Trembath
ABC News

Hundreds of followers of an ancient Middle Eastern faith have descended on a river in western Sydney for one of the holiest weeks in their calendar.

Mandaeans perform an elaborate baptism ritual as a central part of their beliefs.

They are also pacifists, and have suffered a long history of persecution in Iran and Iraq — and Australia now has one of the world's biggest communities of Mandaeans.

The Nepean River is not the Tigris or Euphrates but the next best thing for the dozens of followers in white robes, who wade in as a priest recites centuries old prayers.

Tony Alkhamici from the Sabian Mandaean Association said they revered John the Baptist as a prophet, and that baptism meant a lot to them.

"It's very important for all of us to be baptised in the water, in the flowing river," he said.

Sisters Lisa and Yardena Alkhamicy, who took part in the ritual, splashing water on themselves, said it would bring them good luck and a happy life.
This week is especially holy for the Mandaean community.

Barunaya Shnan, who came with her family to river, said it was a festival marking the creation of the world.

"Not the earth," she emphasized, but when heaven started.

Baptisms during this time are highly regarded.

**Too dangerous for relatives in Iraq to practice religion**

Another distinguishing feature of the Mandaean faith is you have to be born into it, although Mr Alkhamici, who has four children, does not see their numbers dwindling.

"I think, the group, it's growing here in Australia," he said.

Most Mandaeans now live outside their ancestral homeland.

The Iraq war drove thousands out, including Maher al Sadti, who faced the prospect of mandatory military service.

He said he was pleased he had ended up in Australia.

"I came as a refugee a long time ago, maybe about 15 years ago," Mr al Sadti said.

He now works as a security manager and said he considered Australia his home: "It's my country."

The land of his ancestors remains volatile and Mr Alkhamici considers it worse than the Saddam Hussein era.

"We've got some friends and relatives, they still live there," he said.

"They can't do what we do here because it's so dangerous with bombs and ISIS and all that stuff."

Some Mandaeans see the situation in Iraq as going from bad to worse.

"People are struggling with basic needs like water and electricity," said Martin Halboos, a translator at a Sydney hospital.

"If you are fighting for your basic needs and your basic rights you cannot fight for your religious rituals."

The Mandaeans by the Nepean River can practice their religion in peace, with the only disruption the occasional powerboat pulling a water-skier.
March 18, 2016

Vatican to undertake ecological initiatives during Easter season

By Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

During Holy Week and in the Easter season, the Vatican will take part in several initiatives highlighting the importance of ecology and the care for creation.

The Governorate of Vatican City State announced Friday that the thousands of floral arrangements for the Easter morning Mass and the pope's solemn blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and to the world), will be repurposed after the celebrations.

Thousands of bushes, flowering trees, tulips and other flowering bulbs, which are a gift of growers in the Netherlands, will be replanted in the Vatican gardens. The plants also will be distributed to various pontifical colleges and institutions "so that they may bloom in the coming years," the governorate said.

Charles van der Voot, who has designed the Vatican Easter floral arrangements for the past 15 years, will arrange the flowers for the last time in 2016, the Vatican said. He will be succeeded by another Dutch florist, Paul Deckers, who has assisted van der Voot.

Heeding the pope's call to care for the environment, the governorate also announced the inauguration of an "ecological island," a recycling center for the separate disposal of waste and compost.

The cupola of St. Peter's Basilica and Bernini's famed colonnade will also go dark Saturday for one hour in an effort to promote climate change awareness.

The Vatican announced it will join countries around the world in turning off non-essential lights for "Earth Hour 2016," an event promoted by the World Wildlife Fund International. The initiative, according to the fund's website, is meant as "a symbol of their commitment to the planet."

March 18, 2016

Religion and Ecology Summit Establishes CIIS as Leader

Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion Program Hosts Critical Dialogue

By Jessica Paden
California Institute of Integral Studies

An enthusiastic crowd of 111 people packed Namaste Hall on a rainy Friday for the inaugural Religion and Ecology Summit at CIIS.

Hosted by the Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion (ESR) program and sponsored by a grant from the American Academy of Religion, with additional support from the Philosophy and Religion department, the Summit invited leaders from community organizations and academia to speak about the intersection of religion and ecological issues.

“CIIS, in convening thought leaders in the field for this essential dialogue, is positioned as a leader in the field of religion and ecology,” says ESR Chair Elizabeth Allison.

“This conversation is necessary,” she says, “because leading thinkers have been realizing that the environmental crisis is a crisis of conscience and consciousness. We have to reconsider how we think about humans' place in the world,” she says.

“One thing we can do is look to sources of wisdom, and one of those sources is religion—a deep moral force we have that's available to guide us.”

The keynote address, delivered by Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, Yale University senior lecturer and research scholar, stressed the vital need for a focus on values in the sciences—a new marriage of ethics with the humanities and the natural sciences. “This flourishing future is going to require the coming together of science and values, which have been so separated, especially in academia,” Tucker said.

**Economics and Religion**

Dr. Richard Norgaard, Professor Emeritus of Economics at UC Berkeley, a self-proclaimed “economist by training, not by conviction,” spoke on the morning panel. “Growth has become the solution to everything,” he said, “Economics explains how we are supposed to behave…we’re supposed to be consuming more and more, if we don’t do that the economy will collapse. Economics has become a kind of religion,” he said.

Further emphasizing the point, Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness Professor Sean Kelly said, “Science without conscience is immoral. Science with conscience—these two streams need to be rewoven together.”
For ESR doctoral student Laura Pustarfi Reddick (PCC ’13) the Summit was a wonderful experience. “All of the speakers were inspiring, focusing on the intersections of Religion and Ecology from multifaceted angles. I feel reinvigorated in my own research in the doctoral program.”

ESR doctoral student Kim Carfore and PCC doctoral student Elizabeth McAnally gained valuable professional experience and networked with leaders in the field as they handled the logistical aspects of the Summit, including a convivial lunch, featuring Indian dishes, for all participants.

Eijun Linda Cutts, abiding abbess of Green Gulch Farms and Central Abbess of the San Francisco Zen Center; Rev. Canon Sally Bingham of the Regeneration Project and Interfaith Power & Light; and Andreas Karelas from Re-volv Solar, were among the powerful voices to speak at the day-long conference.

Further evidence of the conference’s success is that plans are underway for a follow-up conference next year. In addition, the Western Region of American Academy of Religion, is interested in collaborating with CIIS to bring a focus on Religion and Ecology to the 2018 Western Region meeting.

“It’s thrilling to have a grad program here at CIIS that can support these efforts re-linking ecological science with the deep wisdom and ethical guidance of the world's religious and spiritual traditions,” says Allison.

"Our grad students can support environmental organizations as researchers and interns as we work to re-weave the fabric of values, ethics, and ecological sciences for a more just and sustainable future."

Read the Introduction, "Two Streams Converge at the Religion and Ecology Summit," by Robert McDermott, Department Chair of Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness.

http://www.ciis.edu/ciis-today/news-room/headlines-archive/esr-summit

March 18, 2016

A Martyr of 'Laudato Si'?

The indigenous spirituality of assassinated activist Berta Cáceres

By Betsy Shirley
Sojourners

Less than two weeks after the March 3 murder of acclaimed indigenous Honduran activist Berta Cáceres, Nelson García, another Honduran activist, was murdered outside his home. Both García
and Cáceres were members of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), the indigenous rights organization Cáceres co-founded.

Though Honduran police have claimed Cáceres’ murder was the result of an attempted robbery, many believe it was a political assassination, intended to silence her. Cáceres’ family, along with more than 200 human rights organizations and now the Holy See, are calling for an independent international investigation into the crime.

“I want to express my desire that there be an independent and impartial investigation into what happened in order to resolve this horrendous crime as soon as possible,” wrote Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in a letter addressed to Cáceres’ family and friends.

For those closest to Cáceres, it’s a small but encouraging sign.

“It’s justifying what we’ve all been saying: that Bertita’s had a profound effect around the world,” Cáceres’ nephew, Silvio Carrillo, told Sojourners.

And, by some measures, that legacy can be found everywhere from remote villages in Honduras to papal encyclicals.

“I am vulnerable”

Berta Cáceres knew persistence was dangerous.

“Giving our lives in various ways for the protection of the rivers is giving our lives for the well-being of humanity and of this planet,” she said on April 20, 2015, after accepting the Goldman Prize for her leadership in a nonviolent campaign that pressured the world’s largest hydroelectric company to withdraw from the Agua Zarca dam on the Gualcarque River.

That same day, an international organization that monitors environmental abuse reported that Honduras is “the deadliest country in the world to defend the natural world.” According to the Global Witness report, at least 109 environmental activists were killed there between 2010 and 2015. Cáceres herself had received death threats for more than a decade, and her colleague, Tomás García, was shot by a military officer in 2013. Later that year, Cáceres told Al-Jazeera, “I take lots of care but in the end, in this country where there is total impunity I am vulnerable…when they want to kill me, they will do it.”

The deadly environment for activists is closely tied to recent Honduran history. Following the 2009 coup, in which democratically elected Honduran president Manuel Zelaya was deposed, the new government declared Honduras “open for business” and granted profitable contracts to transnational companies looking to capitalize on Honduran natural resources — including resources on indigenous land. When leaders like Cáceres demanded the rights guaranteed to indigenous people by the U.N and the International Labor Convention — including the right to determine how indigenous land is used — it wasn’t great for business. The death threats followed.
Cáceres’ words about “giving our lives” not only underscore her persistence and courage but also her deeply rooted indigenous spirituality — an understanding that the well-being of humanity depends on the well-being of the earth.

“When we started the fight for Rio Blanco, I would go into the river and I could feel what the river was telling me,” Cáceres said in 2015.

“I knew it was going to be difficult, but I also knew we were going to triumph, because the river told me so.”

The spirituality of resistance

According to the Lenca creation story, when the first man began to clear land to grow maize, the trees bled and cried out against him. God then instructed the man to perform a compostura, “during which the man should sacrifice domestic animals to God and the earth to ask forgiveness for the violence he was about to do.”

Today, the Lenca people live in eastern El Salvador and western Honduras. But according to David Escobar, a Salvadoran Lenca and indigenous activist based in California, the concept of compostura remains an essential part of Lenca culture.

“‘Permission-giving’ is a common value that is still practiced today among the Lencas of Honduras and El Salvador,” he explained.

Consequently, when heavy machinery arrived on the Gualcarque River in 2011 to begin constructing a dam, without the permission of the Lenca people, the Lenca viewed it not only as the destruction of their livelihood and water supply, but also as the destruction of a sacred site and complete disregard for their indigenous rights.

So with the help of Cáceres and COPINH, the Lenca people fought back: On April 1, 2013, members of the Lenca community created a human road block to the construction site. They held out for 21 months.

As part of their defense, the Lenca people made traditional composturas, offering food and drink to the earth and asking the spirits of the earth, water, and sun for protection as they worked for justice. They also engaged the indigenous tradition of caminata, walking as a community to the dam headquarters while offering prayers or incense.

Cáceres identified these actions as a major turning point in halting construction on the Agua Zarca dam.

“In our fight to protect the Gualcarque River, the most powerful element has been the Lenca people’s spirituality and an impressive tenacity in the struggle that continues to this day,” she said.
“Forgive me!”

Shortly after Berta Cáceres was murdered, Fr. Moreno Coto, a Jesuit priest known in Honduras as “Padre Melo,” wrote a note expressing “pain and rage” at the death of someone he called a “friend” and “sister.”

“We had a particular history of close friendship and common struggle,” he said.

A few days later, with the help of Fr. Fausto Milla, a diocesan priest who was another of Cáceres’ closest allies, Padre Melo conducted Cáceres’ funeral.

Cáceres, like many Lenca people, was raised Catholic, but she herself identified most closely with the practices and beliefs of her indigenous heritage. Though Cáceres had the support of local leaders like Frs. Coto and Milla, Carrillo said his aunt had a complicated relationship with the Catholic Church.

“Certain parts of the Catholic Church have not done well by the indigenous population there,” explained Carrillo.

For Cáceres, this complicated relationship included ongoing legacy of colonization by Spanish Catholics — which, by conservative estimates, cut the indigenous population in half — as well as Cáceres’ ongoing struggle with the Honduran hierarchy. According to Cáceres, Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez instructed churchgoers not to work with COPINH or listen to radio stations that were too critical of the Honduran state. Throughout his tenure as archbishop, Cardinal Rodríguez has also been accused of endorsing the 2009 military coup by reading “a statement on national television that seemed to bless the action.” The cardinal has denied these claims.

Cardinal Rodríguez’s feelings about Cáceres seem unchanged by her murder. Carrillo told Sojourners that although someone from the apostolic nunciature in Buenos Aires — the Holy See’s embassy in Argentina — had called Cáceres’ mother, offering condolences on behalf of the pope, no one in his family had heard from the highest-ranking Catholic in Honduras.

Jenny Atlee, who has worked on human rights issues in Central America for more than three decades, confirmed that Cardinal Rodríguez had made “disparaging remarks” about Cáceres and COPINH. But Atlee also noted that the discrepancy between the hierarchy and grassroots of the church wasn’t unusual.

“There’s a real gap between those two positions … with the top levels of the Catholic church being very allied with the powers that be … and another layer of church which is more rooted in the lives and struggles of the poor and accompany those struggles and interpret and reflect on scripture from that reality,” she said.
A martyr of Laudato Si?

But when it comes to the powers that be vs. the poor, at least one person on top level of the church seem to be squarely on the side of the latter: Pope Francis.

In 2014, Cáceres met Pope Francis at the first World Meeting of Popular Movements at the Vatican. During that meeting, the pontiff assured delegates that their concerns — a desire to have “land, housing, and work” — would have a place in his then-forthcoming encyclical on the environment.

And the Holy Father delivered,

“It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions,” he wrote in the fourth chapter of Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home, his 2015 encyclical. He also acknowledged that “agricultural or mining projects” posed a serious threat to the survival of indigenous people.

Even the broader themes of Laudato Si sound like the interconnected worldview of indigenous spirituality that was so central to Cáceres’ work.

“A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach,” wrote Pope Francis.

“It must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

Following Cáceres’ death, one Italian newspaper hailed her as “a martyr of Laudato Si.” Jenny Atlee, who knew Cáceres for more than 20 years, pointed out that while that descriptor might be accurate, the Lenca woman should also be viewed as part of the “long, ongoing history of violence and genocide against indigenous people.”

Perhaps the best suggestion for how we memorialize Cáceres comes from Naomi Klein, a secular activist who was invited to discuss Laudato Si at the Vatican.

“Particularly in Latin America, with its large indigenous populations, Catholicism wasn’t able to fully displace cosmologies that centered on a living and sacred Earth, and the result was often a Church that fused Christian and indigenous world views,” she wrote in the New Yorker.

“With Laudato Si’, that fusion has finally reached the highest echelons of the Church.”

As Klein points out, the lines of influence flow from indigenous spirituality to the encyclical, not the other way around.

Or more to the point: Berta Cáceres is not a martyr in the tradition of Laudato Si. Laudato Si is an encyclical echoing what indigenous leaders like Cáceres have been saying for centuries.

https://sojo.net/articles/martyr-laudato-si
March 21, 2016

Forward Movement Announces New Video Curriculum on Science and Faith

Forward Movement

Are science and faith compatible? Ordained scientists in The Episcopal Church offer insight on this sometimes controversial question through a new groundbreaking video curriculum offered by Forward Movement, now available for free download. The curriculum, offered in partnership with the Committee on Science, Technology and Faith, invites a sense of wonder and discovery to play a part in building care for creation in our faith communities.

*In the Beginning* explores the Bible’s basic doctrine of creation, the modern scientific worldview, perspectives on the Big Bang and evolution, and the biblical roots for environmental care. The Rev. Stephanie Johnson says it is a “thoughtful, engaging invitation into a deeper understanding of all God’s Creation.” Featured clergy-scientists include Katharine Jefferts Schori—former Presiding Bishop and oceanographer; Nicholas Knisely—the Bishop of Rhode Island and physicist; Rev. Lucas Mix—evolutionary biologist; Rev. Alistair So—microbiologist; and the Rev. Stephanie Johnson—environmentalist.

Day Smith Pritchartt, executive director of The Episcopalian Evangelism Society says, “As an evangelism effort, it speaks to those who are passionate about the environment but may not know that people of faith are, too. For those who are within the church but struggling to reconcile their faith with science, it gives them a creed that embraces both.”

*In the Beginning* serves as an excellent platform for a Sunday School or adult formation course. The curriculum serves as a deeper exploration of *A Catechism of Creation*, a downloadable document that explores The Episcopal Church’s understanding of creation in the traditional question-and-answer format. *A Catechism of Creation* is available for free download at [http://tinyurl.com/CatechismOfCreation](http://tinyurl.com/CatechismOfCreation). Four weeks of free downloadable lesson plans, discussion questions, and links to downloadable videos for each class are available [here](http://news.forwardmovement.org/2016/03/forward-movement-announces-new-video-curriculum-on-science-and-faith/).

**Forward Movement** is a ministry of The Episcopal Church located in Cincinnati, Ohio. Since 1935 we have produced resources to inspire disciples and empower evangelists around the globe.
March 21, 2016

Immigrants have been arrested looking for alternatives to Flint water

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Imagine turning on the tap in the morning and seeing something that's "looked like toilet water coming out of your faucet," in the words of one Catholic leader. That's been the reality facing tens of thousands of residents of Flint, Mich., every day for more than a year.

Now, imagine looking for safe, potable water and getting arrested for your trouble. That, too, is the reality -- and the fear -- for immigrants living in Flint without legal permission.

Deacon Omar Odette, pastoral administrator of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Flint, said he knows members of his parish who have been arrested for not having immigration documents.

"The (federal Department of) Homeland (Security) has come out and said they will not put undercover people in the distribution centers -- but that's only the distribution centers, not the rest of the city," Odette told Catholic News Service in a telephone interview.

"They're picked up, hauled away, given a court date. That's really a big issue. It's not a minor issue, it's a major issue," he said. "The Border Patrol is only an hour and 10 minutes away from Flint" in Port Huron, which is separated from Canada by the St. Clair River, "and they come through quite a lot looking for people."

Odette was part of a delegation from the PICO Neighborhood Network and Michigan Faith in Action that flew Wednesday from Flint to Washington by way of Chicago to attend the House hearing on Thursday on the ongoing Flint water crisis with Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy.

While in Washington, Odette and Faith in Action delegates also met with representatives of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the U.S. bishops' domestic anti-poverty arm, to update the situation in Flint, "how distribution is going and what they need still," Odette said. "Looking long-term down the road. It's not going to be the rest of this year (to rid the water system of lead), it's going to be two, three years. ... adapting to whatever people need. They're really dying to get that across to the people," he explained.

Our Lady of Guadalupe became a water distribution center out of necessity. "Because a lot of our people aren't documented, it was the straw that broke the camel's back. They weren't giving people water because they didn't have driver's licenses," Odette told CNS. "That's how we got into distributing water -- our people were getting denied. I don't know how many Hispanic communities came by to give us water, but there were semi-loads."
He recounted the story of a 6-year-old Chicago boy who wanted to help and his pastor told him, "Think about it." The lad thought, and he brought 88 cases of water from the Windy City. "It's amazing to think a 6-year-old boy could think like that," Odette said.

Majority-black parishes in southwestern Michigan brought both U-Hauls full of bottled water "and the people to unload it. Working with our people, it looked like they were here their whole lives," he remarked.

"We still distribute five days a week. We go from 9 to 6," Odette said. "Every day we're learning something new in how to do this. They didn't teach this in the seminary."

Odette, who is retired, took on the Our Lady of Guadalupe assignment because the diocese of Lansing, Mich., is short on Spanish-speaking priests. While the deacon is not a native Spanish speaker, his wife is. "She takes very seriously what they say about wives being the biggest helpers of deacons," he said.

Our Lady of Guadalupe got involved in PICO "when the water crisis started," Odette said. "One of the organizers contacted my parish and wanted to explain what PICO was about. I liked the idea. We needed help. I really knew we needed help citywide, and especially the Catholic community. They've been a tremendous help. They've put in a lot of effort."

Two years ago, city managers decided to switch the city of Flint's water source from Detroit's supply to the Flint River to save money. The city has been since reconnected to the Detroit water supply but during the time residents were using river water, the corrosive water ate away at old lead-lined service pipes that connect to residents' homes, ruining pipes and giving them lead-contaminated water.

When the crisis started making headlines, "people in Flint weren't just going to lay down and be nonresponsive," Odette noted. "There really hasn't been a good plan yet. They're started replacing some of the piping, but they do one a day. They call it 'fast-laning,' but when you have 30,000-some houses, it's going to take a long while if you do it one a day."

It may require replacing "things in the house that are bad" because of lead contamination, Odette said. One reason for the trip to Washington, he added, was to "let all facets of the government know that Flint's going to need money -- lots and lots of money -- unless you want to keep on poisoning 100,000 people."

http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/immigrants-have-been-arrested-looking-alternatives-flint-water

March 21, 2016

C'mon, get happy: Denmark leads in latest global happiness index
The United Nations on Sunday marked its annual International Day of Happiness, and according to at least one report, the epicenter of the celebration was situated squarely in the state of Denmark.

The title of the happiest nation on earth belongs once again to the Scandinavian country, which has now held the distinction in three of the four editions of the World Happiness Report. Switzerland momentarily swiped the “world’s happiest” label in the 2015 report, before settling for the silver medal this year.

The 2016 World Happiness Report update, released Wednesday and published by the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, shows Denmark atop a top-10 field cluttered with its fellow Nordic nations. The U.S. ranks no. 13 out of 157 countries — sandwiched between Austria and Costa Rica, and trailing its neighbor to the north, Canada (6).

The ‘16 update is the fourth iteration of a report first issued in 2012. The next full report is expected in 2017, and will include chapters looking specifically at two global sub-populations, China and Africa. The latest report places special focus on inequality, specifically the inequality of well-being. It also offers several supplemental chapters, with one exploring the links among happiness, the common good and Catholic social teaching.

The idea of ranking nations by happiness draws from the belief that measuring happiness via life evaluations offers a better indicator of human welfare than more traditional, individually viewed measures, such as income, poverty, health, education and good government.

“The realities of poverty, anxiety, environmental degradation, and unhappiness in the midst of great plenty should not be regarded as mere curiosities,” said Jeffrey Sachs, director of the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, in the 2012 World Happiness Report. “They require our urgent attention, and especially so at this juncture in human history.”

To arrive at a “happiness score,” researchers analyzed responses from several global surveys, including the Gallup World Poll, which asks a life evaluation question where respondents rate on a 0-to-10 scale the quality of their lives (10 being the best possible life). A combination of six factors, the report’s authors say, largely explain the resulting happiness scores: GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support in times of need, trust in absence of government and business corruption, perceived freedom to make life decisions, and generosity.

As a whole the world has consistently placed itself in the middle of the happiness scale, averaging a 5.4 score in 2016, though greater variation appeared across geographic regions.

The well-being of life in countries like Denmark and other Scandinavian countries has received heightened interest during the current U.S. presidential election cycle, where hopeful Democratic candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) has raised numerous social democratic policies rampant in the region as examples for the U.S. to emulate.
While there’s much debate on the merits of Sanders’ campaign positions, as far as the happiness rankings go, “the Scandinavian countries just tend to knock this out of the park,” Anthony Annett, an advisor with the Earth institute at Columbia University, told NCR.

The bulk of Denmark’s happiness in the rankings is explained through a combination of its GDP per capita ($60,707 in 2014, according to the World Bank), healthy life expectancy and social support. As a welfare state, its citizens pay higher tax rates, but people recognize they get a lot in return, Annett said.

“You have great social services, you get great education, you get great health care. If you’re in a time of need, if you lose your job, you’ll be taken care of. But there’s also sufficient trust in society that people tend not to take advantage of that,” he said, acknowledging that the relative homogeneity of the Danish population factors into its trust and social solidarity.

In one chapter of the World Happiness Report, Sachs, who also heads the Earth Institute, argued that human well-being cannot be achieved by pursuing any single aspect (such as economic growth) but through three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. He likens Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home” to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals -- adopted in September shortly after Francis addressed the U.N. General Assembly in New York -- as key documents emphasizing a holistic approach to human well-being.

In terms of defining human progress, Sachs writes that Francis “places his emphasis on an integral ecology that cares for the poor, protects culture, directs technologies towards their highest purposes, overcomes consumerism, returns dignity to work, and protects the environment.”

In a separate essay accompanying the report, Annett connects dots among happiness (or human flourishing), the common good and Catholic social teaching. Humans, he argues, “are inclined to seek a deeper sense of happiness than mere hedonistic notions of pleasure and the absence of pain.” That deeper truer form of happiness is, as Aristotle put it “eudaimonia,” or “human flourishing.”

Annett described eudaimonia as a focus “on living in accord with what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings -- purpose, meaningful relationships, good health, and contribution to the community.” In terms of relationships, he said the individual and common good “are inseparable,” that humans draw happiness from a sense of mutual flourishing where they seek not only a good life for themselves with others.

“This is really closely related to Catholic social teaching, because Catholic social teaching -- especially through the common good and integral human development -- is all about taking that Aristotelian idea that the life of a community, the life of a relationship is actually a higher good than the good of the individual,” Annett told NCR.

This idea of happiness, while not new and explored by the likes of Popes Francis and Benedict XVI, has lost traction since the Enlightenment, he said. One way to “put this humpty dumpty
back together again” in the current global economic system, Annett argues, is to use Catholic social teaching as a model. That equates to, for instance, strengthening the bonds between business and workers toward an emphasis on “good goods, good work and good wealth,” to the benefit of both humankind and the natural environment.

The two pillars of Catholic social teaching -- the dignity of each person and the common good -- are manifest in the variables accounting for individual nation’s happiness in the report, he added. While not exactly major Catholic hubs, Denmark and other Scandinavian countries are indirectly applying these principles, he argued.

“People being willing to pay high taxes to support other people in need, because they know it’s a sense that we’re all responsible for all, as [Pope] John Paul II said,” Annett said.


March 22, 2016

How religious cooperation is leading to more toilets in India

By Allison Pond
Deseret News

For decades, one of India’s largest religious festivals left a stinking mess at the mouth of the Ganges River.

Millions of pilgrims gather each January for a dip in the sacred waters of the Ganges Delta where it empties into the Bay of Bengal. The river has been a symbol of purification since ancient times, yet the festival, the Ganga Sagar Mela, left its beaches polluted with human waste from pilgrims lacking sanitary knowledge, a common problem in the developing world, and access to toilets.

In 2016, that all changed. Thousands of toilets were installed, and religious leaders exhorted cleanliness, encouraging pilgrims to use the toilets and then wash their hands with soap. The results, according to organizers, were significant, with many people using a toilet for the first time, allowing the festival to efficiently handle waste.

The push for a “green and clean” Ganga Sagar Mela was a joint effort between the government, the festival administration and the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance of India — a group of Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain and other faith leaders who believe not only in a pure heart, but also a clean body and environment.

GIWA-India, which has also teamed up with UNICEF, is far from the first partnership between religious leaders and a development organization to tackle international humanitarian issues. Religious leaders are effective at spurring change because of their moral influence, strong
community networks and on-the-ground insight into vulnerable populations. But they often lack technical know-how, and NGO workers sometimes need to overcome their own biases about working with religious groups. As they do, they are forging partnerships on issues ranging from health, nutrition and education to women’s issues and water and sanitation.

“For many years, people lost sight of the importance of religious institutions and beliefs in international relations,” said Katherine Marshall, senior fellow and head of the Religion and Global Development program at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs.

“But in recent years — particularly since 9/11, but really going back further to the Iranian revolution of 1979 — within the State Department, USAID, the World Bank and U.N. agencies, there is much more awareness that you simply can’t ignore religion,” Marshall said.

AIDS to zebras

People around the world consistently tell researchers they trust family members and religious leaders more than government or NGOs, Marshall said.

In India, 69 percent of the rural population has no access to toilets and engages in unsanitary behaviors like open defecation and not washing their hands, according to UNICEF. But 99 percent believe or practice a religion, and that’s where development groups and faith leaders see an opportunity.

“Government telling people to do something at a personal level, whether it’s washing your hands or using a toilet, is not that effective, but religious leaders have an impact on personal behaviors,” said Sanjay Wijesekera, chief of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) for UNICEF.

Wijesekera said festivals like the Ganga Sagar Mela, where millions of people converge and religious leaders preach, are an opportunity because high emotional moments can change people’s behavior, whether it’s a religious festival or the birth of a child.

At GIWA-India’s first major event in the Himalayan town of Rishikesh, India, leaders of Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Sikh and other religions gave passionate speeches that broke taboos by addressing issues including menstrual hygiene and dignity.

“Religious leaders understand the community. They have the incredible gift of communication, they know how to reach people with stories and metaphors, and they can reach people emotionally,” Marshall said.

Religious leaders also have greater access to personal and family spheres than government or nonprofit groups, they operate media channels that reach large groups of followers, and they tend to be among first responders in emergencies, according to a UNICEF document of best practices for working with religious groups.
“Working with faith leaders is enabling us to harness collective and powerful voices,” said Susan Coates, UNICEF’s chief of WASH in India. “Faith leaders, once oriented, can explore social issues that are highly complex … in a manner that other actors are less successful at.”

It’s also important to recognize that religious leaders are already involved in development issues, said Marshall.

“They’ve been involved in environmental protection, care of the poor, care of orphans — pretty much, if you look at it, from AIDS to zebras,” Marshall said. “On pretty much any issue, there is (already) a religious engagement historically and in the present.”

A religious lens

Marshall said development officials previously ignored religion in part because of assumptions about the separation of church and state and the fact that people aren’t learning as much about religious diversity in schools and universities.

But in recent years, U.N. resolutions have promoted interreligious cooperation and created an inter-agency U.N. task force on faith-based organizations. The U.S. government has also created offices in the State Department and other agencies devoted to faith-based partnerships.

“There might have been times when people saw development through secular, government-type institutions, but now it’s clear that we need a much broader range of partners,” said Wijesekera, including faith-based organizations and the private sector.

He cited a new partnership between UNICEF and the World Council of Churches aimed at protecting children’s rights. Other UNICEF partnerships have addressed education, health, nutrition and gender-equality issues.

Religious groups especially have a history of being involved with issues of clean water, said Marshall, because of its spiritual symbolism and use in religious rituals.

“In almost every belief, cleanliness is next to godliness, and water is sacred, to be cherished and preserved,” said Hindu leader HH Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati, president of Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, India, and cofounder of GIWA-India.

The religious teaching about cleanliness at Ganga Sagar Mela and other mass outreach events gave followers not just practical information, but “newfound spiritual understanding … surrounding the importance of toilets as a crucial part of one’s daily cleanliness rituals,” Swami Chidanand said in an email.

Common goals

One mistake some development organizations make in partnering with religious groups is “instrumentalizing” faith leaders, or viewing them as simply a tool, said Marshall.
She cited the example of hand washing, the “single most important activity to improve health. (An idea) might be, ‘Oh, good, let’s get religious leaders to tell everybody to wash their hands.’ That often generates a negative reaction from religious leaders feeling used,” she said.

“You want to have much more of an exchange where you learn from religious leaders … and engage them in whole strategy."

NGOs are best equipped to handle technical issues like finding financiers or determining the best place to dig a well, said Marshall, while religious leaders are adept at mobilizing people.

When there is a disconnect over cultural issues, a confrontational, shaming approach is usually futile or counterproductive, according to the UNICEF document, which advises first establishing common ground and shared principles, then building on those to express concerns.

Problematic attitudes or behaviors that are attributed to religion, such as genital mutilation or early marriage, are often based in much older cultural traditions and can be challenged best by religious leaders themselves, who can clarify that such traditions are out of step with religious teachings, according to the document.

Cleanliness and godliness

The sheer scope of many development issues, including water and sanitation, make partnerships with religious groups essential, said Wijesekera.

“In India you have 600 million people who practice open defecation, and that’s not a small number. You can’t do that village by village. It has to be a social movement that says this is unacceptable,” he said.

And yet, the ability to take a social movement village to village is exactly what WASH aims to do with initiatives such as the Toilet College, toll-free hotlines, and others.

The interfaith nature of the effort is also contributing to peace in a nation torn by religious strife.

“People told me later on that their eyes filled with tears as they witnessed this beautiful showing of togetherness at a traditionally Hindu festival,” said Swami Chidanand.

“The thousands who attended not only came away with a greater understanding of the importance of preserving our water and keeping our surroundings clean, but they also left with a heightened sense of peace, as brothers and sisters of so many faiths joined hands in a mighty vow for WASH for all.”

http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865650579/How-religious-cooperation-is-leading-to-more-toilets-in-India.html?pg=all
Global Warming’s Terrifying New Chemistry

Our leaders thought fracking would save our climate. They were wrong. Very wrong.

By Bill McKibben
The Nation

Global warming is, in the end, not about the noisy political battles here on the planet’s surface. It actually happens in constant, silent interactions in the atmosphere, where the molecular structure of certain gases traps heat that would otherwise radiate back out to space. If you get the chemistry wrong, it doesn’t matter how many landmark climate agreements you sign or how many speeches you give. And it appears the United States may have gotten the chemistry wrong. Really wrong.

There’s one greenhouse gas everyone knows about: carbon dioxide, which is what you get when you burn fossil fuels. We talk about a “price on carbon” or argue about a carbon tax; our leaders boast about modest “carbon reductions.” But in the last few weeks, CO₂’s nasty little brother has gotten some serious press. Meet methane, otherwise known as CH₄.

In February, Harvard researchers published an explosive paper in Geophysical Research Letters. Using satellite data and ground observations, they concluded that the nation as a whole is leaking methane in massive quantities. Between 2002 and 2014, the data showed that US methane emissions increased by more than 30 percent, accounting for 30 to 60 percent of an enormous spike in methane in the entire planet’s atmosphere.

To the extent our leaders have cared about climate change, they’ve fixed on CO₂. Partly as a result, coal-fired power plants have begun to close across the country. They’ve been replaced mostly with ones that burn natural gas, which is primarily composed of methane. Because burning natural gas releases significantly less carbon dioxide than burning coal, CO₂ emissions have begun to trend slowly downward, allowing politicians to take a bow. But this new Harvard data, which comes on the heels of other aerial surveys showing big methane leakage, suggests that our new natural-gas infrastructure has been bleeding methane into the atmosphere in record quantities. And molecule for molecule, this unburned methane is much, much more efficient at trapping heat than carbon dioxide.

The EPA insisted this wasn’t happening, that methane was on the decline just like CO₂. But it turns out, as some scientists have been insisting for years, the EPA was wrong. Really wrong. This error is the rough equivalent of the New York Stock Exchange announcing tomorrow that the Dow Jones isn’t really at 17,000: Its computer program has been making a mistake, and your index fund actually stands at 11,000.

These leaks are big enough to wipe out a large share of the gains from the Obama administration’s work on climate change—all those closed coal mines and fuel-efficient cars. In fact, it’s even possible that America’s contribution to global warming increased during the
Obama years. The methane story is utterly at odds with what we’ve been telling ourselves, not to mention what we’ve been telling the rest of the planet. It undercuts the promises we made at the climate talks in Paris. It’s a disaster—and one that seems set to spread.

The Obama administration, to its credit, seems to be waking up to the problem. Over the winter, the EPA began to revise its methane calculations, and in early March, the United States reached an agreement with Canada to begin the arduous task of stanching some of the leaks from all that new gas infrastructure. But none of this gets to the core problem, which is the rapid spread of fracking. Carbon dioxide is driving the great warming of the planet, but CO$_2$ isn’t doing it alone. It’s time to take methane seriously.

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To understand how we got here, it’s necessary to remember what a savior fracked natural gas looked like to many people, environmentalists included. As George W. Bush took hold of power in Washington, coal was ascendant, here and around the globe. Cheap and plentiful, it was most visibly underwriting the stunning growth of the economy in China, where, by some estimates, a new coal-fired power plant was opening every week. The coal boom didn’t just mean smoggy skies over Beijing; it meant the planet’s invisible cloud of carbon dioxide was growing faster than ever, and with it the certainty of dramatic global warming.

So lots of people thought it was great news when natural-gas wildcatters began rapidly expanding fracking in the last decade. Fracking involves exploding the sub-surface geology so that gas can leak out through newly opened pores; its refinement brought online new shale deposits across the continent—most notably the Marcellus Shale, stretching from West Virginia up into Pennsylvania and New York. The quantities of gas that geologists said might be available were so vast that they were measured in trillions of cubic feet and in centuries of supply.

The apparently happy fact was that when you burn natural gas, it releases half as much carbon dioxide as coal. A power plant that burned natural gas would therefore, or so the reasoning went, be half as bad for global warming as a power plant that burned coal. Natural gas was also cheap—so, from a politician’s point of view, fracking was a win-win situation. You could appease the environmentalists with their incessant yammering about climate change without having to run up the cost of electricity. It would be painless environmentalism, the equivalent of losing weight by cutting your hair.

It’s possible that America’s contribution to global warming increased during the Obama years.

And it appeared even better than that. If you were President Obama and had inherited a dead-in-the-water economy, the fracking boom offered one of the few economic bright spots. Not only did it employ lots of people, but cheap natural gas had also begun to alter the country’s economic equation: Manufacturing jobs were actually returning from overseas, attracted by newly abundant energy. In his 2012 State of the Union address, Obama declared that new natural-gas supplies would not only last the nation a century, but would create 600,000 new jobs by decade’s end. In his 2014 address, he announced that “businesses plan to invest almost $100 billion in factories that use natural gas,” and pledged to “cut red tape” to get it all done. In fact, the natural-
gas revolution has been a constant theme of his energy policy, the tool that made his restrictions on coal palatable. And Obama was never shy about taking credit for at least part of the boom. Public research dollars, he said in 2012, “helped develop the technologies to extract all this natural gas out of shale rock—reminding us that government support is critical in helping businesses get new energy ideas off the ground.”

Obama had plenty of help selling natural gas—from the fossil-fuel industry, but also from environmentalists, at least for a while. Robert Kennedy Jr., who had enormous credibility as the founder of the Waterkeeper Alliance and a staff attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, wrote a paean in 2009 to the “revolution…over the past two years [that] has left America awash in natural gas and has made it possible to eliminate most of our dependence on deadly, destructive coal practically overnight.” Meanwhile, the longtime executive director of the Sierra Club, Carl Pope, had not only taken $25 million from one of the nation’s biggest frackers, Chesapeake Energy, to fund his organization, but was also making appearances with the company’s CEO to tout the advantages of gas, “an excellent example of a fuel that can be produced in quite a clean way, and shouldn’t be wasted.” (That CEO, Aubrey McClendon, apparently killed himself earlier this month, crashing his car into a bridge embankment days after being indicted for bid-rigging.) Exxon was in apparent agreement as well: It purchased XTO Energy, becoming the biggest fracker in the world overnight and allowing the company to make the claim that it was helping to drive emissions down.

For a brief shining moment, you couldn’t have asked for more. As Obama told a joint session of Congress, “The development of natural gas will create jobs and power trucks and factories that are cleaner and cheaper, proving that we don’t have to choose between our environment and our economy.”

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Unless, of course, you happened to live in the fracking zone, where nightmares were starting to unfold. In recent decades, most American oil and gas exploration had been concentrated in the western United States, often far from population centers. When there were problems, politicians and media in these states paid little attention.

The Marcellus Shale, though, underlies densely populated eastern states. It wasn’t long before stories about the pollution of farm fields and contamination of drinking water from fracking chemicals began to make their way into the national media. In the Delaware Valley, after a fracking company tried to lease his family’s farm, a young filmmaker named Josh Fox produced one of the classic environmental documentaries of all time, Gasland, which became instantly famous for its shot of a man lighting on fire the methane flowing from his water faucet.

This reporting helped galvanize a movement—at first town by town, then state by state, and soon across whole regions. The activism was most feverish in New York, where residents could look across the Pennsylvania line and see the ecological havoc that fracking caused. Scores of groups kept up unrelenting pressure that eventually convinced Governor Andrew Cuomo to ban it. Long before that happened, the big environmental groups recanted much of their own support for fracking: The Sierra Club’s new executive director, Michael Brune, not only turned down $30
million in potential donations from fracking companies but came out swinging against the practice. “The club needs to…advocate more fiercely to use as little gas as possible,” he said. “We’re not going to mute our voice on this.” As for Robert Kennnedy Jr., by 2013 he was calling natural gas a “catastrophe.”

In the end, one of the most important outcomes of the antifracking movement may have been that it attracted the attention of a couple of Cornell scientists. Living on the northern edge of the Marcellus Shale, Robert Howarth and Anthony Ingraffea got interested in the outcry. While everyone else was focused on essentially local issues—would fracking chemicals get in the water supply?—they decided to look more closely at a question that had never gotten much attention: How much methane was invisibly being leaked by these fracking operations?

Natural gas was also cheap—so, from a politician’s point of view, fracking was a win-win situation.

Because here’s the unhappy fact about methane: Though it produces only half as much carbon as coal when you burn it, if you don’t—if it escapes into the air before it can be captured in a pipeline, or anywhere else along its route to a power plant or your stove—then it traps heat in the atmosphere much more efficiently than CO2. Howarth and Ingraffea began producing a series of papers claiming that if even a small percentage of the methane leaked—maybe as little as 3 percent—then fracked gas would do more climate damage than coal. And their preliminary data showed that leak rates could be at least that high: that somewhere between 3.6 and 7.9 percent of methane gas from shale-drilling operations actually escapes into the atmosphere.

To say that no one in power wanted to hear this would be an understatement. The two scientists were roundly attacked by the industry; one trade group called their study the “Ivory Tower’s latest fact-free assault on shale gas exploration.” Most of the energy establishment joined in. An MIT team, for instance, had just finished an industry-funded report that found “the environmental impacts of shale development are challenging but manageable”; one of its lead authors, the ur-establishment energy expert Henry Jacoby, described the Cornell research as “very weak.” One of its other authors, Ernest Moniz, would soon become the US secretary of energy; in his nomination hearings in 2013, he lauded the “stunning increase” in natural gas as a “revolution” and pledged to increase its use domestically.

The trouble for the fracking establishment was that new research kept backing up Howarth and Ingraffea. In January 2013, for instance, aerial overflights of fracking basins in Utah found leak rates as high as 9 percent. “We were expecting to see high methane levels, but I don’t think anybody really comprehended the true magnitude of what we would see,” said the study’s director. But such work was always piecemeal, one area at a time, while other studies—often conducted with industry-supplied data—came up with lower numbers.

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That’s why last month’s Harvard study came as such a shock. It used satellite data from across the country over a span of more than a decade to demonstrate that US methane emissions had spiked 30 percent since 2002. The EPA had been insisting throughout that period that methane
emissions were actually falling, but it was clearly wrong—on a massive scale. In fact, emissions “are substantially higher than we’ve understood,” EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy admitted in early March. The Harvard study wasn’t designed to show why US methane emissions were growing—in other parts of the world, as new research makes clear, cattle and wetlands seem to be causing emissions to accelerate. But the spike that the satellites recorded coincided almost perfectly with the era when fracking went big-time.

To make matters worse, during the same decade, experts had become steadily more worried about the effects of methane in any quantity on the atmosphere. Everyone agrees that, molecule for molecule, methane traps far more heat than CO₂—but exactly how much wasn’t clear. One reason the EPA estimates of America’s greenhouse-gas emissions showed such improvement was because the agency, following standard procedures, was assigning a low value to methane and measuring its impact over a 100-year period. But a methane molecule lasts only a couple of decades in the air, compared with centuries for CO₂. That’s good news, in that methane’s effects are transient—and very bad news because that transient but intense effect happens right now, when we’re breaking the back of the planet’s climate. The EPA’s old chemistry and 100-year time frame assigned methane a heating value of 28 to 36 times that of carbon dioxide; a more accurate figure, says Howarth, is between 86 and 105 times the potency of CO₂ over the next decade or two.

If you combine Howarth’s estimates of leakage rates and the new standard values for the heat-trapping potential of methane, then the picture of America’s total greenhouse-gas emissions over the last 15 years looks very different: Instead of peaking in 2007 and then trending downward, as the EPA has maintained, our combined emissions of methane and carbon dioxide have gone steadily and sharply up during the Obama years, Howarth says. We closed coal plants and opened methane leaks, and the result is that things have gotten worse.

Since Howarth is an outspoken opponent of fracking, I ran the Harvard data past an impeccably moderate referee, the venerable climate-policy wonk Dan Lashof. A UC Berkeley PhD who has been in the inner circles of climate policy almost since it began, Lashof has helped write reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and craft the Obama administration’s plan to cut coal-plant pollution. The longtime head of the Clean Air Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, he is now the chief operations officer of billionaire Tom Steyer’s NextGen Climate America.

We closed coal plants and opened methane leaks, and the result is that things have gotten worse.

“The Harvard paper is important,” Lashof said. “It’s the most convincing new data I have seen showing that the EPA’s estimates of the methane-leak rate are much too low. I think this paper shows that US greenhouse-gas emissions may have gone up over the last decade if you focus on the combined short-term-warming impact.”

Under the worst-case scenario—one that assumes that methane is extremely potent and extremely fast-acting—the United States has actually slightly increased its greenhouse-gas emissions from 2005 to 2015. That’s the chart below: the blue line shows what we’ve been
telling ourselves and the world about our emissions—that they are falling. The red line, the worst-case calculation from the new numbers, shows just the opposite.

Lashof argues for a more moderate reading of the numbers (calculating methane’s impact over 50 years, for instance). But even this estimate—one that attributes less of the methane release to fracking—wipes out as much as three-fifths of the greenhouse-gas reductions that the United States has been claiming. This more modest reassessment is the yellow line in the chart below; it shows the country reducing its greenhouse-gas emissions, but by nowhere near as much as we had thought.

The lines are doubtless not as smooth as the charts imply, and other studies will provide more detail and perhaps shift the calculations. But any reading of the new data offers a very different version of our recent history. Among other things, either case undercuts the statistics that America used to negotiate the Paris climate accord. It’s more upsetting than the discovery last year that China had underestimated its coal use, because China now appears to be cutting back aggressively on coal. If the Harvard data hold up and we keep on fracking, it will be nearly impossible for the United States to meet its promised goal of a 26 to 28 percent reduction in greenhouse gases from 2005 levels by 2025.

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One obvious conclusion from the new data is that we need to move very aggressively to plug as many methane leaks as possible. “The biggest unfinished business for the Obama administration is to establish tight rules on methane emissions from existing [wells and drill sites],” Lashof says. That’s the work that Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised to tackle at their conclave in March—although given the time it takes for the EPA to draft new rules, it will likely be long after Obama’s departure before anything happens, and the fossil-fuel industry has vowed to fight new regulations.

Also, containing the leaks is easier said than done: After all, methane is a gas, meaning that it’s hard to prevent it from escaping. Since methane is invisible and odorless (utilities inject a separate chemical to add a distinctive smell), you need special sensors to even measure leaks. Catastrophic blowouts like the recent one at Porter Ranch in California pour a lot of methane into the air, but even these accidents are small compared to the total seeping out from the millions of pipes, welds, joints, and valves across the country—especially the ones connected with fracking operations, which involve exploding rock to make large, leaky pores. A Canadian government team examined the whole process a couple of years ago and came up with despairing conclusions. Consider the cement seals around drill pipes, says Harvard’s Naomi Oreskes, who was a member of the team: “It sounds like it ought to be simple to make a cement seal, but the phrase we finally fixed on is ‘an unresolved engineering challenge.’ The technical problem is that when you pour cement into a well and it solidifies, it shrinks. You can get gaps in the cement. All wells leak.”

With that in mind, the other conclusion from the new data is even more obvious: We need to stop the fracking industry in its tracks, here and abroad. Even with optimistic numbers for all the plausible leaks fixed, Howarth says, methane emissions will keep rising if we keep fracking.
“It ought to be simple to make a cement seal, but the phrase we finally fixed on is ‘an unresolved engineering challenge.’” —Naomi Oreskes

And if we didn’t frack, what would we do instead? Ten years ago, the realistic choice was between natural gas and coal. But that choice is no longer germane: Over the same 10 years, the price of a solar panel has dropped at least 80 percent. New inventions have come online, such as air-source heat pumps, which use the latent heat in the air to warm and cool houses, and electric storage batteries. We’ve reached the point where Denmark can generate 42 percent of its power from the wind, and where Bangladesh is planning to solarize every village in the country within the next five years. We’ve reached the point, that is, where the idea of natural gas as a “bridge fuel” to a renewable future is a marketing slogan, not a realistic claim (even if that’s precisely the phrase that Hillary Clinton used to defend fracking in a debate earlier this month).

One of the nastiest side effects of the fracking boom, in fact, is that the expansion of natural gas has undercut the market for renewables, keeping us from putting up windmills and solar panels at the necessary pace. Joe Romm, a climate analyst at the Center for American Progress, has been tracking the various economic studies more closely than anyone else. Even if you could cut the methane-leakage rates to zero, Romm says, fracked gas (which, remember, still produces 50 percent of the CO₂ level emitted by coal when you burn it) would do little to cut the world’s greenhouse-gas emissions because it would displace so much truly clean power. A Stanford forum in 2014 assembled more than a dozen expert teams, and their models showed what a drag on a sustainable future cheap, abundant gas would be. “Cutting greenhouse-gas emissions by burning natural gas is like dieting by eating reduced-fat cookies,” the principal investigator of the Stanford forum explained. “If you really want to lose weight, you probably need to avoid cookies altogether.”

Of course, if you’re a cookie company, that’s not what you want to hear. And the Exxons have a little more political juice than the Keeblers. To give just one tiny example, during his first term, Obama’s then–deputy assistant for energy and climate change, Heather Zichal, headed up an interagency working group to promote the development of domestic natural gas. The working group had been formed after pressure from the American Petroleum Institute, the chief fossil-fuel lobbying group, and Zichal, in a talk to an API gathering, said: “It’s hard to overstate how natural gas—and our ability to access more of it than ever—has become a game changer, and that’s why it’s been a fixture of the president’s ‘All of the Above’ energy strategy.” Zichal left her White House job in 2013; one year later, she took a new post on the board of Cheniere Energy, a leading exporter of fracked gas. In the $180,000-a-year job, she joined former CIA head John Deutch, who once led an Energy Department review of fracking safety during the Obama years, and Vicky Bailey, a commissioner of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission under Bill Clinton. That’s how it works.

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There was one oddly reassuring number in the Harvard satellite data: The massive new surge of methane from the United States constituted somewhere between 30 and 60 percent of the global growth in methane emissions this past decade. In other words, the relatively small percentage of the planet’s surface known as the United States accounts for much (if not most) of the spike in
atmospheric methane around the world. Another way of saying this is: We were the first to figure out how to frack. In this new century, we’re leading the world into the natural-gas age, just as we poured far more carbon into the 20th-century atmosphere than any other nation. So, thank God, now that we know there’s a problem, we could warn the rest of the planet before it goes down the same path.

Except we’ve been doing exactly the opposite. We’ve become the planet’s salesman for natural gas—and a key player in this scheme could become the next president of the United States. When Hillary Clinton took over the State Department, she set up a special arm, the Bureau of Energy Resources, after close consultation with oil and gas executives. This bureau, with 63 employees, was soon helping sponsor conferences around the world. And much more: Diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks show that the secretary of state was essentially acting as a broker for the shale-gas industry, twisting the arms of world leaders to make sure US firms got to frack at will.

To take just one example, an article in Mother Jones based on the WikiLeaks cables reveals what happened when fracking came to Bulgaria. In 2011, the country signed a $68 million deal with Chevron, granting the company millions of acres in shale-gas concessions. The Bulgarian public wasn’t happy: Tens of thousands were in the streets of Sofia with banners reading Stop Fracking With Our Water. But when Clinton came for a state visit in 2012, she sided with Chevron (one of whose executives had bundled large sums for her presidential campaign in 2008). In fact, the leaked cables show that the main topic of her meetings with Bulgaria’s leaders was fracking. Clinton offered to fly in the “best specialists on these new technologies to present the benefits to the Bulgarian people,” and she dispatched her Eurasian energy envoy, Richard Morningstar, to lobby hard against a fracking ban in neighboring Romania. Eventually, they won those battles—and today, the State Department provides “assistance” with fracking to dozens of countries around the world, from Cambodia to Papua New Guinea.

So if the United States has had a terrible time tracking down and fixing its methane leaks, ask yourself how it’s going to go in Bulgaria. If Canada finds that sealing leaks is an “unresolved engineering challenge,” ask yourself how Cambodia’s going to make out. If the State Department has its way, then in a few years Harvard’s satellites will be measuring gushers of methane from every direction.

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Of course, we can—and perhaps we should—forgive all that past. The information about methane is relatively new; when Obama and Clinton and Zichal started backing fracking, they didn’t really know. They could have turned around much earlier, like Kennedy or the Sierra Club. But what they do now will be decisive.

There are a few promising signs. Clinton has at least tempered her enthusiasm for fracking some in recent debates, listing a series of preconditions she’d insist on before new projects were approved; Bernie Sanders, by contrast, has called for a moratorium on new fracking. But Clinton continues to conflate and confuse the chemistry: Natural gas, she said in a recent position paper,
has helped US carbon emissions “reach their lowest level in 20 years.” It appears that many in power would like to carry on the fracking revolution, albeit a tad more carefully.

Indeed, just last month, Cheniere Energy shipped the first load of American gas overseas from its new export terminal at Sabine Pass in Louisiana. As the ship sailed, Cheniere’s vice president of marketing, Meg Gentle, told industry and government officials that natural gas should be rebranded as renewable energy. “I’d challenge everyone here to reframe the debate and make sure natural gas is part of the category of clean energy, not a fossil-fuel category, which is viewed as dirty and not part of the solution,” she said. A few days later, Exxon’s PR chief, writing in the Los Angeles Times, boasted that the company had been “instrumental in America’s shale gas revolution,” and that as a result, “America’s greenhouse gas emissions have declined to levels not seen since the 1990s.”

The new data prove them entirely wrong. The global-warming fight can’t just be about carbon dioxide any longer. Those local environmentalists, from New York State to Tasmania, who have managed to enforce fracking bans are doing as much for the climate as they are for their own clean water. That’s because fossil fuels are the problem in global warming—and fossil fuels don’t come in good and bad flavors. Coal and oil and natural gas have to be left in the ground. All of them.

Bill McKibben is the author of a dozen books, most recently The Bill McKibben Reader, an essay collection. A scholar in residence at Middlebury College, he is co-founder of 350.org, the largest global grassroots organizing campaign on climate change.


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Getting the Next Generation to Fall in Love with the Planet: An Interview with Dan Siegel

By Andrew Revkin
Garrison Institute

The first 25 years of my career as a journalist focused on ways to foster sustainable human progress centered on science illuminating the biological and geophysical interplay of people and the planet. But over and over, I came to realize that decisions about addressing, or ignoring, environmental risks were shaped more by communities’ basic needs and individuals’ perceptions than basic scientific “facts.”

That understanding led me increasingly to consult with behavioral and social scientists—and even philosophers and theologians—in trying to gauge the merits of different policies or individual choices. One such person is Dan Siegel, who’s blended training in pediatrics and psychiatry with decades of experience and research and produced a body of insights into ways, through mindful attention to one’s self and the rest of the world, to expand the mind—literally. I met him at one of the Climate, Mind and Behavior conferences at the Garrison Institute years
ago and have been probing his books and consulting with him ever since. (Watch Dan Siegel’s Climate, Mind and Behavior videos here.)

We recently had a chance to converse about our shared focus on how to foster individual, social, and environmental well-being amid today’s fast-changing landscape of ways to share and shape valuable ideas—along with insults and animal videos.

Andrew Revkin: How are all of these new ways we’re communicating with each other changing not only our relationships with each other, but with our whole environment and the planet?

Dan Siegel: On the one hand, there’s this idea that no one is taking the time they probably need to in order to slow down and be connected to another person. There’s a lot of concern about how that is influencing our present-day experience and also about what that will do for the new generation. Sherry Turkle writes about this, and I think we can see in many kids a kind of thinness of interaction where they’re not spending the kind of face-to-face time that you might want them to.

How does this relate to the environment and our relationship with the planet? I don’t know if there are any studies on that, but it’s certainly an interesting question, because the further away we get from feeling what’s going on inside of ourselves, the further away we get also from feeling like this home we live in is real. It starts to feel like more of like an artificial thing, almost a computer graphic that we live in.

When you bring people out into nature, they start experiencing awe. And through the experience of awe, we connect with other people and the world around us. So, if awe is not happening in the digital world that would decrease our ability to reach out to other people and the natural world.

Revkin: I’ve been exploring this in different ways, one of which was examining whether there’s a hybrid approach to these challenges. When my son was around eight or nine, he was with me in the middle of a very suburban part of Florida, visiting his grandparents, and we went in a little rowboat. There was a little, tiny nook of mangroves. He had my video camera. He was shooting a little documentary, very funky and kid-like, swinging the camera back and forth.

But then we went to an area where there were some herons nesting in the mangroves, deep inside the shrubbery. I couldn’t see them at all, but he had the capacity to see them. He zoomed in and got this really cool moment of seeing these baby herons. I posted it on YouTube and put it on my blog. You could hear his voice when he zoomed in and caught the image of the bird. It was a great moment, where you could hear his breath. He had that awe moment you were just talking about. But he was then sharing it digitally. He told the story in a way that was facilitated by digital media.

Siegel: If those stories can evoke this sense of connecting to something larger than our personal, separate selves, I think that’s just fantastic. That’s going to be the challenge, I think, for all of us in the immediate future.
I remember once talking to a photographer who would go out to these wild places, like the North Pole. I asked him, “What are you feeling when you do that? Not just what it’s like to be on the North Pole, but what is your drive?” He said, “If we don’t get the next generation to fall in love with our planet, there’s no way that they’re going to take any kind of time to protect it, because you only protect something you love.” That’s why he put together his photographs. When I think about the Dot Earth work you’re doing, Andrew, it’s like inviting people to fall in love with our world.

Revkin: Yes, but in a world with limited resources—or in countries with limited resources—what can we do? Especially in areas where you have the high numbers of educated youth, but not a lot of opportunity, what tools or mechanisms or practices might be beneficial?

Siegel: Well, if we start with the premise that you really need to be in love with what you’re going to protect, then it needs to be a top priority to get adolescents in nature more. Otherwise they’re going to think, for example, that food actually is created in a supermarket. And so they’ll say, “Well, my market’s okay.” It may seem simple, but it’s the hidden unknown of all of this, that kids are just not feeling like the planet is really something that’s real. So that’s the first layer of this.

Another layer is that a lot of us feel a sense of helplessness. And then all you do is go through this emotional set of reactions, which are studied in brain scanners. If you feel helpless, then all you do is you go, “Well, this feeling is really terrible. There’s nothing I can do about it, so I’m going to change my focus of attention and not pay attention to this thing that makes me feel so helpless. Let me just go get a beer and go to watch TV and forget about this stuff.” I think that’s a pathway that’s understandable but preventable.

Revkin: Here’s another aspect of what you were just laying out: In the new media environment we’re in—which is no longer the Walter Cronkite, communitarian, authoritative giver of information—but this sort of landscape where if you put in the words “global warming” in Google News, you’ll find everything from “it’s a hoax” to “it’s the end of the world.”

One thing I’ve been trying to teach students at Pace University, is some methods for navigating so you become, to some extent, your own authority. Or at least you can find, amid all that noise, where reality lies. That’s kind of a first step towards having the capacity to be mindful and compassionate and instructive.

We have this built-in bias toward drama, I think. That’s what catches our attention, along with funny dog videos. So much of what’s out there is trying to get our attention, meaning it’s overstated. This is as true for BBC and The New York Times as everyone else. To grab attention now, there’s a torquing towards the caricature. In some ways, a sustainability mechanism now is to develop the capacity to know what’s real. We had it so easy in the old days. We didn’t have to think. It was just we opened The New York Times and watch Walter Cronkite. Cronkite would literally say, “That’s the way it is.”
Siegel: To do this we’re going to need to have inner reflection to understand the way the mind works. This will allow us to respond to the call of the day, which is how to keep yourself aware and then also allow yourself to feel the equanimity so that you don’t burn out.

Revkin: One exercise I’ve been doing with my students in this course I teach—it’s basically a course in online communication—is to have them think about how they knew something that day. How did it get into their consciousness? Trace it back. Where did this factoid come from?

This is more about news information than about some of the things you were just talking about feeling. But I think it gets people into the mode of stopping and thinking about how they thought something. Did the Yankees win or lose? How did I learn that fact today? Where did it come from? Tracing these things back to their source is helpful. It’s interesting. It’s a way to learn how the web works. Someone tweeted something, and that was blogged by someone else, and then it goes somewhere else. You can actually trace things pretty far back if you take a few minutes. It’s a way to become aware of how ideas are moving around.

It would be interesting to do that with a feeling the same way. I’m bummed out. Where did that come from? I assume that’s partially what some of the practices you do accomplish.

Siegel: What we would say about that from the field I work in, interpersonal neurobiology, is that this backtracking practice you’re doing, is really a form of what you would call integration. Integration is how we make sense of our lives. You’re linking different aspects of your life across time, different aspects of your relational life, and even different aspects of your brain together. And that linkage of differentiated parts across all those levels, not just in the brain, is called integration.

Integration creates, basically, equanimity. It creates a sense of well-being. It creates all sorts of improvements in the way your physiology works.

This relates to something I write about at the end of the Brainstorm, which is the notion of a “mwe.” Mwe is the combination of an individual “me,” but you’re also equally, just differentially, a connected person. You’re connected to other people, your family, your friends, your teachers, the larger human family—in fact, the family of all living beings, the whole Earth. These relational connections are part of a “we.”

To embrace the two of them, you could say “mwe.” And what’s been so interesting about that is that it helps resolve a kind of conflict where you can think it’s either one or the other. It doesn’t have to be one or the other. An integrated identity would be both a “me” and a “we.” It allows you to enjoy this body and really love the world in which you live.

Revkin: Kind of a hybrid approach to things. One of the things you pursued or explained when I saw you at the Garrison was something you described as the “we map.” Two aspects of that struck me as valuable to a broader sustainability discussion. One is, maybe with intentionality, that’s where you could see the upside of social networks online. There are social networks that are physical, of course, but the idea of the “we map” seems compatible with a constructive use of
social media to build that sense of you that’s not within your body. That’s your sense of community.

I think there’s untapped potential to use these tools to have a bigger potential of “we-ness,” to make sure that ideas are shared and shaped where they’re needed most, or to build collaborative conversations. But there are so many competing uses of the same portals, such as selling stuff and saying mean things. It’s hard to know which will win out.

Siegel: There’s huge potential for it. If we can start to expand our conversations about what the self is, then I think people will be using all of their incredible creative potential, especially the adolescents coming up, to realize that you can find all sorts of ways of changing the relationality that we have to the planet to make it more robust for the well-being of the whole community. If you just think about this atmosphere we all share, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil that we share—all of these things—and realize the shared nature of our living experience.

That’s something you can embed right into our vocabulary in media, in blogs, in schools, what teachers learn and what parents can do. I think it’s going to be a win/win situation. I think people are going to feel better, because it’s really more about the truth. And all of the studies show a sense of well-being comes when you’re really a part of something larger than your private bodily self. We just need to work collaboratively to make it happen.

Revkin: One other thing that comes to mind is the time I spent at the Vatican in 2014 at the meeting that preceded the encyclical and then writing about the pope’s involvement in the climate question. It was interpreted in many different ways, but the way that I found was most salient and powerful was essentially he has made it safe to think of sustainability—including equity and environmental and climate safety—to bring more than numbers into this arena.

In the climate arena, I think for too long, people have used numbers like “two degrees” or “350” to give a kind of mechanistic determinant to what needs to be done, when, in fact, when you look behind those numbers, it really is much more about choices. Our choices are moral and their functions are feelings as much as facts. So I think what you’re describing sort of fits with the idea that the mechanistic, quantitative approach to problems like climate change or sustainable development generally aren’t going to get you there alone.

Siegel: Absolutely. I don’t know how to say this without sounding too optimistic, but I think there’s a huge potential for good out of this sense of urgency, where people put their divisions down, where we start realizing: This is the time to do it.

Andrew Revkin writes the Dot Earth environmental blog for The New York Times’ Opinion Pages. He is also the Senior Fellow for Environmental Understanding at Pace University’s Pace Academy for Applied Environmental Studies.

https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/getting-next-generation-fall-love-planet/
March 24, 2016

My Lent with Pulse Pledge

By Julie Hall, Youth Speak News
The Catholic Register

I took the Pulse Pledge during Lent and found myself reflecting on how something so small could actually make a difference.

Coinciding with Pope Francis’ environmental encyclical *Laudato Si’*, the United Nations declared 2016 as the International Year of Pulses. Pulses, consisting of dry peas, chickpeas, lentils and beans, have many benefits. The UN, along with many researchers, believe that if everyone pledges to consume pulses at least one day a week, then the world will notice a significant improvement in our environment.

On my own personal journey with pulses, things started out rough. I found myself very hesitant to take on such a challenge, however the benefits made me feel as though it was worth a shot.

I started out one morning by making myself a berry protein smoothie with pea protein in it. This recipe gave me the conviction to carry on with my pledge. It was actually really good and I found it gave me a great boost of energy before heading off to work for the day. I also tried lentil lasagna, chickpea quiche and even a mason jar salad for lunch one day. Not only did I enjoy trying out these new recipes, I also found myself feeling content with the change I was making to help the environment.

I found myself constantly thinking about how such a small change in my life could actually have an impact on the world around me.

The list of benefits associated with pulses is actually quite impressive. To begin with, these superfoods have an extreme nutrition value and are always in season because of their long shelf-life. Being great servings of iron, potassium, fibre, protein, folate and antioxidants, along with being sodium-, gluten- and cholesterol-free, gives these four foods a lasting impact on our bodies.

Pulses are one of the most cost-effective proteins around. They can be enjoyed throughout the world at an affordable price. Pulse crops are natural fertilizers, meaning they actually enrich the ground in which they grow and reduce the need for harmful chemicals. Capable of growing in some of the harshest environments, they also have one of the lowest carbon footprints of any food group. As if this was not enough, these crops also require little to no irrigation, conserving plenty of water.

Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si’* that it is the little things, when done together, which turn into big victories. The simple things, turning the unnecessary lights off, using public transport or carpooling, even changing your diet on a weekly basis.
Needless to say, the attention of the world’s population is desperately being grabbed by influential people all over the globe.

After my experience with pulses, I have decided to take the pledge as often as possible. The idea of making a difference in the world is enough motivation for me. With the UN declaring this the year of pulses, all of our contributions combined will surely have an impact on the world around us and the future which it holds.

“Education in environmental responsibility,” stated Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*, “can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us.”

The time has come for all of us to stand up against the destruction of our environment and join together in this simple task. It does not have to be a difficult one. From protein-enriched smoothies to peanut butter hummus and chickpea salad, the pulse pledge can certainly be rewarding in its versatility and in battling environmental disaster.

Remain hopeful throughout this mission. Pope Francis reminds us once again in *Laudato Si’* that, “We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom.”

*(Hall, 17, is a candidate for first-year social service work at Humber College in Toronto.)*

http://www.catholicregister.org/item/22000-my-lent-with-pulse-pledge

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**March 24, 2016**

Sri Lankan Way of the Cross carries environmental message

Through devotion Catholics protest against controversial port project

UCA News

Negombo, Sri Lanka - Catholics in Sri Lanka conducted a Way of the Cross devotional event as part of a protest against a controversial port project in Colombo.

About four hundred Catholics, including priests and nuns, attended the Way of the Cross event in the city of Negombo, March 22 and urged the government to stop the US$1.4 billion Colombo Port City project and protect the environment.

The Chinese-backed project was suspended in March last year due to regulatory and environmental concerns. The government announced this month that the project would resume.

Father Sarath Iddamalgoda from Colombo Archdiocese, said the project would damage the maritime environment, especially fish breeding grounds. He said it also threatens the livelihoods of local fishermen.
"By destroying the environment, the creation of God is harmed," said Fr. Iddamalgoda.

"Those who participated in the Way of the Cross were really inspired by the teaching of Pope Francis on the environment," he said.

"They reflected how they can practically see the love of God through the environment."

In the pope's June encyclical on the environment, *Laudato si*, the pontiff pointed out the connection between environmental destruction and unjust economic and political policies that penalize the poor.

Nimalee Fernando, a parishioner from Munnakkaraya, said those attending the Way of the Cross shared on each station about man-made disasters that were brought about through the destruction of the environment.

She said that current Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had promised to halt the project during his electioneering before coming to power. A promise that the prime minister has been unable to keep, said Fernando.

It is feared that the port's construction will also displace about 50,000 families living on the coast.

The Way of the Cross is a traditional part of Lent for Sri Lankan Catholics and it helps to reflect and find inspiration to change their life for the better.


March 27, 2016

Walking the length of the river: Spiritual journey calls attention to contamination of the Minnesota River

By Tom Cherveny
West Central Tribune

MONTEVIDEO — Ask Sharon Day why she and others are walking the length of the Minnesota River carrying a copper vessel holding water from its source, and her answer begins like this:

“In the spiritual work of the Ojibwe people the women are responsible for the water.”

It’s a responsibility that has led her to walk the length of many rivers, the Mississippi River, the St, Louis and the Ohio River among them, as well as around Lake Superior.
Day is now leading a group of indigenous women and men — joined by other volunteers along the way — who are carrying a vessel of water from Big Stone Lake to the Minnesota River’s confluence with the Mississippi River at Fort Snelling, a distance of more than 330 miles. Their journey began Friday at Big Stone Lake, started in snow and sleet in Appleton on Saturday, and continued under much friendlier skies on Sunday as they made their way along County Road 15 in Renville County.

They expect to reach Fort Snelling by Friday.

She is supported on this journey by Dakota members of the Upper and Lower Sioux communities, as well as volunteers from organizations such as Clean Up our River Environment and the Land Stewardship Project, organic farmers and other residents of the river valley.

“A whole rainbow color of people,” said Day as she thumbed through her journal holding the names of the 25 who had joined the walk by the time it crossed the Chippewa River on Saturday afternoon in Montevideo.

Like her previous journeys, this one is intended first to pray to the spirit of the water and to honor the river and water as a living being, said Day.

“When we walk that is who we are talking to, we are praying. We are telling that water in the songs we sing, our petitions say to the water in our language: We love you. We are grateful to you. We respect you and also ask for forgiveness,” said Day.

The journey is also intended to call attention to the contamination in the Minnesota River.

“Minnesotans do not want to talk about the elephant in the living room and that is the non-point sources of pollution, and that is agricultural runoff,” said Day.

She chose the Minnesota River for this year’s walk after reading about studies identifying the impairment of waters throughout southwestern Minnesota.

The MNiSota River (cloudy tinted waters to the Dakota) holds historic and cultural significance to the Dakota people, organizers of the walk also note.

Day was involved with the effort in the late 1990s to protect the Coldwater Spring from the widening of Minnesota Highway 55 in the Twin Cities. After the controversial project went forward, she said an elder asked her: “What will you do for the water?”

Her answer has been to join and organize walks honoring the water. She was one of only six who completed the entire 1,700 mile walk the length of the Mississippi River in 2013. She joined Josephine Mandamin, also an Ojibwe elder, on her 1,555 journey around Lake Superior.

Day’s most difficult walk was the 2011 Mother Earth Walk. She carried water from Gulfport, Mississippi, to Lake Superior. For the first 10 days, there were only three walkers to share the burden.
“Physically and emotionally and mentally, very challenging,” she said.

It was also enlightening. “If your motivation is a spiritual one you can really do anything,” she said.

She began visiting communities along the Minnesota River last year to organize this year’s walk. This one has not lacked for support. The water must be kept in continuous motion, so walkers take turns carrying it while allowing others to rest.

At the end of each day, a ceremony is performed before the night’s rest.

There is an urgency in all of this for Day. Her people’s teaching holds that in the seventh generation all of the people on Turtle Island - the United States - “have to move forward in peace if we are to survive,” she said.

When they reach Fort Snelling on April 1, the water in the vessel will be rejoined with the river.

For more information, or to follow the progress of the walk, visit: www.nibiwalk.org.


March 30, 2016

The Environmentalist Monk Who Inspired Pope Francis

By Nick Fouriezos
OZY

Browsing through a New York City bookstore in early 1941, influential editor Robert Giroux bumped into Thomas Merton, an old college pal from his days on The Columbia Review. Merton told Giroux that The New Yorker wanted him to write a piece about Gethsemani, a Trappist monastery in Kentucky where he had “made a retreat.”

“This revelation stunned me,” Giroux recounted, because Merton had never been particularly religious. When Columbia professor Mark Van Doren heard that Merton had joined the monastery, he feared the young man’s literary career was over. “He’s leaving the world,” Van Doren remarked. “I don’t believe we’ll ever hear another word from him.”

We are in the world and part of it and we are destroying everything because we are destroying ourselves….

But he needn’t have worried. Merton went on to become a prolific poet and author, famous in the 1950s for his probing thoughts on social justice and pacifism. The Catholic monk traveled the globe, exploring Zen Buddhism in Sri Lanka and even meeting with the Dalai Lama in India.
Despite adopting the cowl, it turned out that Merton didn’t leave the world at all — and was in fact very worldly with his environmental views long before others.

Merton’s most enduring work, a 1948 autobiography entitled *The Seven Storey Mountain*, won critical acclaim for making contemplative life enticing. But today his writings are being reexamined for their forward-thinking look at climate change. Last September, his work even got a papal plug: Pope Francis, in urging U.S. lawmakers to join other nations in solving global warming, described Merton as “a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time.”

Merton was a monk for two decades before channeling his inner tree-hugger. It was the early 1960s, with Vietnam, the Cold War and civil rights very much on everyone’s mind. But climate change, a term yet to be coined, was not.

In reading *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson, which told the stirring story of how pesticide abuse was killing off birds and poisoning soil, Merton was mortified. The same book was later credited by Jimmy Carter and Al Gore for ushering in our modern conservation consciousness. “Someone will say: you worry about birds: why not worry about people?” Merton wrote in his journal. “I worry about both birds and people. We are in the world and part of it and we are destroying everything because we are destroying ourselves….”

It proved “an epiphanic event,” writes Monica Weis, author of *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, and the cloistered clergy member responded by doing what he did best — writing — first with a congratulatory letter to Carson, and second through poetry. “I have become light/Bird and wind/My leaves sing/I am earth, earth,” he wrote.

Merton’s first public discussion of nonviolence to the environment was fairly controversial in a faith where mass — not frolicking in the woods — is seen as the highest form of worship. But Weis argues that Merton’s love of nature started earlier. Born in France to an American Quaker artist mother and a landscape-painting father from New Zealand, Merton grew up agnostic, once telling a Catholic couple that all religions “lead to God, only in different ways.” Though he later converted and discovered his priestly calling as a 24-year-old doctoral student, he maintained an inherent compassion for alternative ways of thinking.

A firm opponent of nuclear warfare, Merton believed the use of outsize weaponry to exterminate garden pests stemmed from the same sin as the outsize decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki — even if the side effects hurt innocent bystanders, or ourselves. “To make this seem ‘reasonable’ we go to some lengths to produce arguments that our steps are really ‘harmless,’ ” he concluded. Merton’s fusion of devout conservatism and environmentalism may seem odd, given the long-standing political debate over climate change, but the supposed conflict of faith and reason is misleading, suggests Sophia Newman, a former environmental fellow at the International Thomas Merton Society. “The right wing elsewhere is not [denying global warming], and neither are religious people, really,” she says. “It’s a uniquely American phenomenon.”

In 1965, Merton wrote “this is wonderful!” in his journal, making note that a guest to the monastery mentioned new eco-friendly protections in the Hebrides. “In some ways, he may seem
naive,” Thomas Merton Center Director Paul Pearson says, and yet “from the walls of an enclosed monastery, he had this amazing awareness of what was going on.”

In an essay that same year — five years before the Environmental Protection Agency was created, and three years before his own death — Merton wrote: “The silence of the forest is my bride,” and yet, “There is also the non-ecology, the destructive unbalance, poisoned … by fallout, by exploitation.”


March 30, 2016

Calls for Billions of People to Plant Billions of Trees

By John J. Berger, Energy and environmental policy expert
Huffington Post

“At first, I thought I was fighting to save rubber trees, then I thought I was fighting to save the Amazon rainforest. Now I realize I am fighting for humanity.”
— Chico Mendes, Martyred Brazilian environmentalist

Diana Beresford-Kroeger appears to be following the dictum, “Make no little plans.” The 71-year-old self-described “renegade scientist” has a plan to put everyone on Earth to work planting trees. Her “Bioplan” calls on every able-bodied person to plant a tree a year for six years to bring back the world’s lost forests.

Her work was the inspiration for a recent day-long, “Call of the Forest: Water, Climate, Spirit” conference attended by more than 200 people in the Northern California seaside hamlet of Point Reyes. The event featured a special preview of Beresford-Kroeger’s forthcoming feature film, Call of the Forest: The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees, inspired by her book, The Global Forest.

Her website calls the documentary, an integral part of her, “personal mission to educate 7 billion people about the trees outside their doors.” When completed in the fall, it will be accompanied by an extensive app to provide people with details about how and where to plant appropriate trees for their localities.

The film highlights forests’ importance for human welfare and for the sustenance of other ecosystems and species. Apart from the usual story of how forests purify the air and provide numerous other invaluable benefits, we learn, for example, that when a forest was clearcut in Japan for farming, the humus blew away and the land became arid and infertile.

To the surprise and dismay of local fishermen, the marine ecosystem downstream from the clearcut forest was also decimated — deprived of iron and other vital nutrients that had once run off from the forest. “The oceans feel the effect of a forest clearcut hundreds of miles away,” Beresford-Kroeger said.
A botanist and medical biochemist by training, Beresford-Kroeger is deeply concerned about the connection between deforestation and climate change. (Deforestation is a major source of greenhouse gases, and growing forests sequester carbon and help regulate the climate.) Her concern extends to the vast ancient boreal forest, which contains about a third of the world’s forest area. This enormous biome covers a large part of the Northern Hemisphere, and, because of its high latitude, is likely to be greatly affected by climate change.

Tar sands development has already destroyed many square miles of the Canadian boreal forest and an increase in fire and insect infestations related to climate change have also had a negative impact. “You can’t replace or replant the boreal forest complexity,” Beresford-Kroeger warns. “Once it’s gone, it’s gone.”

Beresford-Kroeger is not alone these days in calling for a massive, global reforestation effort. Earth Day Network has pledged to get 7.8 billion trees planted around the world within four years — one for every person on the planet by the group’s 50th birthday. Its Canopy Project has already planted over 3 million trees in 32 countries since 2011, concentrating on areas most in need of restoration.

The United Nations Environment Programme and its partners launched a Billion Tree Campaign in 2006, planting more than 12 billion trees in five years, according to their website, before turning the campaign over to the Plant-for-the-Planet Foundation. (The Billion Tree Campaign was inspired by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Professor Wangari Maathai, founder of Kenya’s Green Belt Movement, which itself has planted 30 million trees since 1977.) The Nature Conservancy also has a Plant a Billion Trees Campaign.

A local representative from the Turtle Island Restoration Network (based near Point Reyes), introduced the Call of the Forest conferees to the organization’s new 10,000 redwood tree planting campaign as a response to climate change, which Turtle Island calls, “the greatest threat to life on Earth.”

Coastal redwoods, however, are particularly effective at sequestering carbon because they are fast-growing, can survive for 2,000 years or more, and can store enormous amounts of carbon in their massive bulk. The trees are also native to the San Francisco Bay Area where they provide excellent protection to streams and riverbanks and habitat for native species like critically endangered coho salmon.

Turtle Island’s goal is to restore 10,000 redwoods in the Bay Area over the next three years as part of its Salmon Protection and Watershed Network (SPAWN) program, which works to protect endangered coho salmon and restore their creekside habitat.

The group is calling for people to plant the trees at their homes and schools and for volunteers to help grow the redwood seedlings in their nursery. They are also looking for corporations interested in offsetting their carbon footprints.

The Call of the Forest conference also included panels on water, climate, and spiritual ecology. Taking the lead on the water panel, Linda Sheehan, Executive Director of the Earth Law Center
of Redwood City argued that nature has an inherent right to exist in a healthy state. “The river
has an inherent right to flow.”

Water laws, she said, need to be “revisioned” to reflect our interconnections with water. Current
water law only values water when it is used or withdrawn from a waterway, she noted.

Brock Dolman, co-founder of the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, focused attention on how
the language we use to describe water and other aspects of the natural world can negatively
influence our behavior toward it. He pointed out that we use an economic vocabulary to speak of
water as a resource, an asset, or as a commodity. “Is the planet a community or a commodity? Is
water a community or a commodity?” he asked.

Other conference speakers also addressed the commodification of nature. Award-winning author
and conservationist Rick Bass, who is working to protect the biodiversity of Montana’s remote
Yaak Valley, said that in contrast to the corporation’s economic myth that resources are
inexhaustible, we need to establish a story of reciprocity and respect for nature.

The Call of the Forest conference was presented by Point Reyes Books and the nonprofit Black
Mountain Circle and was co-sponsored by the Center for Humans and Nature and the U.S. Forest
Service, with additional support from the Entrekin Family Foundation.

John J. Berger, PhD. (www.johnberger.com) is an energy and environmental policy specialist
who has produced ten books on climate, energy, and natural resource topics. He is the author of
Climate Peril: The Intelligent Reader’s Guide to the Climate Crisis, and Climate Myths: The
Campaign Against Climate Science, and is at work on a new book about climate solutions.


April 2016

A Moral Call to Earth Care

Center for Humans and Nature

Seemingly divergent perspectives and peoples are coming to the same conclusion: it is wrong to
wreck the world, and we have responsibilities to each other and the whole community of life. In
response to Pope Francis’ June 18th encyclical letter, Laudato Si’, the Center for Humans and
Nature has assembled a diverse set of reflections on caring for the Earth and each other. The
ideas shared below illustrate many paths that lead to caring and respectful relationships with one
another and with all of life. What are your thoughts on the ethics of caring for each other and our
common home?

Read the contributions here:
http://www.humansandnature.org/a-moral-call-to-earth-care
Generation Anthropocene: How humans have altered the planet for ever

We are living in the Anthropocene age, in which human influence on the planet is so profound – and terrifying – it will leave its legacy for millennia. Politicians and scientists have had their say, but how are writers and artists responding to this crisis?

By Robert Macfarlane
The Guardian

In 2003 the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht coined the term solastalgia to mean a “form of psychic or existential distress caused by environmental change”. Albrecht was studying the effects of long-term drought and large-scale mining activity on communities in New South Wales, when he realised that no word existed to describe the unhappiness of people whose landscapes were being transformed about them by forces beyond their control. He proposed his new term to describe this distinctive kind of homesickness.

Where the pain of nostalgia arises from moving away, the pain of solastalgia arises from staying put. Where the pain of nostalgia can be mitigated by return, the pain of solastalgia tends to be irreversible. Solastalgia is not a malady specific to the present – we might think of John Clare as a solastalgic poet, witnessing his native Northamptonshire countryside disrupted by enclosure in the 1810s – but it has flourished recently. “A worldwide increase in ecosystem distress syndromes,” wrote Albrecht, is “matched by a corresponding increase in human distress syndromes”. Solastalgia speaks of a modern uncanny, in which a familiar place is rendered unrecognisable by climate change or corporate action: the home become suddenly unhomely around its inhabitants.

Albrecht’s coinage is part of an emerging lexis for what we are increasingly calling the “Anthropocene”: the new epoch of geological time in which human activity is considered such a powerful influence on the environment, climate and ecology of the planet that it will leave a long-term signature in the strata record. And what a signature it will be. We have bored 50m kilometres of holes in our search for oil. We remove mountain tops to get at the coal they contain. The oceans dance with billions of tiny plastic beads. Weaponry tests have dispersed artificial radionuclides globally. The burning of rainforests for monoculture production sends out killing smog-palls that settle into the sediment across entire countries. We have become titanic geological agents, our legacy legible for millennia to come.

The idea of the Anthropocene asks hard questions of us. Temporally, it requires that we imagine ourselves inhabitants not just of a human lifetime or generation, but also of “deep time” – the dizzyingly profound eras of Earth history that extend both behind and ahead of the present. Politically, it lays bare some of the complex cross-weaves of vulnerability and culpability that exist between us and other species, as well as between humans now and humans to come. Conceptually, it warrants us to consider once again whether – in Fredric Jameson’s phrase – “the modernisation process is complete, and nature is gone for good”, leaving nothing but us.
There are good reasons to be sceptical of the epitaphic impulse to declare “the end of nature”. There are also good reasons to be sceptical of the Anthropocene’s absolutism, the political presumptions it encodes, and the specific histories of power and violence that it masks. But the Anthropocene is a massively forceful concept, and as such it bears detailed thinking through. Though it has its origin in the Earth sciences and advanced computational technologies, its consequences have rippled across global culture during the last 15 years. Conservationists, environmentalists, policymakers, artists, activists, writers, historians, political and cultural theorists, as well as scientists and social scientists in many specialisms, are all responding to its implications. A Stanford University team has boldly proposed that – living as we are through the last years of one Earth epoch, and the birth of another – we belong to “Generation Anthropocene”.

Literature and art are confronted with particular challenges by the idea of the Anthropocene. Old forms of representation are experiencing drastic new pressures and being tasked with daunting new responsibilities. How might a novel or a poem possibly account for our authorship of global-scale environmental change across millennia – let alone shape the nature of that change? The indifferent scale of the Anthropocene can induce a crushing sense of the cultural sphere’s impotence.

Yet as the notion of a world beyond us has become difficult to sustain, so a need has grown for fresh vocabularies and narratives that might account for the kinds of relation and responsibility in which we find ourselves entangled. “Nature,” Raymond Williams famously wrote in *Keywords* (1976), “is perhaps the most complex word in the language.” Four decades on, there is no “perhaps” about it.

Projects are presently under way around the world to gain the most basic of purchases on the Anthropocene – a lexis with which to reckon it. Cultural anthropologists in America have begun a glossary for what they call “an Anthropocene as yet unseen”, intended as a “resource” for confronting the “urgent concerns of the present moment”. There, familiar terms – petroleum, melt, distribution, dream – are made strange again, vested with new resilience or menace when viewed through the “global optic” of the Anthropocene.

Last year I started the construction of a crowdsourced Anthropocene glossary called the “Desecration Phrasebook”, and in 2014 *The Bureau of Linguistical Reality* was founded “for the purpose of collecting, translating and creating a new vocabulary for the Anthropocene”. Albrecht’s solastalgia is one of the bureau’s terms, along with “stieg”, “apex-guilt” and “shadowtime”, the latter meaning “the sense of living in two or more orders of temporal scale simultaneously” – an acknowledgment of the out-of-jointness provoked by Anthropocene awareness. Many of these words are, clearly, ugly coinages for an ugly epoch. Taken in sum, they speak of our stuttering attempts to describe just what it is we have done.

The word “Anthropocene” itself entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* surprisingly late, along with “selfie” and “upcycle”, in June 2014 – 15 years after it is generally agreed to have first been used in its popular sense.
In 1999, at a conference in Mexico City on the Holocene – the Earth epoch we at present officially inhabit, beginning around 11,700 years ago – the Nobel prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen was struck by the inaccuracy of the Holocene designation. “I suddenly thought this was wrong,” he later recalled. “The world has changed too much. So I said, ‘No, we are in the Anthropocene.’ I just made the word up on the spur of the moment. But it seems to have stuck.”

The following year, Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer – an American diatom specialist who had been using the term informally since the 1980s – jointly published an article proposing that the Anthropocene should be considered a new Earth epoch, on the grounds that “mankind will remain a major geological force for many millennia, maybe millions of years to come”. The scientific community took the Crutzen-Stoermer proposal seriously enough to submit it to the rigours of the stratigraphers.

Stratigraphy is an awesomely stringent discipline. Stratigraphers are at once the archivists, monks and philosophers of the Earth sciences. Their specialism is the division of deep time into aeons, eras, periods, epochs and stages, and the establishment of temporal limits for those divisions and their subdivisions. Their bible is the International Chronostratigraphic Chart, the beautiful document that archives Earth history from the present back to the “informal” aeon of the Hadean, between 4bn and 4.6bn years ago (“informal” because vanishingly little is known about it). Being a geo-geek, I sometimes mutter the mnemonics of the ICS as I cycle to work, trying to get the sequences straight: Cows Often Sit Down Carefully. Perhaps Their Joints Creak? – Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous …

The Anthropocene Working Group of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy – a title straight out of Gormenghast – was created in 2009. It was charged with delivering two recommendations: whether the Anthropocene should be formalised as an epoch and, if so, when it began. Among the baselines considered by the group have been the first recorded use of fire by hominins around 1.8m years ago, the dawn of agriculture around 8,000 years ago and the Industrial Revolution.

The group’s report is due within months. Recent publications indicate that they will recommend the designation of the Anthropocene, and that the “stratigraphically optimal” temporal limit will be located somewhere in the mid-20th century. This places the start of the Anthropocene simultaneous with the start of the nuclear age. It also coincides with the so-called “Great Acceleration”, when massive increases occurred in population, carbon emissions, species invasions and extinctions, and when the production and discard of metals, concrete and plastics boomed.

Plastics in particular are being taken as a key marker for the Anthropocene, giving rise to the inevitable nickname of the “Plasticene”. We currently produce around 100m tonnes of plastic globally each year. Because plastics are inert and difficult to degrade, some of this plastic material will find its way into the strata record. Among the future fossils of the Anthropocene, therefore, might be the trace forms not only of megafauna and nano-planktons, but also shampoo bottles and deodorant caps – the strata that contain them precisely dateable with reference to the
product-design archives of multinationals. "What will survive of us is love", wrote Philip Larkin. Wrong. What will survive of us is plastic – and lead-207, the stable isotope at the end of the uranium-235 decay chain.

The Deutsches Museum in Munich is currently hosting “An Anthropocene Wunderkammer”, which it calls “the first major exhibition in the world” to take the Anthropocene as its theme. Among the exhibits is a remarkable work by the American writer and conservation biologist Julianne Lutz Warren, entitled “Hopes Echo”. It concerns the huia, an exquisite bird of New Zealand that was made extinct in the early 20th century due to habitat destruction, introduced predators and overhunting for its black and ivory tail feathers. The huia vanished before field-recording technologies existed, but a version of its song has survived by means of an eerie series of preservations: a sound fossil. In order to lure the birds to their snares, the Maori people learned to mimic the huia song. This mimicked song was passed down between generations, a practice that continued even after the huia was gone. In 1954 a pakeha (a European New Zealander) called RAL Bateley made a recording of a Maori man, Henare Hamana, whistling his imitation of the huia’s call.

Warren’s exhibit makes Bateley’s crackly recording available, and her accompanying text unfolds the complexities of its sonic strata. It is, as Warren puts it, “a soundtrack of the sacred voices of extinct birds echoing in that of a dead man echoing out of a machine echoing through the world today”. The intellectual elegance of her work – and its exemplary quality as an Anthropocene-aware artefact – lies in its subtle tracing of the technological and imperial histories involved in a single extinction event and its residue.

Anthropocene art is, unsurprisingly, obsessed with loss and disappearance. We are living through what is popularly known as the “sixth great extinction”. A third of all amphibian species are at risk of extinction. A fifth of the globe’s 5,500 known mammals are classified as endangered, threatened or vulnerable. The current extinction rate for birds may be faster than any recorded across the 150m years of avian evolutionary history. We exist in an ongoing biodiversity crisis – but register that crisis, if at all, as an ambient hum of guilt, easily faded out. Like other unwholesome aspects of the Anthropocene, we mostly respond to mass extinction with stuplimity: the aesthetic experience in which astonishment is united with boredom, such that we overload on anxiety to the point of outrage-outage.

Art and literature might, at their best, shock us out of the stuplime. Warren’s haunted study of the huia finds its own echo in the prose and poetry of Richard Skelton and Autumn Richardson. Their work – sometimes jointly authored – is minutely attentive to the specificities of the gone and the will-be-gone. Place names and plant names assume the status of chants or litanies: spectral taxa incanted as elegy, or as a means to conjure back. In Succession (2013), Skelton and Richardson studied palynological records to reconstruct lists of the grasses and flowers that flourished in the western Lake District after the end of the Pleistocene. The area “is still inhabited by the ghosts of lost flora and fauna”, writes Richardson, of which there are “traces that even now, centuries later, can be uncovered and celebrated”. Diagrams for the Summoning of Wolves (2015), a purely musical work, shifts from celebration to intervention: it is intended as a performative utterance – a series of notes, rituals and gestures that might somehow enable “the return itself”.

"What will survive of us is love", wrote Philip Larkin.
Rory Gibb smartly notes that the work of Skelton and Richardson is different in kind from conventional eco-elegy: it evokes “a more feral feeling of being stalked by ecosystemic memory.” Such a feeling is appropriate to the Anthropocene, in which we have erased entire biomes and crashed whole ecosystems. Their writing often moves back through the Holocene and into its prior epochs, before sliding forwards to imaginary far futures. They send ghost emissaries – foxes, wolves, pollen grains, stones – back and forth along these deep-time lines. Instead of the intimacies and connections urged by conventional “green” literature, writing like this speaks of a darker ecological impulse, in which salvation and self-knowledge can no longer be found in a mountain peak or stooping falcon, and categories such as the picturesque or even the beautiful congeal into kitsch.

Perhaps the greatest challenge posed to our imagination by the Anthropocene is its inhuman organisation as an event. If the Anthropocene can be said to “take place”, it does so across huge scales of space and vast spans of time, from nanometers to planets, and from picoseconds to aeons. It involves millions of different teleconnected agents, from methane molecules to rare earth metals to magnetic fields to smartphones to mosquitoes. Its energies are interactive, its properties emergent and its structures withdrawn.

In 2010 Timothy Morton adopted the term hyperobject to denote some of the characteristic entities of the Anthropocene. Hyperobjects are “so massively distributed in time, space and dimensionality” that they defy our perception, let alone our comprehension. Among the examples Morton gives of hyperobjects are climate change, mass species extinction and radioactive plutonium. “In one sense [hyperobjects] are abstractions,” he notes, “in another they are ferociously, catastrophically real.”

Creative non-fiction, and especially reportage, has adapted most quickly to this “distributed” aspect of the Anthropocene. Episodic in assembly and dispersed in geography, some outstanding recent non-fiction has proved able to map intricate patterns of environmental cause and effect, and in this way draw hyperobjects into at least partial visibility. Elizabeth Kolbert’s *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014) and her *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* (2006) are landmarks here, as is Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate* (2014). In 2015 Gaia Vince published *Adventures in the Anthropocene*, perhaps the best book so far to trace the epoch’s impacts on the world’s poor, and the slow violence that climate change metes out to them.

Last year also saw the publication of *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, by the American anthropologist Anna Tsing. Tsing takes as her subject one of the “strangest commodity chains of our times”: that of the matsutake, supposedly the most valuable fungus in the world, which grows best in “human-disturbed forests”. Written in what she calls “a riot of short chapters, like the flushes of mushrooms that come up after rain”, Tsing’s book describes a contemporary “nature” that is hybrid and multiply interbound. Her ecosystems stretch from wood-wide webs of mycelia, through earthworms and pine roots, to logging trucks and hedge funds – as well as down into the flora of our own multispecies guts. Tsing’s account of nature thus overcomes what Jacques Rancière has called the “partition of the sensible”, by which he means the traditional division of matter into “life” and “not-life”. Like Skelton in his recent *Beyond the Fell Wall* (2015), and the poet Sean Borodale, Tsing is
interested in a vibrant materialism that acknowledges the agency of stones, ores and atmospheres, as well as humans and other organisms.

Tsing is also concerned with the possibility of what she calls “collaborative survival” in the Anthropocene-to-come. As Evans Calder Williams notes, the Anthropocene imagination “crawls with narratives of survival”, in which varying conditions of resource scarcity exist, and varying kinds of salvage are practised. Our contemporary appetite for environmental breakdown is colossal, tending to grotesque: from Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) – now almost an Anthropocene ur-text – through films such as *The Survivalist* and the Mad Max franchise, to *The Walking Dead* and the *Fallout video game* series.

The worst of this collapse culture is artistically crude and politically crass. The best is vigilant and provocative: Simon Ings’ *Wolves* (2014), for instance, James Bradley’s strange and gripping *Clade* (2015), or Paul Kingsnorth’s *The Wake* (2014), a post-apocalyptic novel set in the “blaec”, “brok” landscape of 11th-century England, that warns us not to defer our present crisis. I think also of Clare Vaye Watkins’s glittering *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015), which occurs in a drought-scorched American southwest and includes a field-guide to the neo-fauna of this dunescape: the “ouroboros rattlesnake”, the “Mojave ghost crab”.

Such scarcity narratives unsettle what we might call the Holocene delusion on which growth economics is founded: of the Earth as an infinite body of matter, there for the incredible ultra-machine of capitalism to process, exploit and discard without heed of limit. Meanwhile, however, speculative novelists – Andy Weir in *The Martian*, Kim Stanley Robinson in *Red Mars* – foresee how we will overcome terrestrial shortages by turning to asteroid mining or the terra-forming of Mars. To misquote Fredric Jameson, it is easier to imagine the extraction of off-planet resources than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.

The novel is the cultural form to which the Anthropocene arguably presents most difficulties, and most opportunities. Historically, the novel has been celebrated for its ability to represent human interiority: the skull-to-skull skip of free indirect style, or the vivid flow of stream-of-consciousness. But what use are such skills when addressing the enormity of this new epoch? Any Anthropocene-aware novel finds itself haunted by impersonal structures, and intimidated by the limits of individual agency. China Miéville’s *Covehithe* cleverly probes and parodies these anxieties. In a near-future Suffolk, animate oil rigs haul themselves out of the sea, before drilling down into the coastal strata to lay dozens of rig eggs. These techno-zombies prove impervious to military interventions: at last, all that humans can do is become spectators, snapping photos of the rigs and watching live feeds from remote cameras as they give birth – an Anthropocene *Springwatch*.

Most memorable to me is Jeff VanderMeer’s 2014 novel, *Annihilation*. It describes an expedition into an apparently poisoned region known as Area X, in which relic human structures have been not just reclaimed but wilfully redesigned by a mutated nature. A specialist team is sent to survey the zone. They discover archive caches and topographically anomalous buildings including a “Tower” that descends into the earth rather than jutting from it. The Tower’s steps are covered in golden slime, and on its walls crawls a “rich greenlike moss” that inscribes letters and words on the masonry – before entering and authoring the bodies of the explorers themselves. It gradually
becomes apparent that Area X, in all its weird wildness, is actively transforming the members of the expedition who have been sent to subdue it with science. As such, VanderMeer’s novel brilliantly reverses the hubris of the Anthropocene: instead of us leaving the world post-natural, it suggests, the world will leave us post-human.

As the idea of the Anthropocene has surged in power, so its critics have grown in number and strength. Cultural and literary studies currently abound with Anthropocene titles: most from the left, and often biting critical of their subject. The last 12 months have seen the publication of Jedediah Purdy’s *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, McKenzie Wark’s provocative *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* and the environmental historian Jason W Moore’s important *Capitalism in the Web of Life*. Last July the “revolutionary arts and letters quarterly” *Salvage* launched with an issue that included Daniel Hartley’s essay “Against the Anthropocene” and Miéville, superbly, on despair and environmental justice in the new epoch.

Across these texts and others, three main objections recur: that the idea of the Anthropocene is arrogant, universalist and capitalist-technocratic. Arrogant, because the designation of the Anthropocene – the “New Age of Humans” – is our crowning act of self-mythologisation (we are the super-species, we the Prometheans, we have ended nature), and as such only embeds the narcissist delusions that have produced the current crisis.

Universalist, because the Anthropocene assumes a generalised *anthropos*, whereby all humans are equally implicated and all equally affected. As Purdy, Miéville and Moore point out, “we” are not all in the Anthropocene together – the poor and the dispossessed are far more in it than others. “Wealthy countries,” writes Purdy, “create a global landscape of inequality in which the wealthy find their advantages multiplied … In this neoliberal Anthropocene, free contract within a global market launders inequality through voluntariness.”

And capitalist-technocratic, because the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene has technology as its driver: recent Earth history reduced to a succession of inventions (fire, the combustion engine, the synthesis of plastic, nuclear weaponry). The monolithic concept bulk of this scientific Anthropocene can crush the subtleties out of both past and future, disregarding the roles of ideology, empire and political economy. Such a technocratic narrative will also tend to encourage technocratic solutions: geoengineering as a quick-fix for climate change, say, or the Anthropocene imagined as a pragmatic problem to be managed, such that “Anthropocene science” is translated smoothly into “Anthropocene policy” within existing structures of governance. Moore argues that the Anthropocene is not the geology of a species at all, but rather the geology of a system, capitalism – and as such should be rechristened the Capitalocene.

There are signs that we will soon be exhausted by the Anthropocene: glutted by its ubiquity as a cultural shorthand, fatigued by its imprecisions, and enervated by its variant names – the “Anthrobscene”, the “Misanthropocene”, the “Lichenocene” (actually, that last one is mine). Perhaps the Anthropocene has already become an anthropomeme: punned and pimped into stuplimity, its presence in popular discourse often just a virtue signal that merely mandates the user to proceed with the work of consumption.
I think, though, that the Anthropocene has administered – and will administer – a massive jolt to the imagination. Philosophically, it is a concept that does huge work both for us and on us. In its unsettlement of the entrenched binaries of modernity (nature and culture; object and subject), and its provocative alienation of familiar anthropocentric scales and times, it opens up rather than foreclosing progressive thought. What Christophe Bonneuil calls the “shock of the Anthropocene” is generating new political arguments, new modes of behaviour, new narratives, new languages and new creative forms. It asserts – as Jeremy Davies writes at the end of his excellent forthcoming book, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* – a “pressing need to re-imagine human and nonhuman life outside the confines of the Holocene”, while also asking “how best to keep faith with the web of relationships, dependencies, and symbioses that made up the planetary system of the dying epoch”. Systemic in its structure, the Anthropocene charges us with systemic change.

In 1981 the research field of “nuclear semiotics” was born. A group of interdisciplinary experts was tasked with preventing future humans from intruding on to a subterranean storage facility for radioactive waste, then under construction in the New Mexico desert. The half-life of plutonium-239 is around 24,100 years; the written history of humanity is around 5,000 years old. The challenge facing the group was how to devise a sign system that could semantically survive even catastrophic phases of planetary future, and that could communicate with an unknown humanoid-to-be.

Several proposals involved forms of hostile architecture: a “landscape of thorns” in which 15m-high concrete pillars with jutting side spikes impeded access; a maze of sharp black rock blocks that absorbed solar energy to become impassably hot. But such aggressive structures can act as enticements rather than cautions, suggesting here be treasure rather than here be dragons. Prince Charming hacked his way through the briars to wake Sleeping Beauty. Indiana Jones braved wooden spikes and rolling boulders to reach the golden idol in a booby-trapped Peruvian temple. Sometimes I wonder if the design task should be handed wholesale to the team behind the Ikea instruction manuals: if they can convey in pictograms how to put up a Billy bookcase anywhere in the world, they can surely tell someone in 10,000 years’ time not to dig in a certain place.

The New Mexico facility is due to be sealed in 2038. The present plans for marking the site involve a berm with a core of salt, enclosing the above-ground footprint of the repository. Buried in the berm will be radar reflectors, magnets and a “Storage Room”, constructed around a stone slab too big to be removed via the chamber entrance. Data will be inscribed on to the slab including maps, time lines, and scientific details of the waste and its risks, written in all current official UN languages, and in Navajo: “This site was known as the WIPP (Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Site) when it was closed in 2038 AD … Do not expose this room unless the information centre messages are lost. Leave the room buried for future generations.” Discs made of ceramic, clay, glass and metal, also engraved with warnings, will be embedded in the soil and the shaft seals. Finally, a “hot cell”, or radiation containment chamber, will be constructed: a reinforced concrete structure extending 60 feet above the earth and 30 feet down into it: VanderMeer’s “Tower” made real.

I think of that configuration of berm, chamber, shaft, disc and hot cell – all set atop the casks of pulsing radioactive molecules entombed deep in the Permian strata – as perhaps our purest
Anthropocene architecture. And I think of those multiply repeated incantations – pitched somewhere between confession, caution and black mass; leave the room buried for future generations, leave the room buried for future generations … – as perhaps our most perfected Anthropocene text.

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-forever

April 1, 2016

Indigenous Peoples Leaders commend the steadfast actions of SAVE Rivers resulting in the scrapping of the Baram Dam

Indigenous Voices in Asia

The unanticipated decision by Sarawak State Chief Minister to revoke the gazettement for land earmarked for the Baram dam site and reservoir has been commended by indigenous leaders around the world.

“The decision to halt the construction of the Baram dam is timely with the mounting evidence that the unpredictable and extreme weather caused by climate change would further increase the cost and reduce the benefits of mega dams. With the added irreparable damage to indigenous communities who would be relocated for this purpose, the decision to revoke plans for the Baram dam is exemplary,” said Joan Carling, member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNFPII).

Early last week, SAVE Rivers, the key community-led NGO opposing the Baram dam, published a press statement announcing the decision.

In the statement, Harrison Ngau, lawyer for the Baram villagers, shared a letter from the State Legal Office dated 15 March 2016 stating that the gazette that extinguished the native customary rights (NCR) of the indigenous Kayan, Kenyah and Penan communities to their lands for the purpose of the Baram Dam site and reservoir areas was repealed and published in the Sarawak Government Gazette on 18 February 2016.

In the earlier gazettes in 2013 and 2015, native customary lands belonging to up to 20,000 indigenous peoples from 26 villages were taken from them using the Sarawak Land Code for the proposed mega dam. The lands included their villages, farms, cemeteries and communal forest reserve land known as pulau galau. The community protested by setting up two blockades since October 2013 to prevent the construction of the access road and preparatory works for the proposed dam.

Achieving #LandRightsNow
“The success of the Baram villagers in their 5-year old struggle is a huge victory for indigenous peoples around the world. It adds fervor to the momentum we need to double the global area of land legally recognized as owned or controlled by indigenous peoples and local communities by 2020,” adds Carling, referring to the recently launched Land Rights Now campaign (landrightsnow.org/)

Carling, who is also Secretary General of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), was part of the delegation of indigenous leaders who visited the Baram Dam blockades in October last year during the World Indigenous Summit on Environment and Rivers (WISER).

Among the delegates was internationally renowned environmental activist, Berta Caceres from Honduras, who was assassinated a month ago in her home. Together at WISER, they had expressed their strong solidarity and support to the affected communities and the SAVE Rivers network.

“The success of the Baram folks in stopping a mega dam is one of the many land cases we will see through to victory, as we, the indigenous peoples of Malaysia are fully committed to realize the goals of the Land Rights Now campaign,” said Jannie Lasimbang, Secretary General of the Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia (JOAS).

“This is a promise we make to ourselves and to our fellow indigenous friends across the globe,” she added.

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April 4, 2016

Ecuador drills for oil on edge of pristine rainforest in Yasuni

First of 200 wells drilled close to controversial block of forest known to have two of the last tribes living in isolation

By John Vidal
The Guardian

Ecuador has started drilling for oil on the edge of a controversial block of pristine rainforest inhabited by two of the last tribes in the world living in voluntary isolation.
The well platform known as Tiputini C, which is now operational a few kilometres from the Peruvian border in the Yasuni national park, is expected to be the first of nearly 200 wells needed to extract the 920m barrels of crude thought to lie below the Ishpingo Tambococha Tiputini (ITT) block.

The Tiputini field is just outside the ITT zone which the government has ordered oil companies to leave untouched. But indigenous people, rainforest campaigners and many Ecuadoreans said this week that they expect oil exploitation in Yasuni national park to lead to pollution, forest destruction and the decimation of the nomadic Tagaeri and the Taromenane tribes who have chosen to have no contact with the outside world.

The government’s ministry of strategic sectors said that the state oil company, PetroAmazonas, would be using directional and horizontal drilling which would meet high international standards.

The first oil is expected to flow by the end of 2016. “We are optimising costs and increasing production areas with better prospects,” said minister Rafael Poveda.

Ecuador’s decision to allow oil companies to drill the ITT block, which contains around 30% of the country’s remaining reserves, has been hotly disputed since 2007 when the new Rafael Correa government pledged to permanently keep the oil underground in exchange for around $3.6bn from the international community. The “Yasuni initiative” was administered by the UN and hailed as one of the world’s most innovative conservation proposals.

But in August 2013, President Correa withdrew the proposal saying the pledges received from countries were minimal and that Ecuador had been failed by the international community.

He argued that Ecuador, which has been devastated by oil pollution in the 1970s by US oil firms, had no option but to exploit the ITT oil to pay for poverty relief.

Correa’s change of mind led to demonstrations, the emergence of a political movement known as Yasunidos and a hotly-debated petition which failed to reach the threshold to trigger a national referendum.

Ecuador is the first country in the world to include the rights of nature in its constitution and until the Yasuni controversy it was considered one of the most environmentally-progressive countries. To reduce criticism, Correa promised that only 1/1000th of the area of the Yasuni park would be exploited and the best available technology would be used to reduce pollution.

But many indigenous leaders and conservationists remain angry. “By drilling Yasuni-ITT, the Ecuadorian government is threatening to destroy one of the most biodiverse and culturally fragile treasures on the planet for what amounts to about a week of global oil supply,” said Amazon Watch’s director, Leila Salazar-Lopez.

“Why such urgency to exploit the Yasuni-ITT with an adverse oil market?” she said.
Alicia Cahuiya, the vice-president of the Waorani people in Ecuador who has received death threats for opposing oil exploitation in Yasuni, said Ecuador was not protecting isolated peoples.

“If they are going to protect them, they can no longer construct more roads or oil wells … The state must, as they say, ensure and protect the [isolated indigenous] Taromenane. As Waorani we ask that they keep their territory. No more exploitation there. No more taking down our trees,” she said.

Because of its location right on the equator at the junction of the forest and the mountains, Yasuní is one of the most biodiverse places on Earth. The park is thought to have more species of plants, animals and insects per hectare than anywhere else.

Kelly Swing, director of the Tiputini biodiversity research centre on the edge of the Yasuni park, said drilling made no sense. “As a new wave of oil operations push into the last remaining corners of the Yasuni, we are appalled. Ecuador is now losing around $15 per barrel but continues to expand [oil] operations under the pretext that prices are about to soar again while countries like Iran are flooding the world market with more product every day.”

In a separate development, Ecuador’s government earlier this year sold oil exploration rights on 500,000 acres of forest adjoining the Yasuni park to a consortium of Chinese state-owned oil companies.

Andes Petroleum Ecuador paid about $80m, according to the research firm Energy Intelligence.

http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/04/ecuador-drills-for-oil-on-edge-of-pristine-rainforest-in-yasuni

April 6, 2016

For the Planet and the Poor

Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame

We are witnessing an extraordinary moment in the history of global efforts to eliminate extreme poverty and preserve the natural environment. Never before have international development organizations, national governments, the Catholic Church, and other religious and faith-based organizations been so closely aligned in a campaign to address the most daunting challenges facing humanity and the planet.

The surprising convergence of Pope Francis’s encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home, with his support of the Sustainable Development Goals to “end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030,” have presented us with a remarkable moment of opportunity.
This conference, organized by Notre Dame’s new Keough School of Global Affairs, brought together students and faculty with leading thinkers from the worlds of development policy and practice, government, the Church, and other religious bodies to reflect on the events of the previous year and chart a way forward.

Watch videos from this conference: http://keough.nd.edu/news-events/for-the-planet-and-the-poor/

April 6, 2016

Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’: Hope for our Common Home

Every time I read Laudato Si’ I discover fresh insights into the relationship between God and the planetary community of life on Earth, our common home.

By Denis Edwards
MN News

I find myself renewed in hope, taken by joy at the beauty of Francis’ vision, sobered by the challenges we face and summoned again to see my life as an ecological vocation, radically committed to Earth and all its creatures.

This encyclical represents a new moment in Catholic social teaching. Since the 1980s Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have made important contributions that call the church and the world to an ecological conversion. But with this far more developed work of Pope Francis, the protection of God’s creation is now formally and permanently brought to the centre of Catholic social teaching, along with the church’s long-standing commitment to inter-human justice and peace. In what follows, I will highlight some key theological positions taken by Pope Francis.

A theology grounded in what is happening to our ‘common home’

Laudato Si’ begins with a clear-eyed discussion of what is happening to our planet. Pope Francis sees Earth as our common home, to be shared by humans and other creatures, a home for future generations. It’s a home we are meant to care for and protect, but one we have treated with violence. In particular Pope Francis offers a careful analysis of major issues, particularly pollution and global warming, the looming crisis of fresh water and the loss of biodiversity, along with a decline in the quality of human life, the breakdown of society and global inequality.

The way of dialogue

A striking feature of Laudato Si’ is that it consistently puts into practice the way of dialogue advocated by the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The encyclical is fully dialogical in both structure and content. Pope Francis writes, “Now, faced as we are with global deterioration, I wish to address every living person on this
planet...In this encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (par 3).

The Universal Communion of Creation

In his second chapter, Pope Francis turns to the Bible to articulate a theology of the whole of creation as one interrelated community before God. Here he offers us a new theology of the natural world, involving three aspects.

Firstly, he insists that other creatures have meaning and value not simply because of their use to human beings, but in themselves. They have intrinsic value. Why? Because God is present to each of them, God loves each of them, and each has a future in God.

Secondly, each creature is a word of God to human beings. Creation is a kind of revelation, a manifestation of God, a book of God alongside the Scriptures. “Nature is filled with words of love.”

Thirdly, human beings are part of nature, and together with other creatures we form a sublime communion in God. As St Francis has shown, other creatures are our kin. “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in affection with brother son, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (par 92). Francis tells us that the risen Christ is already present to the whole creation, bringing it to its final fulfilment.

Integral Ecology

Integral ecology is at the centre of Pope Francis’ encyclical. Ecological commitment and commitment to our human brothers and sisters, above all the poor, are held together in one vision. These two commitments are united as aspects of one ecological vocation. Our response to the crisis we face will need to be holistic, based on a broad vision of reality that involves not only plants, animals, habitats, the atmosphere, rivers and seas, but also human beings and their culture. We find inspiration for this kind of integration in St Francis of Assisi, in his love for the poor and his love for the other creatures of the natural world.

From his first homily as pope, Pope Francis has made this same link clearly and strongly, calling us to protect creation and our human brothers and sisters; above all, those who are poor and excluded. In his new encyclical he writes, “Everything is interconnected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society” (par 91).

An integral ecology involves love and respect for animals and plants, but also for human history, art and architecture. Integral ecology involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity. It involves respect for the cultures of indigenous peoples, “They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God.
and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values (par 146).

**Political and Personal Action**

Pope Francis prophetically engages political leaders in dialogue, asking them to accept responsibility for protecting the environment and calling them to support international agreements to lift people out of poverty, limit carbon emissions and protect biodiversity.

He also points to the fundamental importance of “civic and political love”, including the indispensable role of ecological education in our families and schools. He insists on the importance of embracing ways of acting, “such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumptions, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights” (par 211).

Pope Francis calls us all to an ongoing ecological conversion, to a spirituality of love and respect for animals and their habitats, for the land, the seas, the rivers, in the one community of life on Earth. All of this culminates in our Sunday of rest and in the Eucharist that embraces all creation and is a source of light and motivation.


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**April 7, 2016**

Meet the Jeans-Wearing, Nature-Loving Nuns Who Helped Stop a Kentucky Pipeline

As fewer women enter the convent, what will become of Kentucky’s tradition of socially and environmentally engaged religious women?

By Laura Michele Diener
YES! Magazine

“The easiest way for me to find God is in nature,” Sister Ceciliana Skees explains. Born Ruth Skees, she grew up in Hardin County, Kentucky, during the 1930s. It’s a rural place of soft green hills, where her father farmed his entire life.

Now just a few months shy of her eighty-fifth birthday, she remembers feeling the first stirrings of a religious calling at the age of 10. Her peasant blouse and smooth, chin-length haircut don’t fit the popular image of a nun, but she has been a Sister of Loretto—a member of a religious order more than 200 years old—since she took vows at the age of 18.
Skees’ commitment to social activism goes back almost as far as her commitment to the church. She has marched for civil rights, founded a school for early childhood education, and taught generations of children.

Then, a few years ago, she heard about the Bluegrass Pipeline, a joint venture between two energy companies: Williams and Boardwalk Pipeline Partners. The project would have transported natural gas liquids from fracking fields in Pennsylvania and Ohio southwest across Kentucky to connect with an existing pipeline to the Gulf of Mexico. Loretto’s land was directly in its path.

On August 8, 2013, Skees and other sisters from Loretto and several other convents attended an informational meeting held by representatives of the two companies. Frustrated with what they saw as a lack of helpful information, several of the sisters, including Skees, gathered in the center of the room and broke into song. A video of the sisters singing “Amazing Grace” was picked up by media outlets such as *Mother Jones* and reached hundreds of thousands of people.

Woodford county resident Corlia Logsdon remembers how a company representative asked the police to arrest the sisters for disrupting the meeting that day. But the officers, who were graduates of local Catholic schools, refused to arrest their former teachers.

Logsdon joined the campaign against the pipeline when she realized the proposed route would cut directly through her front yard. She says she found the sisters to be stalwart partners, who regularly accompanied her to negotiate with state lawmakers. “It was the first time I had ever done anything like that. And they came with me, persistently presenting a positive and yet quietly forceful presence in the legislature.”

Sellus Wilder, a documentary filmmaker, says he joined the campaign to stop the Bluegrass Pipeline after seeing the video of the nuns singing. His experiences led him to produce *The End of the Line*, a documentary film about the pipeline and opposition to it. He called the sisters the glue that held the diverse group of protesters together and kept them focused.

“They all have really strong, glowing spirits,” Wilder says. “They brought their inherent qualities—energy, compassion, and education, as well as a certain ethereal element—to the whole campaign.”

Whatever the nuns brought, it worked. In March 2014, a circuit judge ruled against the pipeline, saying the companies had no right to use eminent domain against owners unwilling to sell their land. A few months later, the companies agreed to redraw their route to avoid Loretto’s grounds, but the sisters kept protesting to support their neighbors. The case eventually went to the state supreme court, which upheld the lower court’s decision. The pipeline was defeated—and the same coalition is now fighting another one.

In a way, Skees and the other nuns’ participation in the Bluegrass Pipeline fight was not that unusual. About 80 percent of American nuns are members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which is committed to environmental activism. Sister Ann Scholz, the
LCWR’s associate director for social mission, says this position is a direct outcome of the way sisters interpret the gospel.

“No Christian can live the gospel fully unless they attend the needs of their brothers and sisters, including Mother Earth,” Scholz explains. “Our work for social justice grows out of the Catholic social teaching and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

But because the Sisters of Loretto are in rural Kentucky, their engagement with these issues takes on a regional flavor. Kentucky is a key battleground state in the debates over fracking and coal mining, and its eastern region is home to some of the poorest counties in Appalachia. The nuns are also rural, and help unify far-flung residents with diverse interests.

For example, the Sisters of Loretto joined with local advocates for coal miners’ rights in 1979 to sue the Blue Diamond Coal Company in order to expose what they saw as a record of poor safety, mining disasters, and environmental negligence in Kentucky.

Skees herself spent much of the 1960s and ’70s teaching in Louisville, where she marched against racial discrimination in housing and for the integration of schools. “At Loretto we tend to go with the flow,” she muses. “But we do not flow with injustice.”

Kentucky sisters have also been involved in protests across the United States. They have traveled to Alabama, Mississippi, and Washington, D.C., to march for civil rights, for universal health care, and against the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. They hold annual protests at the controversial School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, a training program for Latin American military whose graduates have been accused of human-rights violations (the school is now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation).

These nuns and others like them have long formed part of the core of the nation’s activist population. But their numbers are decreasing, and those who remain are getting older. The same thing is happening all over the United States—there were only about 49,000 sisters in 2015, compared to nearly 180,000 in 1965.

Skees’ own life helps explain the decline. “Women had very few choices when I went to the convent,” she says. “We could be nurses, secretaries, teachers—or we could get married.”

Until the 1960s, convent life offered professional opportunities for women that other fields lacked—nuns could become high school principals, college deans, or administrators. But women today don’t need a habit to move into positions of leadership.

What will this decline mean for socially engaged nuns like the ones who helped defeat the Bluegrass Pipeline? Will it end their tradition? Or will their work simply evolve?

To find out, I spent several days at each of three convents in Kentucky. First, I headed east into the foothills of the Appalachian mountains to visit the Benedictine Sisters of Mt. Tabor, an intimate community that has opened up its home to its neighbors as a space of contemplation. Next, I went to central Kentucky to visit the Sisters of Charity, a global order with convents in
Africa, Asia, and Central America. Finally, I dropped by the motherhouse of the Sisters of Loretto, founded by pioneer women dedicated to teaching the children of Kentucky.

I came away thinking how deeply each convent was embedded in its community, and how precious was their wonder at the natural world. The sisters are too busy looking ahead to worry about dwindling numbers.

**Fierce contemplation**

The motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity in Nazareth, Kentucky, serves as a retirement home for sisters who have spent their lives in ministry—although you might not know that from the energy of the women here.

“You keep going as long as you can,” Sister Joan Wilson explained cheerfully. Tall and slender, with close-cropped white hair and a gentle manner, she radiated kindness and concern.

I got to know Joan—along with Sisters Theresa Knabel, Frances Krumpelman, and Julie Driscoll—and all four expressed utter joy in their natural surroundings. “There’s such a beauty in nature that it’s such a spiritual experience,” Driscoll said. “Every time I see a deer, I think, ‘Oh, what a blessing! Thank you, God!’”

“Rainbows just turn the place upside down!” Krumpelman added.

Their pleasure in rainbows and sunsets at first struck me as childlike—odd to find among women in their 70s and 80s. But I soon realized it was deeply rooted in contemplation and prayer.

Their love of nature derived in part from the texts they have studied and prayed over, they said, especially the Psalms, the ancient Hebrew poems that utilize images of mountains, birds, and stars to express the glory of divine creation. “The Psalms rave about nature, so I probably imbibed the beauty of it when I prayed,” Knabel said.

They feel a similar delight in the work of Pope Francis, especially with his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, which calls for a universal awareness of climate change and its effects on the poor.

The community avidly read and discussed it, and couldn’t seem to order enough copies.

The beauty of their grounds is overwhelming, and as I explored them alongside Sister Joan, I found myself caught up in her wonder. The autumn leaves mirrored in the lakes, the shadowy corners with statues of long-ago saints, the bright paths dappled with sun, all brought forth a sense of peace. Judging by the number of other visitors strolling around, I wasn’t the only one drawn to the harmonious abundance of Nazareth. The sisters believe part of their mission is to share the beauty of their home with their neighbors, so they keep it open to the public and maintain walking trails and fishing lakes for the community. They also keep up a garden that anyone from Nelson County is welcome to use. The sisters prepare the soil, fence the land, and provide the water.
To improve their ability to care for this land, the sisters of Charity and Loretto have been working with the foresters at Bernheim Forest, an arboretum and research center in nearby Bullitt County. Forester Andrew Berry has walked though hundreds of acres at both campuses to find ways to make their lands more sustainable and friendly to wildlife. At Charity, for example, he helped pull out invasive species to help restore the native oak forestlands.

Berry says the sisters’ enthusiasm for “good eco-stewardship” has impressed him. “Together we manage the forests for both biodiversity and spiritual value.”

He has also been helping both convents create conservation easements—legal agreements that permanently limit the uses of a piece of land—for their land to ensure it will remain protected in perpetuity, should the sisters no longer be there.

This is a reality age and time has forced them to confront, as nearby convents have begun to shut down. In fall of 2015, with only one able-bodied sister left, the sisters of a Carmelite order in Louisville decided to close their convent. They went to the Sisters of Loretto for help.

“The Carmelite Sisters had so much stuff that they couldn’t take with them—all these habits and prayer books and statues that were too old to be of use to anyone, but to them were holy,” Susan Classen told me. Classen is not a sister but a Mennonite co-member who has lived at Loretto’s motherhouse for 23 years. Rather than simply throw away the sacred items, the Sisters of Loretto offered to bury them on their grounds and, in November 2015, held a ceremony at the edge of their forestlands. When I visited Loretto in December, the grave was still fresh, spilling over with golden dirt.

“One of the Carmelite Sisters spoke about how their life together wasn’t going to continue, and thus God must have something else for them, and that it was time to let go. And then we buried everything.” Susan’s voice broke, and it was obvious she was thinking not only of the Carmelites but her own order. It was impossible not to.

At 58, Classen is outdoorsy and active, but she is one of the youngest members of Loretto. Even though many of the women are incredibly active, the average age overall at the convent is 81. There are 169 vowed sisters, with only 23 under the age of 70, and only two under 50. The numbers are similar for the Sisters of Charity: There are 304 members in the United States and Belize, but only 22 are under the age of 65. Charity’s members are younger in its south Asian monasteries, where only 60 percent of the sisters are over 65, and women still join as young as 18.

Despite health concerns and the trials of old age, many sisters here remain committed activists.

“We see what we are doing with the pipeline as another way to be teachers,” says Sister Antoinette Doyle, referring to the classroom teaching all sisters of Loretto were required to do until 1968. Well into her eighties, Doyle is tiny and delicate, with white hair fluffed around her face. “We’re not classroom teachers as much now, but we teach in the broader way.”
New mountain traditions

Unlike the Sisters of Loretto, the Benedictine Sisters of Mt. Tabor don’t have vast grounds or scores of members. The community is small and intimate, with only eight nuns and one resident oblate—a person who recommits themselves to the Benedictine order every year, rather than taking permanent vows. There was a chore chart on the fridge. Although they work all over the county during the day, the sisters have communal dinners every night after their evening prayers.

Their story begins with a pastoral letter from three archbishops, entitled “This Land Is Home to Me.” The letter, published in 1975, encouraged religious people to move to Appalachia and build places of renewal for people of all faiths.

“Dear sisters and brothers,” the letter reads, “we urge all of you not to stop living, to be a part of the rebirth of utopias, to recover and defend the struggling dream of Appalachia itself.”

Sisters Eileen Schepers and Judy Yunker first read the call while teaching special education classes in a Catholic school in southern Indiana, and both felt inspired by its message. Together they moved to Kentucky in 1979 and founded Mt. Tabor. Originally it was a subsidiary of a larger monastery in Indiana, but it became independent in 2000.

While theirs wasn’t the only convent in the area, Schepers and Yunker found themselves among mainly non-Catholics in a close-knit mountain culture. To break down some of the barriers, they cast off their billowy black habits and took up jeans and flannel shirts. Over the years, the local people and the sisters have built up a mutual respect and maintain many close relationships.

When Sister Eileen Schepers considers the meaning of sustainability, she talks about the sisters taking their place in a cosmic balance between the community, the planet, and the supernatural.

I saw what that meant in practice one evening in October. In the quiet hour before evening prayer, Sister Eileen chopped onions and peeled potatoes for soup in the sun-swept kitchen. She scraped the veggie peelings into a Kay’s Ice Cream bucket by the sink, and sprinkled the potatoes from twin salt and pepper shakers in the shape of smiling nuns.

Around quarter to five, the other sisters started drifting in from jobs, throwing down their briefcases and grocery bags in the doorway before pouring themselves coffee from a thermos. Everyone leaned against the counter, chatting while Sister Eileen spooned biscuit dough onto a baking tray. Just before she put the biscuits in the oven, they all made their way into the chapel for evening prayer.

In the entryway to the chapel, each woman donned long white robes. The garments brought them into a ritual similarity, and it became harder to tell them apart.

Sister Judy officiated at vespers while the sunset over the mountains behind her shone through the glass walls of the chapel. A few men and women sat in the pews, visitors and friends who had wandered in to share the daily tradition. As the prayers ended, we all stood in a circle and Yunker anointed each of our foreheads. Her touch was warm, firm, and personal. We don’t touch
each other enough anymore, I thought. I began to see how one touch full of loving intention could sustain someone throughout each day, and how that intention could spread outward to their neighbors and the world beyond.

*Ending or evolution?*

As more and more of the sisters age, who will continue the orders’ missions and care for their grounds? Who will stand up for local people, advocate for sustainability, and offer a place of quiet in which to contemplate nature?

Corlia Logsdon believes that local farmers, many of them Catholic, have embraced the nuns’ teachings. “I don’t think that is going to go away,” she said. “But I don’t think we could ever replace what they do because they do it with such passion.”

Then again, the Kentucky orders may continue to serve their communities for a long time to come. Rather than relying on an influx of young girls graduating from Catholic schools, some of the convents are recruiting nontraditional members. Co-members at Loretto can be male or female, married or single, and Catholic or not, so long as they are committed to peace and justice. Like Susan Classen, co-members can be deeply integrated in the life of Loretto, living at the motherhouse, serving on committees, and fully participating in campaigns for social change.

“Our philosophy of peace and justice will be carried on by the co-members,” said Skees, who worked side by side with Classen to fight the Bluegrass Pipeline.

At Mt. Tabor, the community decided in 2005 to become ecumenical, meaning they accept women from all Christian denominations. They currently have six Roman Catholics, two Episcopalians, and one non-affiliated Christian woman. “It’s deepening our understanding of Jesus’ call to live in unity with one another,” Schepers said.

Even as they reach out for new members, most of the women I spoke with looked forward to the future, whatever trials it may bring. They spoke of acceptance and transformation, bolstered by faith.

“If God is still calling us to be here, then he will direct us as to how that will happen,” Schepers explained. Another sister added that the Benedictine Rule teaches them not to think in terms of permanence, referring to a guide for monastic living that Benedictine monks and nuns have followed for about 1,500 years.

Susan Classen probably expressed Loretto’s attitude toward an uncertain future most succinctly. “We have a lot of letting go to do, and I don’t want to diminish that. But there’s also a sense that we’re part of something new.”

Yale Advances in Shaping Portfolio to Address Climate Change

Yale University has made progress in minimizing its endowment portfolio’s exposure to less environmentally sound investments such as stocks of companies that contribute to climate change, a letter released on Tuesday showed.

Yale generally does not manage its own investment directly but hires outside money managers to make decisions. Nearly two years ago, the Yale University Investment Office asked the firms that managed its endowment, then $20.8 billion, to assess their investments. The office asked managers to avoid investments that did not take sensible steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Yale endowment, while not the largest, is closely watched by other universities and money managers who invest in publicly held companies.

On Tuesday, David F. Swensen, Yale’s chief investment officer, released a letter to the school’s Advisory Committee on Investor Responsibility saying that Yale had taken several steps with climate change in mind.

Rather than simply selling investments as a response to political pressures, Yale was asking its managers to consider the financial risks of climate change and the risks that those investments held if governments did impose carbon taxes. “What we did was to take a look at the economics and come up with an economically driven decision,” he said in a telephone interview. Mr. Swensen added that the reaction was heartening.

“When we sent out the letter, one of our energy-focused managers, Arc Financial, did an analysis of a carbon audit of every single energy position in the portfolio and assessed the exposure to more stringent emissions regulation,” he said. “They are using it as a tool when they make new investments. They also published a white paper on the issue.”

In his letter to the committee, Mr. Swensen pointed out that the firm developed “a framework for assessing, reporting and comparing the greenhouse gas intensity of fossil fuel operations on an apples-to-apples basis.”

Two of Yale’s other money managers had positions that were not consistent with Yale’s approach, Mr. Swensen wrote. One held a small position in a company that engaged in the production and sale of coal. Another had interests on Yale’s behalf in two publicly traded oil sands producers. Though the investments were valued at only $10 million in total, those positions have since been sold.

While it would not have been as easy for Yale to sell investments in individual companies because it does not manage most of its money internally, it still has some separate accounts that
would allow the endowment to sell those stocks as it did when it sold holdings in South Africa and Sudan some years ago.

For example, the Yale endowment was close to making an investment in an energy company. “That investment had even been approved by the endowment’s board,” Mr. Swensen said. “But when we sat down with the company and brought up these issues, they denied it was a problem, so we did not go forward with the investment.”

The move came out of growing pressure from students concerned about environmental issues. Some universities have divested themselves of fossil fuel stocks, while others have resisted action, arguing that they do not want to terminate a dialogue with such companies.

Mr. Swensen pioneered the use of alternative investments in such areas as hedge funds. Over the 20-year period that ended June 30, 2015, Yale had the strongest performance record in the endowment world. For that fiscal year, Yale turned in an 11.5 percent increase, bringing its endowment to $25.6 billion.

Mr. Swensen’s average return over 10 years ending June 2015 was 10 percent, slightly eclipsed by returns at M.I.T., Bowdoin College and Princeton. At each of those schools, the endowment is led by a manager who trained under Mr. Swensen in the investment office at Yale.

Mr. Swensen recalled that the initial approach came up after Yale decided that it would not simply ask managers to sell shares in companies under question. Yale’s president, Peter Salovey, asked Mr. Swensen what the school could say, and the investment office came up with this plan.

April 12, 2016

Yale to partially divest from fossil fuels

By Finnegan Schick
Yale Daily News

Almost two years after Chief Investment Officer David Swensen added climate change awareness to Yale’s investment strategy, the endowment is starting to divest from fossil fuels.

In a Tuesday letter to the Yale community, Swensen reported that after months of talking with Yale’s external investment managers about the potential risks associated with investments in coal, oil, around $10 million of the endowment has been removed from two publicly-traded fossil fuel producers. Although Swensen did not release the names of the investment managers or companies involved, he said that by the end of Fiscal Year 2015, Yale’s $25.6 billion endowment had only minor exposure to the oil and coal industries.
“A few managers held positions we felt were inconsistent with our principles,” Swensen wrote. “Thermal coal miners and oil sands producers are two of the obvious industries that would suffer if regulation imposed the social cost of the carbon emissions on producers.”

In August 2014, two of Yale’s external managers were investing the endowment in industries that Swensen said were inconsistent with Yale’s principles. These included thermal coal miners and oil sands producers.

At Swensen’s prodding, both managing firms sold their coal and oil sands holdings. The founder of one of the firms agreed climate change and carbon pricing were “unknowable risks and fossil fuel producers with significant carbon footprints were declining businesses, a profile the firm preferred to avoid.”

Yale’s investment strategy combines in-house endowment management with a host of external investment managers. Swensen’s letter suggests that these external managers have listened to and showed support for the recommendations Swensen made in 2014. But instead of arguing for divestment on ethical grounds, as Fossil Free Yale has in the past, Swensen said the shift from some fossil fuel industries makes financial sense because regulations on the social cost carbon emissions could hurt industries like coal and oil.

“The Investments Office believes the risks of climate change, like any risks, should be incorporated in the evaluation of investment opportunities,” Swensen wrote. “Initiating and continuing a dialogue with our managers about those risks results in more thoughtful consideration of investment opportunities, higher quality and lower risk portfolios for yale, and better environmental outcomes.”

While climate activists have condemned Yale’s holdings in fossil fuel industries, Swensen said Yale’s investment managers should also consider the implications of climate change when evaluating farmland acquisitions in southern locations or the risks of owning low-lying coastal real estate, which could be vulnerable to rising sea levels.

For almost five years, student groups like Fossil Free Yale have urged the University to divest completely from the fossil fuel industry.

Yale’s endowment saw a 11.5 percent return in Fiscal Year 2015.

http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2016/04/12/yale-begins-divestment-from-fossil-fuels/
April 14, 2016

A Radical Alliance of Black and Green Could Save the World

But first the two movements will have to rediscover their shared roots in a fundamental critique of an economy and a society that value things more than lives.

By James Gustave Speth and J. Phillip Thompson III
The Nation

A beautiful thing is happening: Advocates for racial justice and for environmental protection—too often, movements quite distant from each other—are coming together in a new way. One can see it in the campaign of National People’s Action and the Climate Justice Alliance to push for a just and locally empowering transition to clean energy; in the New Economy Coalition’s inclusive membership and commitment to front-line communities; and in the projects of the Evergreen Cooperatives, in inner-city Cleveland. These new efforts (may they multiply!) are grounded on a strong foundation. When one explores the roots of both the environmental and civil-rights movements, one finds a strikingly similar radical critique. Both movements have called for a deep restructuring of society and the economy; in both cases, that call is based on an affirmation of life and the devoted care that life requires of us.

There is urgency in this fusing. Environmentalists must confront a haunting paradox. Our environmental organizations have grown ever stronger, more sophisticated, and better funded, winning many battles along the way. Yet, 46 years after the first Earth Day, we find ourselves on the cusp of a ruined planet. Climate change is bearing down on us, with dire consequences that disproportionately impact the poor. Around the world, we are losing biodiversity, forests, fisheries, and agricultural soils at a frightening rate. Fresh-water shortages multiply. Toxins accumulate in ecosystems and in our bodies. Something is terribly wrong, and more of the same cannot be the answer. It’s time for environmentalists to reassess and reboot. It’s time for a new environmentalism.

One can begin by asking: What is an environmental issue? We’d say that an environmental issue is any issue that affects environmental performance. When answered that way, environmental issues must include our failing political system and the erosion of democracy; the pervasive economic insecurity that paralyzes political action; and the materialistic, racially divisive, and completely anthropocentric values that dominate our culture. Environmental degradation is also driven by the triple imperatives of GDP growth at almost any cost, sustained corporate profits, and the projection of national power around the world.

These are among the root causes of our environmental decline, and if American environmentalists ever hope to succeed, we must find ways to address these systemic issues, which our movement has largely ignored. Environmentalists must revive our legacy of radical critique. In the movement’s early days in the 1960s and ’70s, those at the forefront asserted the need for a radical restructuring of the economy and society. Ecologist Barry Commoner was not alone in asking, in his 1971 best seller The Closing Circle, whether the operational requirements of the capitalist system are compatible with ecological imperatives. Commoner’s answer was no:
If we do the right things for the environment, he argued, it’s difficult to see how today’s economic system could continue to operate, as dependent as it is on accumulation and growth.

Ideas like these motivated many of us as we set out to build the modern environmental movement. Reviving these ideas will require a new democratic politics, one that reasserts the ascendancy of people power over money power and moves us far away from the plutocracy and corporatocracy we see today. Rebuilding people power requires a fusion of progressive efforts, which means that progressives of all stripes must come out of our individual silos to build an unprecedented social movement.

Many of us who took up the environmental cause in the late 1960s drew our primary inspiration from America’s black community and its struggle for civil rights. We had entered college when the civil-rights movement was in full swing; those of us who went on to law school studied civil-rights litigation and legislation. We had seen the impact of social movements, of citizens standing up and speaking out. We regained faith in government’s ability to do great good. The civil-rights movement and the ’60s generally had taught us that activism could succeed, that government could succeed, that wrongs could be righted.

How do we overcome our tragic legacy of subordination of nature to humans and humans to other humans?

A great tragedy, looking back, is that the booming environmental movement of the 1970s didn’t build on this civil-rights connection. Instead of forging relationships with communities of color, our movement became—for a long period—a movement composed heavily of middle-class whites. The more recent emphasis on environmental-justice concerns has helped build a bridge between environmentalists and communities of color. But the environmental and racial-justice movements remain distant, without major dialogue between them. In a world where there is a premium on a melding of progressive forces, this situation is doubly unfortunate.

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As in the environmental world, many in the black community are seeing limits to traditional advocacy. Achieving equal legal rights has enabled a small black upper-middle class to prosper, but it hasn’t prevented a widening wealth gap between most blacks and middle-class whites (not to mention the superrich). Nor has it prevented the reemergence of a racialized, two-tiered educational system or the mass criminalization of black youth. Faced with this realization, a number of black leaders, from grassroots organizers (such as those involved with Black Lives Matter and the Moral Mondays movement) to scholars, are calling for a rediscovery and revitalization of the civil-rights movement’s radical roots to address the deeper structural issues that America confronts.

The modern civil-rights movement had its origins in black advocacy before the Civil War, when radical activists called for a fundamental reordering of American society, beginning with its values. Martin Luther King Jr. turned increasingly to these broader issues in his later years. In his last presidential address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1967, King called upon his followers to “honestly face the fact that the movement must address itself to the
question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are 40 million poor people here. And one day we must ask the question, ‘Why are there 40 million poor people in America?’ And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. And I’m simply saying that more and more, we’ve got to begin to ask questions about the whole society. We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life’s marketplace. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.” Shortly after this address, King launched the Poor People’s Campaign.

Recently, Cornel West has brought together a remarkable collection of King’s speeches and writings. In his book *The Radical King*, West notes that later in his career, “King’s dream of a more free and democratic America and world had morphed into, in his words, ‘a nightmare.’… He called America a ‘sick society.’ At one point, King cried out in despair, ‘I have found out that all that I have been doing in trying to correct this system in America has been in vain. I am trying to get at the roots of it to see just what ought to be done. The whole thing will have to be done away with…. Are we integrating into a burning house?’” The last years of King’s life were devoted to reviving the radical roots of the civil-rights movement—and his own.

There is something profoundly hopeful in these calls to rediscover the civil-rights movement’s radical roots. Though they’re important in their own right, they are also important for environmentalists and the future of the environmental movement, and for progressivism generally.

Of course, the black struggle in America includes many strong currents of radical thought and action, more than in the environmental movement. Still, their shared roots are apparent, and the best traditions of both movements are very much aligned. Both see the origin of our country’s problems in the system as a whole: in capitalism and the values and institutions that support it. As King said, the whole edifice needs restructuring. The operating system by which we live and work is programmed for the wrong results, and it needs to be reprogrammed so that it genuinely sustains and restores human and natural communities. This task is daunting, but it is also rich with opportunity as a powerful basis for dialogue and collaboration between two of our country’s greatest social movements—one that holds the potential for a common language, a common critique, and a common agenda.

And there’s an even deeper and more profound set of considerations that unite black and green. Early crusaders for black freedom took special aim at the worldview and values that enabled a rapacious form of capitalism—the slave system—to emerge and flourish. Unlike later theories of socialism, which focused blame for economic inequality and racial divisions on economic self-interest and power differentials between classes, advocates like Sarah Grimké and Frederick Douglass emphasized the cultural origins of inequality and oppression—in precapitalist religion, in philosophy, and in social attitudes and prejudices. They held that there could not be a fundamental change in the economic or social system without a simultaneous revolution in deeply held values. Much later, King would revive the call for “a radical revolution of values.” He spoke with clarity about what was at stake: “We must rapidly begin the shift from a ‘thing-oriented’ society to a ‘person-oriented’ society. When machines and computers, profit motives
and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and extreme militarism are incapable of being conquered."

For King, “other-preservation is the first law of life. It is the first law of life precisely because we cannot preserve self without being concerned about preserving other selves.” He was referring to other humans, whereas environmentalists consider nature as the other about which humans must be concerned. Yet these two imperatives are ineluctably intertwined. The subjugation of nature and its life creates the pretext for the subjugation of human beings. Human dignity cannot be restored fully without first displacing the God-like status that Western thought has bestowed on some at the expense of others, as well as our instinct to sort life into hierarchies of value. Full dignity requires that humans be reconnected to each other and to the natural world that sustains all life.

* * *

The environmental movement criticizes the separation of human beings from the natural world and the treatment of nature as existing to serve human ends. This separation has strong roots in the Western tradition, from Aristotle to the Bible. The Genesis “dominion” mandate, for example, served the cause of elevating humans over nature and has had a powerful influence down through the centuries, an influence that efforts like the Forum on Religion and Ecology have sought vigorously to counter.

The cultural historian Thomas Berry has described the European settlement of North America as “a clash between the most anthropocentric culture that history has ever known with one of the most nature-centric cultures ever known.” European settlers in the Americas made a major distinction between themselves, whom they declared were created in God’s image, and indigenous peoples and Africans, whom they regarded as less than fully human. The escaped slave and abolitionist revolutionary Henry Highland Garnet, addressing a black audience in 1848, said, “Brethren, your oppressors…endeavor to make you as much like brutes as possible.” King noted that “a nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will ‘thingify’ them and make them things.”

This attitude of control and dominion over “soulless” matter and animals, including “inferior” nonwhites, is an evil embedded deeply in the culture of modern society. It also haunts and weakens our democracy. Absent genuine solidarity across racial groups, democracy can easily degenerate into a tyranny of the majority, as it has for much of American history. Unless we counter the white-supremacist attitude of control and domination over both nature and nonwhite others, the cross-racial solidarity we need in order to deepen democracy, change the economy, and save the environment will continue to elude us.

* * *

Civil-rights activists were fond of saying that all human destiny is intertwined. What many indigenous philosophies teach is that the destiny of all life is intertwined. In 1977, the elders of the Iroquois Confederacy issued a remarkable statement, “Basic Call to Consciousness: Address to the Western World”: “The Hau de no sau nee, or the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, has
existed on this land since the beginning of human memory…. Our essential message to the world is a basic call to consciousness. The destruction of the Native cultures and people is the same process which has destroyed and is destroying life on this planet. The technologies and social systems which have destroyed the animal and plant life are also destroying the Native people…. It is the people of the West, ultimately, who are the most oppressed and exploited. They are burdened by the weight of centuries of racism, sexism, and ignorance which has rendered their people insensitive to the true nature of their lives…. The people who are living on this planet need to break with the narrow concept of human liberation, and begin to see liberation as something which needs to be extended to the whole of the Natural World.”

How do we overcome our tragic legacy of subordinating nature to humans and humans to other humans? Surely one step is to see this historical pattern for what it is: the product of profound arrogance. Love, care, respect—we owe these to each other and to the natural world, and their common wellspring is an attitude of the heart, an abiding humility, awe, and reverence in the face of life’s wondrous creations: the very opposite of arrogance.

* * *

James Gustave Speth James Gustave Speth, a former dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the author of The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing From Crisis to Sustainability (Yale), is co-chair of the Democracy Collaborative’s Next System Project and is on the board of the New Economy Coalition.

J. Phillip Thompson III J. Phillip Thompson III is associate professor of Urban Planning and Politics at MIT.


April 18, 2016

A Western Soto Zen Buddhist Statement on the Climate Crisis

Soto Zen Buddhist Association
Press Release

*Today it is our responsibility as Buddhists and as human beings to respond to an unfolding human-made climate emergency that threatens life.*

This statement is a Zen Buddhist perspective on the climate emergency, expressing deep concern and pointing towards actions to halt and reverse climate change. It is a first step.
This statement is a unique collaboration among Soto Zen Buddhists in the west. Soto Zen, with its Japanese roots in the 13th century teachings of Eihei Dogen, emphasizes *zazen*, or seated meditation, developing a down-to-earth awareness of one’s own mind as expressed in all areas of daily life — at home, at work, and in society.

Among the largest of Japan’s Buddhist denominations, Soto Zen was brought to the west by teachers like Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, Taizan Maezumi Roshi, Dainin Katagiri Roshi, Jiyu Kennett Roshi, and other spiritual pioneers creating Zen centers throughout the continent. The members and teachers of these centers are deeply concerned about the fate of the earth, of our children, of their children, and all beings. The statement argues:

*There is an uncontestable scientific consensus that our addiction to fossil fuels and the resulting release of massive amounts of carbon has already reached a tipping point. The melting of polar ice presages floods in coastal regions and the destabilization of oceanic currents and whole populations of sea life...Severe and abnormal weather bring devastating hurricanes and cyclones around the world. Eminent biologists predict that petroleum-fueled “business as usual” will lead to the extinction of half of all species on Earth by the close of the twenty-first century.*

This statement is signed by Rev. Gengo Akiba, who serves as *sokan* (or bishop) of the Japanese Sotosho (or School) in the U.S., and as head of the Association of Soto Zen Buddhists (ASZB), representing more than 100 Zen priests authorized by Shotosho headquarters in Japan. It is jointly signed by Rev. Hozan Alan Senauke, president of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA), representing western Zen priests recognized in North America. This is the first time these organizations have collaborated on an urgent social issue.

Coming on the heels of the December 2015 United Nations Climate Conference in Paris and Pope Francis’s landmark encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, this statement intends to spur a wider discussion in Zen centers and communities, as well as encouraging denominations and religious communities of all faith traditions to express themselves about the fate of the earth.

Please share the statement with your community, friends, and local environmental and interfaith activists. Let us know how your community is addressing the climate crisis and how we might be of support to you

Peace & Dharma,
Hozan Alan Senauke

You can read the statement here:

For further information, contact the Soto Zen Buddhist Association
April 18, 2016

Delivering on the Promises of Paris: Why the World’s Muslims Are Demanding Climate Action Now

By Naser Haghamed, CEO of Islamic Relief Worldwide, an independent humanitarian and development organisation with a presence in over 40 countries worldwide

Huffington Post

The global Muslim community - made up of around 1.6 billion followers from world leaders to academics, from teachers and healthcare workers to business people and investors - has incredible collective power. Islam is the fastest-growing religion: 1 in 5 people today are Muslim, and Muslims will make up around 30% of the global population in 2050. As the newly appointed CEO of the world’s largest Islamic humanitarian and emergency relief NGO, I have witnessed this collective power harnessed to achieve immense and noble things, from providing shelter and relief to victims of floods and earthquakes to supporting refugees from war-torn countries. However, one longstanding crisis constantly threatens to undermine our efforts to make the world a safer place to live in: climate change. With world leaders gathering in New York on April 22nd to reaffirm the commitment they made to end the fossil fuel era in Paris last December, it is time for a reminder of just how important it is that they turn their promises into action without delay.

We can’t fall into the trap of thinking that climate change is a problem for the next generation whose effects won’t be felt for years. Climate change is devastating the world. Now. Many Muslim majority countries are on the front lines: a recent report from the Asian Development Bank showed that in Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim country and the fourth largest country in the world by population, climate change and the floods it causes are turning the poor into the ‘ultra-poor’. Most of the Middle East and North Africa is expected to become hotter and drier due to climate change, worsening droughts and exposing millions to water shortages. These changes provoke migration to other countries themselves facing resource deficiencies aggravated by climate change, thereby increasing the risk of violent conflict. This, and the ever-growing death toll among the world’s poorest who have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions, are unjust realities with which we are all too familiar at Islamic Relief.

Whilst more and more Muslims are experiencing the ravages of climate change first hand, more Muslims and governments are in turn starting to join the fight against climate change. Last August, Muslim scholars, experts and activists from over 20 countries called on the world’s Muslims to act on climate, with a particular demand to governments to move away from fossil fuel sources of energy and towards societies where 100% of energy is provided by renewable sources such as solar and wind - resources which many Islamic countries have in abundance - as early as possible. There is nothing radical in the claim that acting on climate change is a fundamental part of Islam: we know from the Qur’an that Allah has made each of us a steward (khalifah) of the earth - a ‘precious home’ with finite resources - in order to maintain its delicate
equilibrium (mizan). The fossil fuels that once brought us prosperity are now destroying this equilibrium and our prosperity along with it.

In January this year, the Islamic Development Bank agreed with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to use Islamic finance to combat climate change and food insecurity. Days later, in February, the world’s largest solar power plant opened in Morocco and could provide enough energy to power over 1 million homes by 2018. At the beginning of April, Saudi Arabia’s Deputy Crown Prince announced the country’s intention to create a $2 trillion megafund to help it transition to the post-oil era. Islamic Relief has also done its bit, building solar-powered homes in places like Bangladesh - the most disaster prone country in the world - and installing water harvesting systems in Kenya. However, the scale of the problem is so large that it will require a huge increase in efforts from Muslims and non-Muslims alike in solidarity.

That is why, together with 270 faith leaders, I have today issued an urgent call to faith communities around the world to divest their money from fossil fuels and reinvest it in renewable energy solutions. Together, we will reduce emissions in our homes, workplaces and centers of worship, standing in solidarity with those communities already facing the severe consequences of climate change. Such is my conviction, that on April 22nd, the day that a record number of countries will meet at the UN Headquarters in New York to sign the Paris Agreement, Islamic Relief Worldwide will be helping to launch a global Muslim network dedicated to tackling climate change issues in the Islamic world and will present the Islamic Climate ChangeDeclaration to the President of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Mogens Lykketoft. To show they are equally serious, countries must implement the Paris Agreement as soon as possible, phasing out the astonishingly high fossil fuel subsidies that the International Monetary Fund estimated would be $10 million every minute in 2015, and endeavoring to peak greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 to give us the best chance of going 100% renewable and to keep the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

We must urge world leaders to make a real difference to prevent climate change and help people of all faiths and none to adapt to the climate change that we are already experiencing, in accordance with Islamic teachings. Much is already being done by both governments and citizens, but we are not fulfilling our collective potential. With the World Humanitarian Summit taking place in Istanbul in May and the implementation-focused sequel to last December’s successful conference in Paris taking place in Morocco in November, 2016 has to be the year that the world starts delivering on its promises in earnest, before we lose further lives in the fight against climate change.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/naser-haghamed/delivering-on-the-promise_b_9717634.html

April 18, 2016

250 Faith Leaders Demand Nations Ratify Paris Climate Deal
By Jeremy Deaton & Jack Jenkins
Think Progress

Former U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres has credited faith groups for helping to advance the Paris Climate Agreement by supporting “holistic, equitable, but above all, ambitious climate action.”

Now, faith leaders are going one step further, calling for immediate ratification of the landmark international accord to curb global climate change.

In December, 196 nations adopted the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit warming to well below 2°C (3.6°F) above pre-industrial levels. While nations have agreed to the language of the accord, 55 parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change representing at least 55 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions must still ratify the agreement for it to enter into force.

Monday’s Interfaith Statement on Climate Change urges “all Heads of State to promptly sign and ratify the Paris Agreement.” More than 80 groups and 3,600 individuals of Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim faith have signed on, including the Dalai Lama, the head of the World Council of Churches and several Catholic cardinals. The declaration was assembled by a coalition of environmentally-minded religious organizations.

“The time for action is not five years from. It’s not 10 years from now. It’s now,” Rev. Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of Greenfaith, said in an interview. “I think that is our request and our deep desire, more than anything else, is that our leaders lead.”

The statement advocates the swift reduction of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions. It also calls for 100 percent renewable energy by 2050 and financing to help developing nations adapt to the hazards of a changing climate: persistent drought, extreme heat, dangerous storms, and rising seas.

“Climate change is hugely consequential for the developing world, where many countries have started to climb out of absolutely horrendous poverty to begin to enjoy a more decent life,” said Harper. “You’ve got storm activity that threatens to destroy the infrastructure that countries have begun to build. You’ve got previously fertile agricultural regions becoming drought-stricken and barren. Climate change puts poverty on steroids.”

According to a 2014 survey from the Public Religion Research Institute, majorities of most major American religious group — including 82 percent of Jewish Americans, 76 percent of black Protestants, and 69 percent of Hispanic Catholics — agree that dealing with climate change now will help prevent future economic problems. And while groups such as white evangelical Protestants remain skeptical of environmental science, even they are beginning to accrue widespread support for action on climate change.
In the lead-up to Paris negotiations, 1.8 million people signed faith-based petitions calling for climate action. Leaders of the all of the world’s major religions made statements, most notably, Pope Francis, who wrote that the climate “is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.”

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy said the pope’s encyclical on climate change was a “game changer.” According to a report from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 17 percent of Americans say the pope’s stance on global warming has shaped their view of the issue.

Climate change puts poverty on steroids

In a statement prior to the Paris negotiations, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said Pope Francis and other faith leaders reminded the world that “we have a moral responsibility to act in solidarity with the poor and most vulnerable who have done least to cause climate change and will suffer first and worst from its effects.”

Indeed, along with Francis’ groundbreaking, scientifically supported encyclical, Monday’s letter is the latest in a litany of first faith-based clarion calls asking world leaders to take action on climate change. In August 2015, a group of Islamic leaders from more than 20 countries published a sweeping declaration demanding nations to phase out the use of fossil fuels. In 2015 alone, the World Council of Churches, Unitarian Universalists, Union Seminary, and the Episcopal Church all divested from fossil fuels, and the Church in England divested $19 million from tar sands. The Vatican, for its part, also convened two recent gatherings on climate change: a five-day summit with on sustainability in 2014 that gathered microbiologists, economists, and legal scholars, to discuss the challenge of specifically on climate change, and another in 2015 where U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon delivered the opening address.

The sustained efforts of faith groups may prove vital to the success of the Paris Agreement. The pact sets out a long-term goal of net zero carbon emissions and includes a regular review process to ramp up countries’ carbon-cutting ambitions. It will be the task to advocates, including members of the faith community, to push policymakers to fulfill their commitment under the accord.

“We need all hands on deck to meet the climate challenge,” said Ban Ki-Moon in a recent statement. “Cities, schools, the business and investment communities, faith groups — all have a role to play.”

Now, that means pressing for the hasty ratification of the Paris Agreement, a first step on the long road ahead.

http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2016/04/18/3770408/interfaith-climate-statement-paris/

April 18, 2016

Maasai winner of environment prize protects land from grabbers
DAR ES SALAAM, April 18 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Dressed in his traditional red shawl, Edward Loure was watching over a herd of cattle grazing on dew-laden grass when he heard that his efforts to protect land rights had earned him one of the world's most prestigious environmental prizes.

The 44-year-old Maasai community leader in Tanzania's northern Manyara region is among six winners of the Goldman Environmental Prize, the world's largest award for grassroots campaigners, presented on Monday in San Francisco.

"I am very humbled to receive this honour, it's a great honour for the entire Maasai and Hadzabe community," Loure said of the prize which was also awarded to activists from Cambodia, Slovakia, Puerto Rico, the United States and Peru.

Seeing the indigenous people of northern Tanzania come under increasing pressure from commercial interests, Loure, who keeps more than 200 cattle, decided more than a decade ago to take action to protect his people's land and way of life.

"Some people call this land a 'conservation area', but for me and my family this is our home," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Semi-nomadic Maasai herders and hunter-gatherer Hadzabe communities in Tanzania's northern rangelands have lived side by side with wildlife for centuries, co-existing peacefully and safeguarding the region's fragile ecological balance.

However, rising numbers of large-scale land deals in Africa are pitting indigenous people against investors. Resource and tourism projects may have brought money and jobs but campaigners say marginalised communities face loss of land as well as the ability to practise traditional land management techniques.

For Loure, armed with both indigenous knowledge and a university degree in management, protecting his community and its ancient culture became his life's goal.

Working with the Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT), a grassroots land rights group in northern Tanzania, he began to examine tenure documentation to fight for land security.

Knowing a lack of official titles would let outsiders grab land they considered to be unclaimed, Loure set about formalising land rights for the Maasai and Hadzabe.

ANCIENT TRADITIONS

Loure and UCRT pioneered an approach that gives land titles to indigenous communities instead of individuals using a provision called the Certificate of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCRO) from the Tanzanian Village Land Act.
"I had what it takes to fight for the marginalised community's land rights to ensure that their territory is protected from land grabbers," he said.

"We identified specific areas for hunting, gathering and grazing. Then we prepared all the documents and through lobbying and advocacy, we finally achieved ownership of our land."

One of the oldest surviving cultures on earth, the Hadzabe have been living by hunting and gathering for some 40,000 years.

Although it was not common for a cattle-raising Maasai such as Loure to work on behalf of the Hadzabe people, he won their trust and a reputation for openness and fairness.

By 2013, after nearly a decade of work, Loure had secured more than 200,000 acres of land for the Maasai and Hadza using CCROs.

Loure also negotiated an agreement between the Hadzabe group and a non-profit environmental organisation, Carbon Tanzania, so the local community could be paid for the carbon sequestered in their forests.

Securing land rights has assured the survival of the Hadzabe people and their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, while generating modest revenue from carbon credits and carefully managed cultural tourism.

"The Hadzabe have a very rich culture that will be lost if their land is taken away from them," said Loure.

"They are very clever and have expertise in animal tracking, making traditional weapons to hunt and gather fruits, roots and honey from the forest."

NOMADS

Born to a Maasai tribe, Loure grew up in the Simanjiro plains, where his family led a peaceful nomadic life, raising their cattle among wildlife such as wildebeest and zebra.

In 1970, the Tanzanian government sealed off part of their village land to create Tarangire National Park and forcibly evicted the Maasai living within the park's boundaries.

Since then the Maasai have lost more than 150,000 acres of rangeland across northern Tanzania. Population growth and commercial demands have put pressure on areas managed by the Maasai and Hadzabe, often perceived as 'empty', said David Gordon, Executive Director of the Goldman Environmental Foundation.

Loure's success has inspired other indigenous groups to use the same strategy to protect land, and he is working to secure rights for communities to secure more than 970,000 acres of land, mostly in northern Tanzania.
"This work is challenging but all in all I love what I do: everything is done with the aim of seeing ways to help the pastoralists and the community," he said. (Editing by Ros Russell; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, property rights and climate change. Visit news.trust.org)


April 20, 2016

“We have to move now”: Islanders watch as their home disappears in the sea

By Mark Bowling
The Catholic Leader

ALMOST 6000 islanders to Australia’s north face forced evacuation as they watch their low-lying Pacific homelands disappear under rising seas.

Their plight amounts to just a drop in the ocean, and yet these island people take solace from Pope Francis’ call for action on climate change and the environment, and for the dignity of displaced persons.

The communities of four atoll groups – Carteret Islands, Mortlock Islands, Tasman Islands and Fead Islands – have already started moving to neighbouring Bougainville, because storm surges flood their islands, eating away their beaches and coastal lands, and washing away their food gardens.

On some of the most populated atolls deep wells are already contaminated by salt water and the people are forced to rely on coconut water and rainwater for drinking and everyday use.

The closest of the islands are more than 80km from Bougainville, which is an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea.

“I love my islands, we live by the sea and they provide for us every day, but we have to move now,” Ursula Rakova, a Catholic woman who was born in the Carterets, said.

“We are already suffering the impacts of climate change and rising sea levels – this is a matter of life and death.”

Ms Rakova heads the organisation, Tulele Peisa, which means “Sailing in the wind on our own”, and has the task of shifting displaced island families.
Ten families from the Carteret Islands have already moved to a 48ha plantation on Bougainville, donated by the Catholic Church.

But 140 families remain on the atolls, which are their traditional homes.

Ms Rakova is one of two island leaders visiting Australia on a speaking tour, pleading for government and community aid – in the name of respect and dignity.

She has described the loss of their homelands and their livelihoods, which has reduce them to amongst the world’s poorest people, and forced their displacement.

Ms Rakova took solace in Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on the environment Laudato Si (Praise Be), which highlighted the plight of those suffering directly from climate change.

The Pontiff called for “decisive action, here and now”, to stop environmental degradation and global warming, and argued that environmental damage was intimately linked to global inequality.

“We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity,” Pope Francis wrote.

During her visit to Australia, Ms Rakova is accompanied by Pais Taehu, a traditional chief from the Tasman Islands, the most far-flung of the island groups off Bougainville, and which support a population of 1500 people.

“We are affected the same way as the Carteret Islands. One day, somehow, whether we like it or not, we will have to move,” Chief Pais, who is chairman of the Temarai Association, a voice for the welfare of the outer atolls people, said.

“In the long run, it is better to act now than waiting for anything to happen.”

While the atoll peoples face the full force of climate change, Ms Rakova was critical of some of the international efforts to help her people.

“There have been training teams, research projects, media series, studies by lawyers – 27 programs – aimed at disaster risk reduction, such things as building up the sea walls and the gardens to stop saltwater intrusion and planting mangroves,” she said.

“Sea walls could cost billions of dollars. Replanting mangroves could take 10 years. In the meantime what do the island people do? Get drowned? Float in the sea? Eat sponges from the sea?

“It is important that we can master our own destiny. We want to accept assistance, but on our own terms. We know the situation on the ground and what needs to be done.”
Ms Rakova said she accepted that climate change had caused irreversible loss and damage to her islands and that displacement was inevitable.

She said funding would be better directed towards relocating people to the mainland, finding appropriate land and building houses.

“My vision is that Carteret Islanders are living sustainable livelihoods and are safe and secure wherever they are – that they have enough land space to grow food and cash crops to sustain their family incomes,” Ms Rakova said.

She singled out Caritas Australia and Catholic Mission as amongst the humanitarian organisations which had delivered focused and practical assistance so far.

This included providing agricultural projects on the mainland. But in a direct plea to government, community groups and individual benefactors, she said building mainland houses for the Carteret Islanders would cost about $8500 each or about $1.6 million for the islands’ 150 families.

“That is not a big cost for a neighbour as big as Australia,” she said.

Ms Rakova said direct support for community-based relocation projects like Tulele Peisa was better than aid money being channelled through government projects.

Caritas Australia’s chief executive officer Paul O’Callaghan said, as one of the highest per capita emitters in the world, Australia had a special responsibility to show leadership in mitigating and preventing the negative impacts of climate change in the Pacific region.

Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania executive committee president Archbishop John Ribat of Port Moresby, said he was heartened by growing world concern about climate change and global warming.

“Pope Francis in his recent encyclical Laudato Si invites – indeed urges – the global human family to see our planet and its peoples as our universal home,” he said.

“The protection of the atmosphere and the oceans are powerful examples of the need for political representatives and leaders of nations to take responsibility for the wellbeing of peoples beyond their own particular shores or borders.”

Australian Religious Response to Climate Change president Thea Ormerod said ratifying the Paris Agreement was a first step for Australia to do its fair share of accelerating the shift to low-carbon technologies and building resilience in vulnerable countries.

“In many places across this fragile planet of ours, global warming is no longer just a theory. It is destroying lives and livelihoods,” she said.

Donations can be made directly via an account for Tulele Peisa administered by the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane. Email Sr Wendy Flannery at wendy.flannery@gmail.com.
April 21, 2016

In Photos: The Indigenous Protectors of the World's Most Sacred Places

All around the world, sites sacred to indigenous people are besieged by mining, tourism, and other threats. Meet the groups safeguarding and restoring them.

By Christopher McLeod
YES! Magazine

Back in the 1990s, there was an intense debate among my Native American friends about whether public education about sacred places would be a good idea. One activist argued forcefully that: “Sacred places don’t need a PR campaign. They need ceremony and prayer.” But many places, from the San Francisco Peaks and Black Mesa in the Southwest to Bear Butte and Devils Tower in the Black Hills, were being desecrated. Ski resorts. Coal stripmines. New Agers. Rock climbers. Dams. While some battles revealed outright racism, other sacred sites were being destroyed out of ignorance. Though tradition long mandated that “sacred” meant “secret,” more people began to agree that limited information about sacred places should be shared in order to nurture understanding, build respect, and inspire allies.

“We use the word ‘sacred.’ That’s not an Indian word. That comes from Europe,” Onondaga elder Oren Lyons explained to me during an interview for the Standing on Sacred Ground film series. “It comes from your churches. We have our own way to say things. The way we use it, it’s a place to be respected, a place to be careful.”

Around the planet, indigenous communities still guard their sacred places—mountains, springs, rivers, caves, forests, medicinal plant gardens, burials of beloved ancestors. Everywhere it seems these places are under siege. Each attack is met with a spirited defense because sacred places anchor cultures. They provide meaning. They give life, give information, heal, and offer visions and instructions about how to live, how to adapt, how to be resilient.

There have been many inspiring victories. At Kakadu in Australia, Aboriginal leaders stopped uranium mining and protected a World Heritage Site. At Devils Tower in Wyoming, the National Park Service consulted with Lakota elders and developed a plan to discourage climbing. Native Hawaiians stopped U.S. Navy bombardment of sacred Kaho‘olawe island and are now restoring it spiritually and ecologically as a cultural refuge. But battles rage on at Mauna Kea, on Oak Flat, in the Amazon.

On Earth Day, let us all celebrate the sacred lands and territories of our indigenous friends. And let’s pledge to work harder to respect these supremely important places.
The following photos were shot as we produced the Standing on Sacred Ground films and are shared out of respect—to help us all explore the mystery of what is sacred.

Winnemem Wintu Chief Caleen Sisk leads a sunrise prayer ceremony at Mt. Shasta in California. The Winnemem are fighting a U.S. government plan to raise the height of nearby Shasta Dam, which would flood ancestral village sites, burials, and dozens of sacred places on the McCloud River. The Winnemem wish to restore the Chinook salmon to the river that flows through their homeland.

In the Altai Republic of Russia, shaman Maria Amanchina has worked for years to protect the Ukok Plateau, a sacred burial area and World Heritage Site that’s home to endangered snow leopards. The government-owned energy giant, Gazprom, plans to build a natural gas pipeline to China through this remote mountain plateau. Already, Russian archaeologists have unearthed indigenous bodies here for museum display.

Military and consumer demand propels mining operations into the most remote regions of the planet. In Papua New Guinea, John Kepma and his family were forcibly relocated by Chinese-government-owned RamuNico because their village sat atop a rich nickel-cobalt deposit. Brothers John and Peter Kepma resisted for years, but police came early one morning and destroyed their homes. Mine runoff and chemicals are now polluting the sacred Ramu River and refinery waste is dumped in the sea.

A moral outrage is unfolding in the tar sands region of Alberta, Canada—polluted water seeping through unlined waste ponds, deformed fish, lethal cancers in First Nations communities, and inadequate science serving an industry that has long been in bed with the government. Few Americans realize they are burning tar sands oil in their cars, with 1.4 million barrels per day being imported into the United States, even without the Keystone XL pipeline.

In the Gamo Highlands of Ethiopia, village elders manage sacred meadows and forests according to age-old customary laws and consensus decision-making that starts and ends with prayer. Shortly after this photo was taken in sacred Dorbo Meadow, evangelical Christians disrupted a marriage and initiation ceremony by erecting poles for a church in the heart of the meadow. According to traditional custom, the vivid green grass carpet of Dorbo Meadow must never be pierced. A riot erupted, which we captured in our documentary film.

Q’eros women embark on a pilgrimage to the Quyllur Rit’i festival in the heart of the Peruvian Andes. They pass before sacred Mt. Ausangate, whose glaciers are rapidly disappearing as the planet warms. Q’eros leaders make prayers and offerings to the apus, the powerful spirits of the mountains, and wonder if they have in some way failed to show proper respect, while carbon emissions in far away places are the more likely cause of their water’s demise.

Gudangi women and children dance for the Rainbow Serpent along the McArthur River in Australia’s Northern Territory. The river is held sacred by local Aboriginal clans whose Dreamtime stories include the story of the Rainbow Serpent who created the river and lives forever nearby. One of the largest zinc deposits in the world lies directly beneath the riverbed and when mining giant Xstrata started relocating the river to strip-mine the zinc, Aboriginal
leaders sued and stopped the bulldozers. But the Northern Territory Parliament rewrote the law and the river channel was moved.

Native Hawaiians arrive on the sacred island of Kahoʻolawe, where they are restoring the island after 50 years of target practice bombing by the U.S. Navy. A decades-long resistance movement based on aloha ʻaina, love for the land, won the island back. Today, Hawaiians are redefining “restoration” as they incorporate spiritual ceremony and cultural revival into their ecological practices.

Christopher “Toby” McLeod wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Toby directs the Sacred Land Film Project. His most recent film series, the award-winning Standing on Sacred Ground, tells the stories of eight embattled indigenous communities around the world. It is now airing on public television stations, including The PBS WORLD Channel. First Nations Experience (FNX), a network of 16 PBS stations reaching Indian Country, started broadcasting the series on Tuesday, concluding on Earth Day at 9 PM (ET). Check local listings. Read more at StandingOnSacredGround.org.


April 22, 2016

Brazil suspends Amazon dam project over fears for indigenous people

By Chris Arsenault
Reuters

RIO DE JANEIRO (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Land rights campaigners have welcomed the suspension of a mega-dam project in Brazil's Amazon basin which would have flooded an area the size of New York City and displaced indigenous communities.

The São Luiz do Tapajós dam would have forced Munduruku indigenous people out of their traditional territory while disrupting the Amazon ecosystem, a campaigner said on Friday.

The move by Brazil's environment agency IBAMA to suspend construction permits for the dam followed a report by the country's National Indian Foundation which said the project would have violated indigenous land rights protected under Brazil's constitution.

"The areas that would have been flooded include sites of important religious and cultural significance," Brent Millikan, a Brasilia-based campaigner with the non-profit rights group International Rivers told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"The local communities have a huge amount of knowledge about the resources where they are - if they were forced off the land and into cities they would become unskilled workers."
Brazil's environment agency said this week that it suspended licensing due to "the infeasibility of the project from the perspective of indigenous issues". The dam would have flooded 178,000 hectares of land.

The decision comes as South America's largest country faces a political crisis following a congressional vote to impeach President Dilma Rousseff who is embroiled in a corruption scandal as the nation grapples with its worst recession since the 1930s.

Supporters of the dam, which was expected to produce around 8,000 megawatts of electricity, say it would have provided green power and jobs in a country which needs both.

Hydroelectric power plants produce about 80 percent of the electricity generated in Brazil.

Backers of the dam have a 90 day period where they can appeal the suspension and submit revised plans on the size of the flooded area and how to deal with the local indigenous population, Millikan said.

http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-environment-dam-idUSKCN0XJ2AM

April 22, 2016

On Earth Day, Pope Francis calls all ‘to see the world through the eyes of God the Creator’

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

See the world through the eyes of the Creator, Pope Francis said at the end of his general audience in St. Peter’s Square on Wednesday, marking Earth Day.

“I exhort everyone to see the world through the eyes of God the Creator: the earth is an environment to be safeguarded, a garden to be cultivated,” he said.

“The relationship of mankind with nature must not be conducted with greed, manipulation and exploitation, but it must conserve the divine harmony that exists between creatures and Creation within the logic of respect and care, so it can be put to the service of our brothers, also of future generations,” the pope said.

In his universal prayer intention for April, Francis prayed “That people may learn to respect creation and care for it as a gift of God.” On Tuesday, he said on Twitter:

In addition, the Global Catholic Climate Movement has designated April as Care4Creation Month and has produced resources and prayers that communities can use in observing it.
Since its beginning in the U.S. in 1970, Earth Day has grown into the largest worldwide civic observance, according to the Earth Day Network, which estimated more than 1 billion people participate in activities each April 22.

Earth Day was the brainchild of U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, who sought a way to place environmental protection on the national agenda at a time when pollution was compounding. The Democratic senator enlisted college students to organize and coordinate the day. More than 20 million Americans attended Earth Day festivities on April 22, 1970, aligning a broad spectrum of cohorts: Democrats and Republicans, urban and rural communities, labor and business leaders.

The energy that surfaced that day has been credited with spurring the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (1970) and the passage of signature environmental legislation, such as the Clean Air Act (1970), the Clean Water Act (1972) and the Endangered Species Act (1973) -- all initiatives enacted under President Richard Nixon.

Earth Day has since expanded to 192 countries, according to the Earth Day Network.

http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/earth-day-pope-francis-calls-all-see-world-through-eyes-god-creator

April 22, 2016

Catholics join Earth Day effort to plant 7.8 billion trees

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The new juniper tree at Light of Hearts Villa, in Bedford, Ohio, offers its nearly 100 residents another scenic outpost in the landscape that often draws deer, fox and recently, a peregrine falcon.

The tree was planted as part of the assisted-living community's Earth Day celebration on Thursday. Some of the 25 residents in attendance braved the weather with umbrellas to partake in the prayer and planting outside, while others watched from drier conditions inside.

Sr. Regina Kusnir said the Sisters of Charity ministry does much of the planting, viewing them as partners in their mission to help others be "light of heart." Many of their residents, in their 80s and 90s, hold "great respect for the earth," she said, since many grew up on farms and relied on family and community gardens for their meals.

"That sense of blessing the earth for its generosity to us and we being responsible stewards is something that I find is very meaningful in their lives," said Kusnir, the director of pastoral and special ministries.
The Light of Hearts Villa service relied on a program produced by the Catholic Climate Covenant to help Catholics plan Earth Day celebrations. In previous years, the nearly 10-year-old Covenant has primarily produced programs around the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi (Oct. 4). This year marks their first foray into Earth Day.

"There's a hunger for this in the faith community," Paz Artaza-Regan, a program manager for the Covenant, told NCR.

The "Trees for the Earth" program includes an opening prayer from "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home," along with Scripture readings, videos and discussion questions rooted in the centrality of trees and plants in the web of life.

The program grew from a broader effort orchestrated by the Earth Day Network, which has positioned the 46th Earth Day -- a holiday that began in the U.S. but has since spread worldwide -- around the act of planting trees. The network has set a goal of planting 7.8 billion trees, or one for each person on Earth, by the 50th anniversary of Earth Day in 2020.

Planting trees, the Earth Day Network says, "will serve as the foundation of a cleaner, healthier and more sustainable planet for all." Part of that is the role trees play in addressing climate change.

Forests operate naturally as "carbon sinks" in capturing and storing carbon. According to the third National Climate Assessment, released in 2014, U.S. forests represent "an important national 'sink'" by storing the equivalent of "roughly 25 years of U.S. heat-trapping gas emissions." In 2011, American forests and wood products absorbed and stored about 16 percent of all carbon emissions from fossil fuels; the Assessment found that active establishment and planting of forests in the next century has the potential to almost double that storage capacity.

But how much carbon forests absorb in the future largely depends on how they're managed, and how pervasive threats to trees from a warming climate -- drought, wildfire, invasive insect species -- ultimately become.

In Laudato Si’, Francis spoke of trees, which he acknowledge assist in mitigating climate change, most often through their loss, typically through economic pursuits.

“As long as the clearing of a forest increases production, no one calculates the losses entailed in the desertification of the land, the harm done to biodiversity or the increased pollution,” he wrote.

The pope grouped planting trees among what he called “a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions.”

“Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us … All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings,” he said in Paragraph 211, later adding “Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life.”
In a bit of symbolism, as communities across the globe used Earth Day for the simple act of planting trees, roughly 170 world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York to plant pen to paper in officially signing the historic Paris Agreement, the international roadmap for addressing climate change.

The "Trees of the Earth" toolkit draws information from the Earth Day Network -- such as an acre of mature trees in one year captures the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide emitted by an average car driving 26,000 miles -- but adds passages from Genesis and from Matthew's Gospel, the parable of the sower.

Beyond climate change, it discusses the importance trees play in keeping air clean and in building communities. It highlights one group of women in Africa who rely on planting trees for income through carbon credits from high-emissions companies.

While it offers resources for planting a tree, it also suggests alternatives, such as donating to Catholic Relief Services or TIST, the group of African farmers highlighted in the program. Other options include distributing seeds, bulletin inserts, or blessing creation care teams at weekend Masses.

About 1,000 groups downloaded the Earth Day program, said Artaza-Regan, who has been receiving updates on how people have incorporated it in their own Earth Day plans.

Numerous congregations of women religious across the country have planned to use "Trees of the Earth" in prayer services.

The Chicago archdiocese has sent weekly Laudato Si'-inspired email reflections and planned an Earth Day-focused Mass Friday that will include aspects from the closing prayer from the Catholic Climate Covenant program.

The Newman Catholic Center at Eastern Illinois University planned a discussion Friday on the detrimental effects of climate change on basic needs, and will screen the animated film "The Lorax" on Sunday.

At Bellarmine Chapel at Xavier University, in Cincinnati, they plan to distribute apple trees and milkweed seeds to parishioners at Masses all week.

In Eden Prairie, Minn., Pax Christi Catholic Community is holding Saturday an "Earth Day Retreat" where Fr. Larry Snyder, former head of Catholic Charities USA, will speak.

At Our Mother of Peace School in Church Point, La., this year marked their first Earth Day celebration. That's in part thanks to Assistant Principal Sr. Joel Miller.

"Well, my first question was 'Are y'all involved in Earth Day?' and they just kind of looked puzzled. I could tell right away they were not," she said.
Miller, who through her Marianites of Holy Cross congregation has been engaged in environmental issues for about a decade, decided it was time to change that. She offered materials to her teachers and then watched with amazement at how quickly they embraced it, the school's hallways soon decorated by drawings from the kindergarten, first- and second-grade classes.

"I was just filled with joy, because I didn't expect that much of a reaction," she said.

Throughout the week, Our Mother of Peace has begun their day with prayers concerning the Earth. In addition to coloring, the younger classes have talked about recycling, while all classes have looked at the stark figures of how wasted water, food and energy.

The Earth Week exercise, Miller said, has helped the children -- as well as the adults -- recognize what is happening around them and how their actions can impact other people and the planet.

"When you see a little kindergarten child saying, 'I will never waste water again,' I think that plants a seed that hopefully they will use for the rest of their lives and begin to do other things with it," she said.

A few grades up and about 400 miles west, students at St. Edward's University, in Austin, Texas, held their own Earth Week. Earlier days hosted a discussion of the Paris Agreement, an Earth Day Fair, a local creek clean-up, and sustainable clothing swap. The big moment comes Friday, when they will plant trees marking their new designation as a Tree Campus USA college.

Cristina Bordin, sustainability coordinator for the school, told NCR the Tree Campus recognition, a program through the Arbor Day Foundation, comes as a cherry on top of the work the 160-acre campus began in 1999 through its long-term landscape plan. Since then, the campus has planted nearly 1,000 trees.

At the ceremony Friday they will plant 10 more. The seed to planting so many trees was initially pragmatic: It gets hot in Texas, and trees provide shade and help keep temperatures cooler – "so we're not a heat island," Bordin said.

The trees were also seen as a way to make the campus more pedestrian and to create community spaces. A 350-year-old Sorin Oak tree at the school's center already serves as a gathering point and source of campus pride.

The act of planting a tree, beginning with a seed buried deep in the earth, is a sign of growth, Kusnir said.

"We're each a kind of tree and we have the seeds of God's love and inspiration in us. And we grow branches and touch other people, and let them rest within the comfort of our love and care," she said.

Back in Church Point, Earth Day Week at Our Mother of Peace School has included plenty of prayers, coloring and environmental discussion, but so far hasn't included a tree-planting. A local
resident, though, has approached the school about doing just that, perhaps next week. Asked about the current landscape of the school, the assistant principal Miller said its roughly four acres already have numerous trees.

"But you know, there can always be more," she said.

http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/catholics-join-earth-day-effort-plant-78-billion-trees

April 23, 2016
Rouhani opens Intl. Seminar on Environment, Religion, Culture
Mehr News Agency
TEHRAN (MNA) – The 2nd 'International Seminar on Environment, Religion, and Culture' was opened at Tehran’s Pardisan Park Sat. morning with the presence of President Rouhani and participants of 15 countries.

Organized by the Islamic Republic of Iran and with the active collaboration of the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the second edition of this invitational event entitled, the ‘International Seminar on Environment, Religion, and Culture,’ is currently underway at Pardisan Park in Tehran and will continue until Sunday.

The seminar aims to convey this message to the world that ‘dialogue’ is the foundation of any kind of common understanding among human beings, societies, cultures and religions.

The event has been organized in line with the general environmental policies issued by Leader Ayat. Khamenei, and seeks to promote further peace and freedom in the world.

Speakers and foreign guests from 15 countries which encompass all continents and are of nine religions including Christianity, Catholicism, Sunni Islam, Shia Islam, Jainism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Buddhism, will participate in five specialized panels to discuss ideas and exchange views.

The seminar is being held due to the successful and positive results of the 1st seminar on Environment, Culture and Religion in 2011 as well as the 2005 Conference on Environment, Peace and Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures with the support and participation of UNESCO and the United Nations.

The framework of this seminar is a ‘transformation of our world: 2030 agenda for sustainable development’ which has been confirmed as the action plan for people, our planet and prosperity in the recent meeting of the United Nations in New York, September 15.

April 24, 2016

Minding Animals Bulletin 32

https://mindinganimals.com/bulletins/
https://mindinganimalsinternational.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/bulletin-32.pdf

April 26, 2016

The Power of Memory: Chernobyl Thirty Years Later

By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Thirty years ago, in the early morning of April 26, 1986, even as the Orthodox Church was about to embark on its holiest of weeks leading to the joy of Easter, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine exploded, creating the worst nuclear disaster that the world had seen up to that time.

The consequences of the disaster were felt far and wide: in the extension of contaminating radioactive particles into Russia, Belarus, as well as countries to the North and West; in human desertion and ecological destruction of vast surrounding areas; in long-lasting and permanent damage to health and loss of human life estimated at one million premature deaths.

With this painful background of experience and knowledge, what can we conclude as conscientious citizens? What can we resolve as committed believers? And what can we profess as responsible leaders?

First, we must never forget. *We must forever remember.* We must recall the names of all those, known and unknown, who lost their lives as a result of our actions, just as we must retain vivid in our heart and mind the tragic consequences of our failures. Memory is a powerful attribute in religion, and particularly in Christianity where it becomes a transformative force. It is the way in which we relate to the past, change our attitude and conduct in the present, and assume responsibility for the future.

Second, we have reached a point in technological development where *we must learn to say “No!”* to technologies with destructive side effects. We are in dire need of an ethic of technology. In the Orthodox Church, we profess and confess that God’s spirit is “everywhere present and fills all things” (From a Prayer to the Holy Spirit). However, we must also begin to embrace a worldview that declares and demonstrates the biblical conviction that “the earth is God’s and everything in it” (Psalm 23.1) so that we may refrain from harming the earth or destroying the life on it. We have been gifted with unique resources of a beautiful planet. However, these resources of underground carbon are not unlimited—whether they are the oil of the Arctic or the tar sands of Canada, whether they are the coal of Australia or the gas in Eastern Europe. Moreover, with regard to nuclear energy specifically, we cannot assess success or
sustainability purely in terms of financial profit—the disasters at Three Mile Island (1979), Chernobyl (1986), and Fukushima (2011) have amply demonstrated the human, financial, and ecological cost. Nor, indeed, can we ignore the other problems of nuclear power, such as waste disposal and vulnerability to terrorist attacks.

Third, we have reached a point in our economic development where we must learn to say “Enough!” to the mentality of consumerism and the competition of market economy. It is time to be honest with ourselves and with God, acknowledging that the Christian gospel is not always really or readily compatible with the ways of the world; indeed, the message of Jesus Christ and the Church Fathers aims at restraining the crude passions of greed and avarice.

Finally, we have reached a point in our global civilization where we must learn to say “Yes!” to another reality beyond ourselves, to the Creator of all creation, before whom we should kneel in humility and surrender in prayer, recognizing that he and everything he created is for all, not just our own selfish desires. Perhaps the greatest lesson and recollection from Chernobyl is that we must share the world with all people. What we do in the world and for the world affects people’s lives—their health (with the inestimable number of cancer victims), their nourishment (with the inconceivable contamination of food), as well as future generations (whether with the insufferable birth defects and the indiscernible impact on our children). This is the lesson that, in the Church, we call communion. It is the foremost definition of “God as love” (1 John 4.8) and the highest expression of human love.

This new kind of thinking—this new ethic that aspires to “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21.1)—is what should be taught in every parish and every corner of the world. Chernobyl should be a lesson about restraint and sharing. We must show compassion; we must demonstrate respect; and we must make peace, not just with our neighbors, but also with the whole of creation.

As the Mother Church of Ukraine, we fervently pray that the memory of Chernobyl be eternal and not in vain.

https://www.patriarchate.org/-/the-power-of-memory-chernobyl-thirty-years-later?inheritRedirect=true

April 27, 2016

Confronting climate change is our moral obligation

By Most Reverend Oscar Cantú and Most Reverend Broderick Pabillo
The Hill

We are bishops from the global South and North, united by faith and humanity. As pastors, we seek to comfort the young and the old, the healthy and the infirm.
We try to ensure that the powerless are heard and the powerful are engaged. In accordance with these values, we joined hands with Pope Francis to call upon our leaders to protect all of creation from ecological calamity as they prepared to sign the Paris climate change accord April 22 at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

In his encyclical *Laudato Sí*, Pope Francis discussed the grave implications of climate change and called on all people, not just Catholics, to protect the earth—the common inheritance of all. The Pope’s message was heard clearly last December in Paris, where the world’s countries reached an historic agreement to reduce carbon pollution and be held accountable for their actions to do so. Now, as world leaders prepare to formally sign the agreement and bring it into force, we wish to elevate the Pope’s message of our shared moral obligation to protect creation for generations to come.

Climate change threatens all life—and the life cycle of the earth itself. Climate change attacks the human dignity of those most affected, with the least fortunate bearing a disproportionate burden from its impacts. What the scientific consensus tells us, and what real observations and experiences around the world have shown us, is that humanity’s current reliance on fossil fuels is altering the atmosphere. Warmer oceans and higher temperatures are already being connected with increased sea levels, storm surges, rainfall intensities and droughts, as well as disruptions in growing seasons and migratory patterns.

In *Laudato Sí*, Pope Francis highlighted the urgency of our task: “Technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay.” We have a moral obligation to reduce carbon pollution, to protect people from climate impacts and to safeguard human health.

Heeding Pope Francis’ call—in response to the warnings of major scientific bodies—we encourage all people, and especially Catholic leaders, to continue to foster dialogue in local communities and among policymakers to find ways to address today’s social and ecological crises. Many Catholic parishes, schools, hospitals, and other organizations are already reducing carbon pollution with energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Catholic citizens and organizations that demand bold, science-based climate policies from elected officials can bring change and results to their communities.

Those of us living in the industrialized nations in the global North know that we are disproportionately responsible for carbon pollution. Those of us living in developing nations in the global South know that we are disproportionately impacted by climate change. In solidarity, then, we must all examine our lifestyles with sobriety and support public policies that place the common good of everyone over the narrow self-interests of the few.

The international negotiations in Paris give us reason to be optimistic. U.S. leadership on climate change is encouraging other nations to do likewise, and repay what Pope Francis calls an “ecological debt” to those historically least responsible for climate change. Policies like the Clean Power Plan will drive down carbon pollution, while the global Green Climate Fund will help developing nations adapt to the effects of climate change and adopt clean energy
technologies. World leaders must not back down from their commitments, and should continue to augment efforts to reduce the dangerous pollution that causes climate change.

As bishops from different countries, we find hope in the many Catholic organizations that are helping spread Pope Francis’s call to care for our common home. With the help of countless other faith-based organizations and people of goodwill, moral appeals can join with the economic, political, and cultural arguments for addressing climate change. Together, we must avert the catastrophic consequences of indifference and inaction, and safeguard creation for all of humanity.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú, Bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico; Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Most Reverend Broderick Pabillo, Auxiliary Bishop of Manila; Chairman of the Committee on the Laity, Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines.


April 27, 2016

Zambia’s Catholic Bishops call for action on environment

Vatican Radio

Zambia’s Catholic Bishops say they appreciate that the country still needs mining and large-scale farming. The Bishops have acknowledged that mining contributes to the country’s development and provides much-needed jobs. They also say large scale agriculture is still necessary for increased food production in the country.

Nevertheless, the Bishops want the country’s mining companies and those in the agricultural sector to be more responsive to the needs of the environment and accountable to local communities affected by their activities.

“Recognising that mining contributes to job and wealth creation of the country, we, however, challenge the mining sector to begin to practice responsible mining that takes into account the needs of the environment,” the Bishops say in a communiqué issued at the end of a national environmental conference held in Lusaka this week.

President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson, was the principal guest speaker at the conference. On Monday Cardinal Turkson addressed the meeting and gave an overview of Pope Francis’ encyclical, Laudato si. Outlining key issues in the document, the Cardinal clarified that Pope Francis was not anti-business.

The national conference dubbed the “Laudato si conference” was organised by the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), through its Department of Caritas Zambia. The Jesuit Centre for
Theological Reflection (JCTR) co-hosted the national conference whose theme was, ‘Care for Our Common Home in the Context of Large Scale Investments – Mining and Agriculture.’ The meeting was held at Lusaka’s Government Complex from 25 to 26 April.

Zambia’s open-door investment policy meant to encourage foreign multinational corporations to invest in the country has been criticised for prioritising investors at the expense of poor ordinary Zambians.

Zambia is one of the leading producers of copper and emeralds. The government has given over-reaching incentives such as extended tax breaks to lure the multinationals into investing.

Observers say that the real cost of mining and agricultural investment is borne by the poor who are usually evicted from their ancestral land to make room for new investment projects. The environment also suffers. In some areas, locals accuse mine owners of polluting rivers and sources of drinking water. One such case is now making its way at a London court. Dominic Lungowe and 1,812 others have commenced proceedings at London’s High Court of Technology and Construction.

The matter, Dominic Liswaniso Lungowe and others versus Vedanta Resources PLC, and its subsidiary Konkola Copper Mine (KCM) has ignited much debate in the country.

Dominic and others allege that they have suffered various health problems due to negligence by the international mining giant, Vedanta Resources and its subsidiary KCM. The Zambian Government is equally not happy with the suit and Zambian President Edgar Lungu; last month criticised former Attorney General, Musa Mwenye for prosecuting the Vedanta Resources and KCM matter in a UK court.

(Fr. Paul Samasumo, Vatican Radio)

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May 2016

Global Responsibility and the Enhancement of Life

By William Schweiker

De Ethica. A Journal of Philosophical, Theological and Applied Ethics Vol. 3:1

This article advances a conception of global ethics in terms of the centrality of responsibility to the moral life and also the moral good of the enhancement of life. In contrast to some forms of global ethics, the article also seeks to warrant the use of religious sources in developing such an
ethics. Specifically, the article seeks to demonstrate the greater adequacy of a global ethics of responsibility for the enhancement of life against rival conceptions developed in terms of Human Rights discourse or the so-called Capabilities Approach. The article ends with a conception of ‘conscience’ as the mode of human moral being and the experience of religious transcendence within the domains of human social and historical life. From this idea, conscience is specified a human right and capacity to determine the humane use of religious resources and also the norm for the rejection of inhumane expressions of religion within global ethics.

http://www.de-ethica.com/archive/articles/v3/i1/a05/de_ethica_16v3i1a05.pdf

May 2016

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute Newsletter

http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=19a325b944&e=a758405790

May 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=ef58e56a98&e=709fe41ec4

May 2016

Unfriendly Climate

Texas Tech’s Katharine Hayhoe is one of the most respected experts on global warming in the country. She’s also an evangelical Christian who is trying to connect with the very people who most doubt her research. Too bad the temperature keeps rising.

By Sonia Smith
Texas Monthly

One clear day last spring, Katharine Hayhoe walked into the limestone chambers of the Austin City Council to brief the members during a special meeting on how prepared the city was to deal with disasters and extreme weather. A respected atmospheric scientist at Texas Tech University, the 43-year-old had been invited to discuss climate change, and she breezed through her PowerPoint slides, delivering stark news in an upbeat manner: unless carbon emissions were swiftly curbed, in the coming decades Texas would see stronger heat waves, harsher summers, and torrential rainfall separated by longer periods of drought.
“Why do we care about all of this stuff?” Hayhoe asked. “Because it has huge financial impacts.” The number of billion-dollar weather disasters in the United States had ballooned from one or two per year in the eighties to eight to twelve today, Hayhoe explained as she pulled up a slide with a map of the country. “Texas is in the crosshairs of those events, because we get it all, don’t we? We get the floods and the droughts, the hailstorms and the ice storms, and even the snow and the extreme heat. And we get the tornadoes, the hurricanes, and the sea-level rise. There isn’t much that we don’t get.”

Soon afterward, Don Zimmerman, a conservative councilman who, before being elected, regularly sued the city over tax increases, declared from his seat on the dais that climate change was a “nebulous” and “foolish” field of study. Zimmerman, wearing a banker’s collar and projecting an officious air into the room, continued, “We have maybe thirty years of satellite data, and the world is maybe millions of years old. I have a really visceral reaction against the climate-change argument, for the simple reason that when you look back in time, there have been dramatic climate changes before humanity ever existed.

“The worst thing that can be done to humanity is put government bureaucrats in charge of carbon dioxide emissions,” he said as Hayhoe listened politely. “You don’t have to be as smart as a fifth grader to know that what causes the climate is the sun. I have people tell me, ‘Carbon dioxide warms the earth.’ No, it doesn’t. The sun warms the earth, and there is more energy in our sun than humanity can comprehend.” Zimmerman then insisted that the sun didn’t need “a permit from the EPA” to emit solar flares.

An uncomfortable silence settled over the chamber for a moment before Hayhoe joked, “I think if the EPA could be in charge of the sun, that could create bigger problems than we have today.” She then proceeded to gut Zimmerman’s arguments. “A thermometer is not Democrat or Republican, and when we look around this world, it’s not about trusting what our thirty-year-old satellites say. It’s about looking at 26,500 indicators of a warming planet, many of them we can see in our own backyards,” she said. The climate was not changing because of orbital cycles, which bring about ice ages, Hayhoe maintained. “The Earth’s temperature peaked eight thousand years ago and was in a long, slow slide into the next ice age until the Industrial Revolution,” she said. Instead of being in this cooling period, the planet had seen its average temperature steadily rise. The sun was also not the culprit: “If the climate were changing because of the sun, we’d be getting cooler, because energy from the sun has been going down over the last forty years,” she said.

But Zimmerman, it seemed, had no use for facts, and after the meeting he continued to harangue Hayhoe. The encounter, however, came as no surprise. In fact, it was depressingly familiar to Hayhoe, who has auburn hair, hazel eyes, and a calm, affable nature that is reminiscent of an excellent physician’s bedside manner. And she often likens herself to a doctor, but her patient is the planet. After taking its temperature, she feels compelled to report her diagnosis: because of man-made carbon emissions, the earth is running a fever. She knows that this message doesn’t always find a receptive audience. Over the past fifteen years, climate change has emerged as one of the most polarizing issues in the country, ahead of guns, the death penalty, and abortion. And there is no group that is more unconvinced of climate change’s reality than evangelical Christians, who primarily identify as conservative Republicans. As Brian Webb, the founder of...
the faith-based Climate Caretakers, recently told Religion News Service: “The United States is the only industrialized country in the world where denial of climate change has become inextricably linked to a dominant political party.”

All of which puts Hayhoe in a unique position. A co-author of the last two National Climate Assessments and a reviewer on the Nobel Prize–winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Hayhoe—the daughter of missionaries and the wife of a pastor—is herself an evangelical Christian. In her talks, she uses the Bible to explain to Christians why they should care about climate change and how it affects other people, from a poor family on the island nation of Kiribati who will be displaced by rising sea levels to an elderly couple in Beaumont who can’t afford to pay for air-conditioning in Texas’s increasingly sweltering summers. As she puts it, “The poor, the disenfranchised, those already living on the edge, and those who contributed least to this problem are also those at greatest risk to be harmed by it. That’s not a scientific issue; that’s a moral issue.”

**Hayhoe maintains a dizzying schedule.** In the past year, she has attended the historic United Nations climate summit in Paris, traveled to the edge of Hudson Bay, in Canada, to witness the annual polar bear migration, curated a special *Good Housekeeping* issue on climate change, and appeared onstage in New York with Gloria Steinem at a talk at the Rubin Museum of Art. That’s in addition to teaching her graduate-level seminars, serving as a co-director of Texas Tech’s Climate Science Center, and publishing seventeen scientific papers. (Travel is essential for Hayhoe’s job but to do her part—and perhaps head off criticism about her carbon footprint—Hayhoe buys carbon offsets to reduce the impact of her trips.) One warm afternoon in October, on a day spent in Lubbock between visits to Colorado and Houston, Hayhoe spoke at a Phi Beta Kappa ice cream social inside Texas Tech’s Hall of Nations, a room draped with the flags of 190 countries and featuring a glossy terrazzo map of the world on the floor. The crowd, mostly professors from across the university’s departments and a smattering of students, dug into Styrofoam bowls of vanilla and cookies and cream as Hayhoe, who was wearing a red top and flowing linen pants, began her speech.

“I’m a professor here at Tech, and what I’m going to talk about today is not my research. I’m going to talk about the experience that I have talking about my research. Now, most of you are not going to have the same experience I do. If you study literature, you don’t have to spend a lot of time convincing people that books are real. If you study engineering, most people will agree that engineering is real and it’s an important part of our society. But I study something that about half of the country and much more than half of Texas thinks is a complete hoax,” she said.

“Many people view having climate science at Texas Tech as similar to having a Department of Astrology. But we don’t use crystal balls, we use supercomputers; we rely on physics, not brain waves.”

The study of climate science dates to 1824, when French physicist Joseph Fourier discovered what would become known as the greenhouse effect, in which gases trapped in the atmosphere absorb heat and raise the temperature of the planet. It took 35 more years for John Tyndall, an Irish chemist, to pinpoint carbon dioxide as one of the heat-trapping gases in the earth’s atmosphere. And in 1896, a Swedish chemist named Svante Arrhenius declared that burning coal contributed to the greenhouse effect, after spending almost 2 years calculating (by hand!) how
increasing carbon dioxide concentrations raised the earth’s temperature. So the basic science, as Hayhoe often points out, has been settled since before the start of the twentieth century. Today, there is robust scientific consensus that global warming is “real, caused by humans, and dangerous”; a study found that 97 percent of climate scientists agree that anthropogenic climate change is happening, and many scientific organizations have issued statements that it is a threat.* The Department of Defense calls climate change a “threat multiplier,” because it exacerbates existing problems. And the year 2015 was the warmest on record, breaking the previous mark, which was set in 2014.

So why is climate science greeted with so much skepticism? Part of the reason can be attributed to the way the topic is often handled in the media. On cable news, two people from opposite sides of the debate are typically paired to argue about the subject, but that can lead to a false equivalency between scientists on the one hand and paid spokesmen on the other. As historians Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway chronicled in the book *Merchants of Doubt,* some of the most prominent climate-change skeptics are the same politically conservative scientists who were previously funded by Big Tobacco to spread falsehoods about cigarettes. Their employer this time around? The fossil-fuel industry.

And part of the reason is the suspicions that conservatives have of government intervention. Hayhoe has found that some people don’t reject the reality of climate change because they disagree with the science but because they fear that the solutions will upend their lives. This seems to be the case for U.S. senator James Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma, who once told journalist Rachel Maddow, “I thought it must be true until I found out what it would cost.” That day at Tech, Hayhoe recounted an anecdote about an experience she’d had speaking to a group of water managers for the Brazos River a few months back. At the end of that talk, an older man stood up and said, “Everything you said makes sense, but I don’t want the government telling me where to set my thermostat.”

Some critics feel so threatened that they resort to ad hominem attacks on climate scientists. Hayhoe receives a steady stream of hate mail, which she files away in a special folder. When I asked her when this started, she replied, “The first time I was ever quoted in a newspaper article.” The ugliness reached its height in 2012, during the presidential race. At the time, Hayhoe was writing a chapter on global warming for a book Republican hopeful Newt Gingrich was co-authoring about the environment. Rush Limbaugh mentioned it on his radio program, dismissively referring to Hayhoe as a “climate babe.” A few days later, an Iowa voter buttonholed Gingrich on camera to ask him about it, and Gingrich swiftly replied, “That’s not going to be in the book. We didn’t know that they were doing that—we told them to kill it.” Hayhoe took to Twitter to respond: “What an ungracious way to find out, eh? Nice to hear that Gingrich is tossing my #climate chapter in the trash. 100+ unpaid hrs I cd’ve spent playing w my baby.”

Most of the time, she laughs these incidents off. “I got one today that was exceptional,” she told me in late September, as we sat inside the Climate Science Center. “Most of the stuff is rambling, but this one was not. Someone wrote on Facebook, ‘She is a lying lunatic, and probably a witch.’ That was very concise,” she said with a grin. But sometimes the comments veer into violent territory. Hayhoe recalls one email that prompted her to call authorities. “You
are a mass murderer and will be convicted at the Reality TV Grand Jury in Nuremberg, Pennsylvania,” the email began. “After the Grand Jury indicts you, I would like to see you convicted and beheaded by guillotine in the public square, to show women that if they are going to take a man’s job, they have to take the heat for mass murder.” But most of the time, Hayhoe doesn’t let such vitriol drive her to despair, though dealing with it can be exhausting. “What frustrates me the most, and what I find difficult not to take personally, is how much of the hate mail comes from so-called Christians.”

**That bile is something** Hayhoe never anticipated when she was applying to graduate school 22 years ago. A native of Toronto, she had double-majored in physics and astronomy at the University of Toronto and spent every clear night one summer gazing through the telescopes on top of the physics building. She found that the astronomer’s life appealed to her and planned to study that in graduate school. Then she took a climatology class her junior year. “Until I took that course, I did not realize that climate change is affecting everything, from poverty to biodiversity to health, and so you can’t fix any one of them if you leave climate change out of the picture,” she told me. She also realized that her background in physics had perfectly positioned her to study climate modeling.

If she was going to leave astronomy behind, Hayhoe wanted to do policy-relevant climate science. When she was considering graduate programs, she was thrilled to learn that Don Wuebbles, who had been instrumental in addressing the chlorofluorocarbon problem in the eighties, was the new head of the department of atmospheric science at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He would serve as her adviser for both her master’s degree and her doctorate. Under Wuebbles’s guidance, Hayhoe eventually began focusing on statistical downscaling, which was still a relatively new field when she started graduate school, in 1995. “There was very little of this being done at the time,” Wuebbles recalled recently, “and the methods were not capturing the full extent of the science, so she set about to develop a new technique and very successfully did so. She’s brilliant.”

Statistical downscaling involves combining historical weather observations with global-climate models to better predict what the future could look like in a particular place. “The local environment, whether it’s hilly or flat, with crops or forest, urban or rural, modifies the weather patterns we get,” she said. “So, for example, if we had identical high-pressure systems over Lubbock and Houston, it would mean something different for the temperature, for the humidity, for the rainfall patterns.” Hayhoe also tries to see if the global models reflect real-world conditions on the ground. “When we get an El Niño, we see a very wet winter from here in Lubbock all the way across to Florida. Do the models pick that up or not? We need to know,” she explained.

Hayhoe runs simulations on a supercomputer, then she combs through the data to interpret the output. On a practical level, this means Hayhoe exists in a world of numbers, thousands upon thousands of lines of them. A single file dealing with one variable—say, temperature across the country over the next hundred years—can be almost five gigabytes in size. And she runs these simulations for multiple variables and scenarios on multiple climate models. (Some 42 global-climate models exist today, run by labs around the world.) These reams of data are shapeless until she translates them by writing code. “What a lot of people don’t realize is that the most
important skill any climate scientist has is programming,” she told me over pizza in Lubbock one afternoon last fall.

Hayhoe has used downscaling in her consulting work for the cities of Washington, D.C.; Boulder; and Chicago, as well as federal entities, including the Department of Defense and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She helps analyze problem areas, such as sewer overflow during heavy rain or warped train rails during heat waves, and tries to pinpoint how often those things will be a problem in the future, based on changing climate patterns. In 2004 Hayhoe was an author on a paper that examined California’s future from different angles, from water supply to agriculture to tourism. She was heartened when, a few months later, that research prompted Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign an executive order limiting greenhouse-gas emissions. He was the first governor to do so. “When Schwarzenegger signed that bill, he had the authors from California standing in a semicircle behind him. The reason why I left astrophysics is to do policy-relevant research, and when I saw that picture, I thought to myself, ‘I did it. This works.’”

Hayhoe’s scientific credentials are impeccable, but what has made her an international star are her skills as a communicator. John Abraham, an associate professor of thermal sciences at the University of St. Thomas, in Minnesota, has called her “one of the best climate communicators in the world.” Abraham told me, “She is extraordinary at relaying very complex topics into language that other people can understand, without speaking down to them. The other thing she’s good at is hearing questions. We all listen, but she has this innate ability to understand the perspective of the person making the inquiry,” he said. “She has this knack for honestly presenting the science but doing it in a disarming way for people who are often anti-science.”

One mild Friday in early October, I flew to Houston with Hayhoe and her eight-year-old son, who spent the short flight absorbed in the game Minecraft on his iPad while Hayhoe tapped away on her laptop. She was to give a keynote speech at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church, a collection of limestone buildings nestled between pine trees in one of Houston’s most affluent neighborhoods. The weekend symposium was called “Faithful Alternatives to Fossil Fuel Divestment.” Hayhoe arrived with some tough talk for her audience. “There’s no way to sugarcoat this, and I wish I could, because I know I’m in Houston, but the way that we get our energy does matter. If we continue to rely only on fossil fuels, we’re going to end up on a very different pathway than if we gradually and sensibly transition to clean and renewable energy that we can grow here in Texas—and that many of our energy companies are already investing in very heavily.”

The conference was organized in response to the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s proposal to divest church resources from fossil fuels, a move the Houston chapter had rejected as a symbolic one that unfairly vilified the people who work in the fossil-fuel industry. The group instead proposed that the national organization take steps to reduce its carbon footprint and advocate for a carbon tax. Hayhoe, too, is a proponent of putting a price on carbon and letting the markets sort it out. She thinks that a reasonable tax on gasoline would be around 6 cents a gallon. “Regulations just get more and more complicated, and you have to hire new people to deal with them,” she explained. “It gets expensive and difficult to plot your strategy, but any business—from the ma-and-pa shop around the corner to the biggest multinational in the world—knows what to do with a
simple price change. Business is all about maximizing profit and minimizing costs. So in a sense, putting a price on carbon just frees up business to do what it does best.”

But the most revealing part of her talk centered on why Christians should care about climate change. To lead into this subject, Hayhoe flipped to a slide with a quote from John Holdren, President Obama’s science adviser: “We basically have three choices: mitigation, adaptation, or suffering. We’re going to do some of each. The question is what the mix is going to be. The more mitigation we do, the less adaptation will be required and the less suffering there will be.” Suffering, Hayhoe said, is not a word often deployed by scientists. “As scientists we don’t know a lot about suffering, but as Christians we do. And we know that part of the reason we’re here in this world is to help people who are suffering.” And that suffering will not be meted out proportionally: if global warming continues unchecked, the poor—whether they’re in Houston’s Fifth Ward or in low-lying areas of Bangladesh—who have contributed least to carbon emissions will feel the most pain, from enduring more-intense heat waves to paying the higher food prices that will accompany failed crops. Throughout the Bible, God charges Christians to serve others, Hayhoe said, from Genesis, where God makes man in his image so that he can be responsible for every living creature on earth, to 1 Peter 4:10: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

“We’ve been given this commandment to love others as Christ loved us,” Hayhoe said as a slide quoting John 13:34–35 flashed on the screen: “‘Let me give you a new command: love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.’” She continued: “You can see, you just go through the Bible for verse after verse. They’re not verses about climate change; they’re not verses about the environment. They’re verses about our attitudes and perspectives to other people on the planet. We are to be recognized for our love for other people.” The members of the crowd nodded along in agreement as she spoke. The year 2015 was a good one to be proclaiming this message: in June, Pope Francis sent out his 192-page papal encyclical imploring the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics to care about climate change, and in October, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a similar call to action.

Hayhoe can speak honestly about suffering because of a lesson she learned when her parents became missionaries and moved the family to Colombia when she was nine. There, she witnessed true poverty. Her father would travel to remote villages to speak at tiny churches, and she remembers hearing stories of landslides washing away homes after heavy rains. She now recognizes that these early memories of poverty and vulnerability have informed her work. Hayhoe was raised as a member of the Plymouth Brethren, a conservative, evangelical offshoot of the Anglican Church that emphasizes reading the Bible and interpreting it for oneself. This lent itself well to science, Hayhoe told me. “My dad was very much of the perspective that the Bible is God’s first book and nature—creation—is God’s second book.”

Though Hayhoe has always been serious about her faith, connecting with groups of fellow Christians about climate change was not something she did before moving to Texas. In 2006 she and her husband, Andrew Farley, relocated from South Bend, Indiana, to Lubbock, one of the most conservative cities in the country, so that they could both take jobs at Texas Tech, he as a linguistics professor, she as a researcher. He also became the pastor at a small
nondenominational church on the southwest side of town, now called Church Without Religion. People were surprised when they learned what the pastor’s wife did, and Farley started getting lots of questions about it. And at Texas Tech, the invitations for Hayhoe to speak about climate change started rolling in. The volume of these questions and the lack of resources to point people to spurred her and Farley to write a book together, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions*. The questions they tackle in the book were familiar territory for the couple, who had met through a Christian organization while in graduate school. A few months into their marriage, Hayhoe realized that Farley, who had grown up in a conservative household in Virginia, did not think climate change was real, and they began vigorously debating the topic. “It took about two years, but now we’re on the same side,” she said.

But beyond just speaking to Christian groups, Hayhoe prides herself on being able to talk to anyone with an open mind about the reality of climate change. She bemoans the fact that global warming has come to be viewed as a niche environmental issue. “To care about climate change, all you have to be, pretty much, is a human living on planet Earth. You can be exactly who you are with exactly the values you have, and I can show you how those values connect to climate change,” Hayhoe told me.

Hayhoe’s first step is always to “genuinely bond over a shared value,” with an emphasis on that shared value’s being genuine. “The key is not to pretend; we can all smell someone who is not genuine a mile away,” she said. “If I’m talking to farmers or ranchers or water managers, I start off by talking about what we all care about, which is making sure we have water. And that, for many Texans, is almost as strong a value as whatever it says in the Bible.” Her next step is to connect that issue to climate change. So when talking about water, she describes how climate change is changing rainfall patterns. “We’re getting these heavy downpours, and then we’re getting longer dry periods in between, and our droughts are getting stronger because the warmer it is, the more water evaporates out of our lakes and rivers and our soil,” she said. She tries to end her talks with solutions that inspire people, ranging from the personal (measuring your carbon footprint and installing energy-efficient light bulbs) to the large-scale (putting a tax on carbon). Hayhoe herself is most excited by the efforts of Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla Motors and founder of SpaceX. “If I had to pick one person to save the world—and I don’t think any one person will but if I had to pick one—it would be him.” She is excited about the battery packs that Tesla is developing, declaring energy storage the “single technology that will make the most difference.”

Ultimately, she does not care whether people agree with the science, so long as they take action. She compares this to a battle waged in the mid-1800’s, before the germ theory of disease gained widespread acceptance, when a Hungarian physician urged other doctors to wash their hands and instruments before delivering babies. As doctors changed their habits, fewer and fewer women died from “childbed fever.” “I don’t care if they thought germs are imaginary, so long as they washed their hands,” she said. The same is true for climate change, in Hayhoe’s mind. If people start using more-efficient light bulbs or driving more-fuel-friendly cars, it doesn’t matter what they think about the science.

Hayhoe is coy about her own personal politics, and this air of mystery is useful to her. When I asked her about another Canadian-born Texan, climate-change skeptic and senator Ted Cruz, she
demurred. She’s a U.S. permanent resident but not a citizen, so she can’t vote in the presidential election, and she seems to enjoy the level of remove this gives her from American politics. “It helps me not to pick sides, because people always ask if you’re Democrat or Republican, and I’m neither. I can’t be,” she told me. “I appreciate the solutions that some Republicans are starting to advance, and I appreciate the fact that Democrats accept the science. But it’s become so polarized that the good people on both sides are being marginalized.” Whoever the next president is, Hayhoe hopes he or she will honor the commitments made at the climate summit in Paris last year and also put a price on carbon.

Hayhoe’s religious background led NOVA’s *Secret Life of Scientists and Engineers* to dub her a “climate change evangelist” in 2011, and the label has stuck, though she is lukewarm on it. “An evangelist is someone who spreads good news, and I feel like I’m not really evangelizing. I feel more like a Cassandra, or an Old Testament prophet spreading bad news, saying, ‘If thou dost not change from thy wicked ways and repent, thou shalt reap the harvest of thy deeds.’” But when Hayhoe talks, she doesn’t sound so pessimistic. That’s a strategic choice, as she realizes that doom and despair won’t motivate others to act. For that, you need hope. “You have to offer people a vision of what the world could look like if we could wean ourselves off fossil fuels, if we could have a clean-energy economy,” she said. “We would all want to live in that world.”

**Lyndon Baines Johnson was** at his ranch outside Johnson City recuperating from gallbladder surgery on November 5, 1965, when his science advisers published a 317-page report warning about the dangers of air pollution. Tucked away in an appendix were 23 pages about atmospheric carbon dioxide. “Through his worldwide industrial civilization, Man is unwittingly conducting a vast geophysical experiment,” the report states. “Within a few generations he is burning the fossil fuels that slowly accumulated in the earth over the past 500 million years.” This additional carbon in the atmosphere would, over time, raise the earth’s temperature, slowly melt the antarctic ice cap, and lead to increased ocean acidity, the report proclaimed. “The climate changes that may be produced by the increased CO2 content could be deleterious from the point of human beings,” the report concluded.

Fifty years later, Hayhoe gave the capstone presentation at a daylong symposium in Washington commemorating the first time a president was warned about the danger of climate change. “As several have already said today, we are conducting an experiment with our planet on a scale that has never before been attempted,” she said, echoing the words of the report. The climate models that scientists now use churn out petabytes of data—which is something like, in Hayhoe’s words, “twenty million four-drawer filing cabinets full of text”—that then need to be analyzed to see how these changes will manifest in particular locales. “What’s the point of doing all of that modeling and all of that analysis if we don’t understand how it’s going to affect the system right here that we care about?”

Would LBJ even recognize the future Texas predicted by these models? In the past fifty years, temperatures in Texas have risen half a degree per decade and are set to rise at least 3.5 degrees by mid-century if global emissions aren’t slashed. “Our average summer could look like 2011 within my lifetime if we continue on our current pathway,” Hayhoe told an audience in October, referencing that scorching summer when much of Texas saw more than one hundred 100-degree days. Austin could feel more like Scottsdale, Arizona. Rainfall patterns are shifting, so the state
will face longer dry spells punctuated by more bouts of heavy rain. In West Texas, farming and ranching communities have thrived in the semi-arid environment by pulling water from aquifers. But as the aquifers dry up, these communities are relying more on rainfall, just as that rainfall is becoming less likely and droughts are getting more intense, Hayhoe said. In LBJ’s beloved Hill Country, this means increased risk of fire. Humans are the ones igniting the fires, but climate change is making them worse by providing the ideal dry conditions they need to spread. On the Gulf Coast, where a quarter of the state’s 27 million people live, sea levels are already eight inches higher than they were a hundred years ago and are set to rise an additional one to four feet by the end of the century. And then there’s the danger from stronger hurricanes fueled by record-breaking ocean temperatures.

Texas leaders, however, seem unwilling to tackle the problem or even admit that it exists. Governor Greg Abbott has long voiced skepticism about the science of climate change, telling the editorial board of the San Antonio Express-News during his gubernatorial campaign that the climate has always changed over time and further study was needed. “We must be good guardians of our earth, but we must base our decisions on peer-reviewed scientific inquiry, free from political demagogues using climate change as an excuse to remake the American economy,” he told the newspaper. As attorney general, Abbott made a habit of suing the Obama administration, oftentimes over regulatory issues relating to climate change. His successor, Ken Paxton, is continuing that tradition, joining a lawsuit in October over the administration’s Clean Power Plan, which calls on states to curb emissions by phasing out coal plants and shifting to natural gas and renewables. The plan would require Texas to decrease its coal power capacity by 4,000 megawatts, or 25 percent, and Paxton has likened this to the EPA’s mounting a “war on coal and fossil fuels.”

In such a milieu, efforts to incorporate climate change into planning at the state level have fallen flat, and bills that attempt to address it have gone nowhere in recent years in the Legislature. “At the state level, in some circles, climate change is still a taboo subject,” John Nielsen-Gammon, the state climatologist, told me. This leaves cities to do their own resilience planning. Meanwhile, entities such as the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, the operator of the state’s electric grid, are not taking climate change into account when developing their projections for load growth, which could lead to problems as the mercury creeps upward.

In Congress, Texans are some of the most vocal climate-change skeptics. Congressman Lamar Smith, a Republican from San Antonio, has used his chairmanship of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee to tussle with federal agencies over their climate-change research, going so far as to subpoena the scientists who conducted a study with a conclusion he disagreed with and demand their emails. (Smith, it is worth noting, has received more than $600,000 in campaign donations from the fossil-fuel industry over his 29 years in Congress.) And then there’s Cruz, who in December held a three-hour Senate hearing titled “Data or Dogma? Promoting Open Inquiry in the Debate Over the Magnitude of Human Impact on Earth’s Climate,” at which he claimed that there was a lack of scientific consensus on global warming.

Hayhoe is hopeful that as green energy gets cheaper, more people will begin using it. “Texas is unique, in that it is one of the states that have the most to lose economically from climate-change impacts, but Texas also has the most to gain by transitioning to a clean-energy economy,”
Hayhoe told me one day in her office on campus, a cluttered, windowless space. The room’s sole decorative flair, a papier-mâché arctic fox that was a Christmas present from her young son, sat perched on a shelf.

If Texas were its own country, it would be the seventh-most-prolific emitter of carbon dioxide in the world. As it stands, Texas is the number one emitter in the U.S.; it released some 641 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2013, almost double that of California.

But the state also has a seemingly boundless potential for green energy. Texas leads the nation in wind generation; turbines produced a full 10 percent of the state’s power in 2015. By 2030, that number is forecast to jump to 37 percent. One night last September, supply of wind power was so plentiful and demand was so low that the spot price of electricity went negative for a few hours. Solar installation has lagged behind, but when it ramps up, there’s enough capacity just in the hundred-square-mile area between Plainview and Amarillo to light the entire United States, as Hayhoe likes to point out. In Pecos County alone, companies have plans to invest $1 billion in large-scale solar energy farms. “Texas understands energy. Energy is a Texas thing,” Hayhoe told me. “We have the land we need to do this, as well as the technology and entrepreneurial spirit. I wish that the whole state could see that this is an opportunity for a better future.”

*Clarification: This sentence has been edited to clarify the conclusions of the study and include the fact that a number of scientific organizations have issued statements about global warming being a threat.


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May 3, 2016

Green Ribbon Political Awards

Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM)

The Green Ribbon Political Awards are the only awards to celebrate the achievements of politicians, businesses and charities judged by experts of the highest international calibre.

The 2016 Green Ribbon Political Awards were held on Tuesday 3rd May on the Terrace of the House of Commons. The ceremony was hosted by the eminent Jonathon Porritt and special guest speaker, President of the Constitutional Council, President of COP21 and broker of the Paris climate deal Laurent Fabius.
Most inspirational figure internationally

His Holiness Pope Francis

His Holiness Pope Francis has won the Green Ribbon Political Award for the most inspirational figure internationally for the Papal Encyclical *Laudato si’*.

The 180-page encyclical reached an audience of millions and not just Catholics. Its impact in the USA has transformed the climate debate. *Laudato si’* (On Care for Our Common Home), is at its core a moral call for action on phasing out the use of fossil fuels, and for the first time the link between poverty and social justice was linked to climate change. Circulated to the church’s 5,000 bishops and 400,000 priests it is a call to action to the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics, and can now be considered as the Church’s official position on the environment.

It is also the first encyclical to try to influence a global political process. Pope Francis repeated his message of climate justice and change to world leaders at the UN, seeking to influence climate change negotiators ahead of their December meeting in Paris. He also spoke before a joint session of the US Congress.

The social teaching argues that climate change is not just a “global problem with serious implications”, but has an impact felt disproportionately by the world’s poorest people. The judges praised the encyclical as a perfect example of how to write about climate justice, with juxtaposition to reduce you to tears. They believe that it was the most significant moment of 2015, utterly compelling and inspirational.

See the full list of award winners:
[http://ciwem.org/greenribbon/](http://ciwem.org/greenribbon/)

Read the press release:

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May 3, 2016

Climate scientist-turned-psychologist seeks paths toward more compassion for the earth

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

A recent furniture commercial on TV features a frustrated woman who has too much stuff and no place to stash it. At first, she briefly considers downsizing, but quickly dismisses the notion when she encounters a brand-new bed frame complete with seemingly bottomless storage drawers. The bonus take-away, of course, is the roomy bed frame she purchases allows her to buy even more stuff.

My initial reaction: a sickening chill.
But a recent conversation with climate scientist/psychologist Jeff Kiehl altered my perception, as I see it now as a reflection of the contemporary archetypal myth that economic growth and prosperity are all that matter for our happiness.

In his book *Facing Climate Change: An Integral Path to the Future*, Kiehl explores the worlds of science, Jungian psychology and Buddhist philosophy in an attempt to offer hopeful ways in which we can change to break free of our old patterns to create a new story filled with compassion for the earth.

At one point in *Facing Climate Change*, Kiehl discusses the “Earth Destroyer” myth, written more than 2,000 years ago by the Roman poet Ovid in *Metamorphosis*.

The myth tells of a man who wants to build the largest house in town. To complete his ambitious project, he cuts down the largest tree in the sacred forest -- an action he took despite a warning from Demeter, the forest goddess, that he would suffer for his deed. Foreshadowing what is to come, the tree drips blood on his ax. At Demeter’s request, her sister Famine devises a long-lasting punishment for the sacrilege by breathing into him a never-ending hunger. Seeking to satisfy his now-aching belly, the man, not finding enough food, sells his possessions -- including his house and his only daughter -- before ultimately consuming his own body.

Kiehl said this myth arose around the time when the Greeks built a massive array of ships to expand their control over the Mediterranean Sea. They cut down most of the trees on the Greek Peninsula, leading to deforestation and the loss of agriculturally valuable topsoil.

The allegory of the “Earth Destroyer,” he explains in his book, shows “what happens when we become separated from nature and destroy it.”

“Metaphorically, this depicts how by feeding our current endless hunger, we discount the future for our children,” Kiehl wrote. “In addition, his disconnection from the feminine, represented by the sale of his daughter, means he cannot relate in a healthy way to others.”

The furniture commercial, while free of Ovid's gruesomeness, taps into the basic idea that the hungrier and needier the shopper, the better for industry and the economy.

To truly create a healthier environment, Kiehl said heart and compassion have to enter the equation.

“Science can only do so much explaining,” he said.

A senior scientist who heads the Climate Change Research Section at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, in Boulder, Colo., Kiehl said he devotes little time in lectures on climate change talking about facts, and instead veers toward asking how his audience feels toward the issue: be it, anger, grief, helplessness, or fear -- in particular, fear of change, income loss or lifestyles. All of which are understandable reactions, he noted, particularly from the standpoint of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which suggests attention to higher-level needs, such as a healthy planet, often get less attention until more primary ones (food, shelter, safety) are first met.
In our conversation, Kiehl also delved into archetypes: those shared lenses, images and metaphors through which we view the world. Some are father, mother and hero; others include the elder, the warrior, the senex -- the latter of which offers particular insights into the caustic climate debate in America.

The senex likes things fixed, rigid and secure, wanting absolute certainty in things; even when he has evidence that change would be better, he continues to balk. His positive side includes careful assessment, along with weighing of the situation and deep reflection, but if it loses out, then the status quo remains.

Examples of the negative side of the senex archetype from history include those who fought against civil rights legislation or regulations on air pollution, Kiehl said. On the climate issue, he pointed to Republican presidential candidate Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

While Kasich acknowledges a human degree to climate change, he insists that environmental protection shouldn’t come at the expense of the economy and cautions against actions akin to worshiping the earth. But inaction could itself disrupt the economy, Kiehl said, whereas shifting to renewable energy could lead to increased employment and economic growth.

“The idea that this would be an economic disaster comes from the fossil fuel industry or those who resist change because they fear change. This is the senex archetype in motion,” Kiehl said.

It was a curiosity that sprouted about 25 years ago into widespread resistance to the notion of human-caused global climate change that led Kiehl, who holds a Ph.D. in atmospheric science, to study clinical psychology from the perspective of Carl Jung at Regis University, the Jesuit school in Denver. Kiehl taps into that Jungian psychology background in Facing Climate Change, blending his clear and poetic writing with discussion of science and Buddhist spirituality.

Each chapter begins with a meditation on the beauties of nature Kiehl, who resides in Santa Cruz, Calif., finds during his daily walks. In one particularly memorable account, he and a police officer stand in admiration of a gorgeous redwood tree “so tall that I must arch backward to see its top.” Standing quietly in awe, Kiehl ran his hand along the tree’s trunk,” the bark soft and fibrous.”

“The contours of the red, corrugated surface reach out to the shape of my hand,” he wrote. “Tree and I are present to the other in a state of 'being with.'”

If we are to survive, Kiehl said, we must return to our authentic spiritual roots, whether they be within our individual religious paths, or, in nature herself. We must learn to feel, to put ourselves in the places of suffering people everywhere in the planet. He offers two striking metaphors for imagining change: the cross, from Christianity, and from his own Buddhist tradition, Indra's net.

Jung perceived the cross image as a vertical-horizontal way of living; the horizontal symbolizes living in the world, and the vertical as being connected to the numinous, or spiritual, dimension. A healthy person, Jung believed, will live at the apex, where the two converge. Kiehl noted that in Jung's book Aion Christ is a symbol of the archetype of wholeness.
In Buddhism, Indra's net spreads across the universe, with highly reflective jewels placed at each intersection. Whatever is reflected at one point of the net is seen throughout the whole network.

“I believe this is how transformation can take place now; each individual is a jewel in the global social network, reflecting ideas, feelings, beliefs and actions,” Kiehl said, explaining that Indra's net is a story that focuses on compassionate creation rather than destruction.

Like Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry, Kiehl believes that the arts are superb vehicles for helping to create new, positive archetypal images that will touch into people's consciousness. To that end, he is working with artists and filmmakers to discover images that can strike the hearts of people on the fragile beauty of the planet, to move them to action.

Kiehl's closing message says it all: “Look within and follow the path of your heart. See the basic goodness within yourself and others. This goodness is the ultimate ground from which we all begin. Touch it and stay true to the path of compassion and you will create that world of wonder.”

Wonder that doesn’t reside in the bottom drawer, crammed with stuff, of that new bed.


May 4, 2016

Leaders of different faiths release declaration on ‘Swachhta Kranti’

By FPJ Bureau
The Free Press Journal

Ujjain: A grand assembly of prominent religious leaders representing many faiths came together for a historic first time at the Simhastha Mahakumbh-2016, to appeal for a Swachhta Kranti (Clean Revolution) for Mother India through Sadbhavana Sankalp.

In so doing, they implored the people of India to rise together so that India may shine as a global example of cleanliness. For this, they said that we must do all we can to ensure that our lands and rivers are kept open-defecation free through the use of eco-friendly toilets.

On illuminating a holy lamp at this Sarva Dharma Swachhta Sankalp event, Swami Chidanand Saraswati, co-founder of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance and president of Parmarth Niketan Rishikesh, stated, “The world is as we dream it, and it is time for a new dream. Every day, 1,200 children die needlessly in India due to lack of clean water, sanitation and hygiene. The deaths are a result of our bad habits. We can change that. By changing our ways, we change the world.” Representing five religions, the faith leaders were brought together by the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA), with technical support from UNICEF, under the inspiration of Chidanandji.
Junapeethadishwar Swami Avdheshanand Giri shared his views on water conservation and cleanliness. He said that water is the most basic requirement of all life, but only 0.75 percent is potable; therefore, it is crucial to conserve water. Every religion honours the element of water hence it is beautiful that the interfaith and faith community has come together here on the banks of Kshipra to move in the right direction.

Eminent Sunni leader and president of All India Imam Organisation Imam Umar Ilyasi pledged to bring all of India’s Imams together to spread vital messages on the importance of health, water, sanitation and hygiene in our homes and communities. “All faiths must come together to promote an end to open-defecation and a clean and healthy India, because cleanliness, purity and respect for nature are embedded in every religion,” he said. Similarly, Shia leader, Maulana Dr Syed Kalbe Sadiq, founder of Tauheedul Muslimeen Trust, “From today onwards, let dreams become reality. Our hands should be tools for action. In our hearts should be pledges for change.”

Jain Muni Acharya Lokesh shared that ahimsa (non-violence) and sanitation must be seen as going hand-in-hand. “Unclean choices are causing the deaths of countless children every day. This suffering must end. It is up to all of us to be the change,” said he. Chief Jathedar, Giani Gurbachan Singh, Amritsar; Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia OBE KSG, Chairman, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ); Paramjit Singh Chandhok, Chairman of DSGMC; Ven Bhikkhu Sanghasena, Founder-President of Mahabodhi International Centre, Leh-Ladakh;

Ujjain Bishop Sebastian Vadakkel; Swami Harichetanandji, Haridwar; Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, secretary-general GIWA and others also spoke.

http://www.freepressjournal.in/leaders-of-different-faiths-release-declaration-on-swachhta-kranti/839803

May 6, 2016

Catholics and Buddhists should work together for the environment

Vatican Radio

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent a message to the Buddhists of the world to mark the Feast of Vesakh, which commemorates the his birth, enlightenment and death of Gautama Buddha.

This year’s Message was inspired by Pope Francis’ Encyclical Laudato si’.

“As the crisis of climate change is contributed to by human activity, we, Christians and Buddhists, must work together to confront it with an ecological spirituality,” writes Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, the President of the Pontifical Council. “The acceleration of global environmental problems has added to the urgency of interreligious cooperation.”
Cardinal Tauran concludes by calling on Catholics and Buddhists to “cooperate together in liberating humanity from the suffering brought about by climate change, and contribute to the care of our common home.”

The full text of the Message is below

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Buddhists and Christians:
Together to Foster Ecological Education

MESSAGE FOR THE FEAST OF VESAKH

2016

Vatican City

Dear Buddhist Friends,

1. In the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we are pleased to extend once again our best wishes on the occasion Vesakh, as you commemorate three significant events in the life of Gautama Buddha – his birth, enlightenment and death. We wish you peace, tranquillity and joy in your hearts, within your families and in your country.

2. This year we write to you inspired by His Holiness Pope Francis’s Encyclical Letter, Laudato Si, On the Care for Our Common Home. His Holiness notes that “the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion” (n. 217). Moreover, he states that “our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature” (n. 215). “Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment” (n. 211). In response, Pope Francis proposes that “ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere” (n. 213).

3. Dear Buddhist friends, you have also expressed concern about the degradation of the environment, which is attested to by the documents The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change and Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders. These evidence a shared understanding that at the centre of the eco-crisis is, in fact, an ego-crisis, expressed by human greed, anxiety, arrogance and ignorance. Our lifestyles and expectations, therefore, must change in order overcome the deterioration of our surroundings. “Cultivating the insight of inter-being and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our
planet” (Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders). Otherwise, “When the Earth becomes sick, we become sick, because we are part of her” (The Time to Act is Now).

4. As the crisis of climate change is contributed to by human activity, we, Christians and Buddhists, must work together to confront it with an ecological spirituality. The acceleration of global environmental problems has added to the urgency of interreligious cooperation. Education in environmental responsibility and the creation of an “ecological citizenship” require virtue-oriented ecological ethics such as respect and care for nature. There is a pressing need for the followers of all religions to transcend their boundaries and join together in building an ecologically responsible social order based on shared values. In countries where Buddhists and Christians live and work side by side, we can support the health and sustainability of the planet through joint educational programmes aimed at raising ecological awareness and promoting joint initiatives.

5. Dear Buddhist friends, may we cooperate together in liberating humanity from the suffering brought about by climate change, and contribute to the care of our common home. In this spirit, we wish you once again a peaceful and joyful feast of Vesakh.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran

President

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ

Secretary

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/05/06/catholics_and_buddhists_together_for_the_environment/1227858

May 7, 2016

An interfaith view on climate change

By David Boyd
Nelson Star

Here in Nelson, a local interfaith group has come together to advocate for climate justice and to urge all citizens to participate in the transition to a zero-carbon future. The following groups are working together for carbon pollution solutions and sharing spiritual practices: Ascension Lutheran Church, Cathedral of Mary Immaculate, Kootenay Shambhala Meditation Centre, Nelson United Church, St. Saviour’s Anglican Church, and Yasodhara Ashram.

Last fall, a large group of more than 75 people participated in discussions of Pope Francis’ climate change Encyclical, Laudato Si’. Currently, we are working on plans to join other local groups and institutions in creating a plan to get to zero-carbon use in the Nelson area. There is a
huge opportunity for us, especially here in the Nelson area, to get to 100 per cent renewable energy use by 2050 at the very latest; in fact, some of us believe we can get there much sooner!

A common complaint leveled against religious leaders who comment on issues like climate justice is that we are told that religion has no place in political discourse. As a religious leader in the Nelson area, I can categorically tell you that spiritual leaders have a moral imperative to speak out for a holistic view of the world in which we live.

As has been demonstrated in the past five years, religious leaders around the world from all faith traditions have called loudly for action with respect to climate justice. Almost every major world religion has issued a call to action with respect to getting off fossil fuels and keeping the global temperature increase to less than 2 degrees by the end of this century.

The most recent call for action from spiritual leaders came ahead of the Paris Agreement signing ceremony at the United Nations on April 22. Two hundred and fifty world faith leaders called for heads of state to ratify the Paris Agreement. In a show of unity and support, 175 countries have signed the Paris Agreement, including our own prime minister, and 15 have already ratified the agreement.

The document signed by world faith leaders on April 18 said in part that “Humanity is at a crucial turning point. We as faith communities recognize that we must begin a transition away from polluting fossil fuels and towards clean renewable energy sources. It is clear that for many people significant lifestyle changes will have to be made. We must strive for alternatives to the culture of consumerism that is so destructive to ourselves and to our planet.” (See this link for the full statement.)

According to the World Bank, Canada is one of the worst emitters of carbon pollution per capita. We emit 14.7 tonnes per person per year. Canadians have traditionally taken a keen interest in international justice and Canada has been a good partner to many nations. Addressing and reducing our carbon pollution is key to continuing to be a just society. Getting to a zero-carbon future is being a good neighbour.

As a Nelson and area interfaith community, we are committed to a future where human societies live in an integrated manner with the earth. As human beings, we can draw on renewable energy resources that are not damaging to ecosystems and do not comprise the earth’s capacity for life.

We can get to 100 per cent renewable energy use and we can do it soon. We can all stand together; I invite you to pay attention for announcements regarding local and national strategies coming from our interfaith community and other activist groups both locally and nationally. The time for action is now.

Rev. David Boyd is with the Nelson United Church.

http://www.nelsonstar.com/opinion/378290311.html
May 8, 2016

10 Latin American Indigenous Rights Warriors You Need to Know

Telesur

These Indigenous human rights and environmental activists are making waves in Latin American and beyond.

Indigenous leader around the world are on the front lines of struggle against corporate exploitation, resource extraction, neoliberal policies, and other injustices impacting people and the environment.

Here’s a look at some of the most prominent Indigenous leaders fighting for justice and human rights in Latin America.

1. Miriam Miranda, Honduran Garifuna Leader

Miriam Miranda is a leader of Garifuna Afro-Indigenous community and the organization known as Ofraneh, the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras. She is renowned for her activism resisting mega-tourism projects, the expansion of African palm monocultures, and market-based “false solutions” to climate change displacing Garifuna communities along the Honduran coast as part of a fight for Garifuna survival, self-determination, and food sovereignty.

2. Maxima Acuña, Peruvian Campesina

Maxima Acuña is a Peruvian subsistence farmer who has successfully taken on U.S. mining giant Newmont in a tireless fight for land and livelihood. Acuña’s resistance, recognized with the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize this year, has become an iconic David and Goliath tale after she managed to halt Newmont’s plans to open a US$4.8 billion open-pit gold and copper mine in the area. Despite her legal win, Acuña continues to face threats and harassment for her activism.

3. Marcos Terena, Brazilian Trailblazer

Marcos Terena is a Xane leader from Brazil who has spearheaded multiple initiatives to advance the rights of Indigenous people in his home country and around the world. He founded Brazil’s first Indigenous political movement, the Union of Indigenous Nations, organized historic global events, and fought for the inclusion of Indigenous rights in the Brazilian constitution.

4. Milagro Sala, Argentine Political Prisoner

Milagro Sala is an Indigenous leader in Argentina considered to be the first political prisoner of President Mauricio Macri’s government. She founded and leads the Tupac Amaru movement, a
70,000-strong organization focused on Indigenous rights and other political issues. Sala is also a lawmaker with Parlasur and a member of other political and labor organizations.

5. Feliciano Valencia, Colombian Peace Activist

Feliciano Valencia is a Colombian community leader and winner of the 2000 National Peace Award. The activist was arrested last year despite the Indigenous rights to legal jurisdiction over their territories in Colombia, and his capture became a symbol of the systematic repression suffered by Indigenous movements in the country. Valencia has dedicated his life to fighting for Indigenous rights and supporting the path toward peace.

6. Silvia Carrera, Panamanian History-Maker

Silvia Carrera is the first woman chief of the Ngobe Bugle and the leader of a resistance movements to block unwanted hydroelectric dam and copper mining projects on Indigenous territory. She has represented her people in negotiating with the government for respect for Indigenous rights and self-determination and has become a symbol of dignity and inspiration for Indigenous women in Panama and across Latin America.

7. Humberto Piaguaje, Ecuadorean Chevron-Challenger

Humberto Piaguaje is a leader of the Secoya Indigenous group of Ecuador and has been an important figure in the fight against the the U.S. energy giant Chevron and its corporate cover-up of a massive oil spill in the Ecuadorean Amazon. He has long championed the fight of the Secoya people against Chevron, formerly Texaco, and slammed the corporation for human rights abuses and falsified evidence in the court battle.

8. Aura Lolita Chavez Ixcaquic, Guatemalan Feminist

Aura Lolita Chavez Ixcaquic is a Guatemalan Maya K’iche leader and defender of the rights of women and the environment. She is a leader of the Council of K’iche’ Peoples in Defense of Life, Mother Nature, Earth and Territory and has fights for the Indigenous right to self-determination over their territories with a focus on the role of women in the movement against resource extraction. She has suffered attacks and threats for her activism.

9. Oscar Olivera, Bolivian Water Warrior

Oscar Olivera was key leader in the so-called Cochabamba Water Wars against the privatization of water in Bolivia between 1999 and 2000. He won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2001 and is now an important leader in protests related to the Bolivian gas conflict.

10. Nestora Salgado, Former Mexican Political Prisoner

Nestora Salgado is a Mexican community leader who spent more than two years in jail for her activism organizing autonomous police forces in the state of Guerrero to combat drug cartels and
state complicity in rampant violence. She was freed earlier this year and has vowed to fight for the rights of other political prisoners in Mexico.


May 9, 2016

Mining and extraction coalition at UN holds countries, companies accountable

By Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report

Global Sisters Report is focusing a special series on mining and extractive industries and the women religious who work to limit damage and impact on people and the environment, through advocacy, action and policy. Pope Francis last year called for the entire mining sector to undergo "a radical paradigm change." Sisters are on the front lines to help effect that change.

The quiet corridors of the Church Center for the United Nations, a 12-story building across from U.N. headquarters in New York City, are thousands of miles away from rock-strewn chasms and polluted waterways that characterize so many of the world's mining operations. But Sr. Áine O'Connor and her colleagues feel a connection with sisters and others working to help communities affected by companies seeking silver, gold, copper, coal, zinc and other commodities.

O'Connor and her colleagues who work at the United Nations see a multifront approach in tackling mining — or extractive — issues. As nongovernmental organizations acting in a "consultative status" with the U.N., their role is to bring pressure at the top, working with governments and companies to abide by international standards on environment, safety and health issues. They also want to raise the issue as an international concern, and there is no better place to do that than at the United Nations.

But their activism is also connected with sisters and others who are working with the local communities that mining directly affects. In recent years, protests against mining operations have become increasingly visible throughout the world, from the Peruvian mountains to the hills of Appalachia.

Catholic sisters are among those focusing on the ramifications of mining and other extractive industries. The Loretto Sisters, whose motherhouse is in Nerinx, Kentucky, have joined other groups in protests against mountaintop mining. In Australia, Sisters of Mercy are adding their voices about the coal seam gas industry, operations that extract natural gas from coal deposits.

In India, Sr. Valsa John, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary and an outspoken critic of mining operations in the eastern state of Jharkand, was killed in November 2011 in an
attempt to silence her, fellow indigenous rights activists say. India's Roman Catholic hierarchy spoke out about her death.

At the United Nations, meanwhile, "the voice of Catholic religious are raising the issue as we connect the problems of extraction, climate change and other challenges," said O'Connor, who coordinates the U.N. work of the Sisters of Mercy and the Mercy International Association.

Colleague Amanda Lyons, advocacy officer for Franciscans International, said the foundational questions about mining include: "Does it do harm? Does it serve the common good? Who bears the burdens and who reaps the benefits? How does it affect the health, water, farming and safety of communities and regions nearby?"

The Sisters of Mercy and the Franciscans are members of a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, most of them religious and with robust representation from Catholic sisters, nearly 20 in all, that works under the title NGO Mining Working Group.

The working group, which is allied with local grass-roots organizations throughout the world, is an advocacy coalition. It supports human and environmental rights in the wake of what O'Connor and her colleagues call "the extractive industries."

O'Connor said the group meets at least once a month, either at the U.N. or at Church Center for the United Nations, the base of a number of faith-based organizations working at the U.N.

Advocacy work of this sort focuses on analysis and the development of advocacy positions and documents. Some of this is done in formal meetings, some of it is done in ad hoc sessions, and much of it is done electronically.

"When an official U.N. meeting is in session that we are actively following and doing our advocacy, we meet a couple of days prior to the particular meeting, then we caucus the morning of the meeting, at the middle and at the end of the day," O'Connor said. "During these times, we are making the plan, acting on the plan, then reviewing and revising our advocacy strategy based on that day's outcome. A few times, with the U.N. member states, we have spent all night at the U.N. following critical sessions, especially around the human right to water and sanitation."

Guiding the coalition's current advocacy is pressing the U.N. to a rights-based model of sustainable development. That means respect for civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights must be the foundation for governmental policies in the future and that actions should be aligned with long-term sustainability of natural resources.

In September, U.N. member states agreed to 17 new sustainable development goals for the good of "people, planet and prosperity." This followed the development in 2000 of the Millennium Development Goals by the U.N. that established targets to help eradicate poverty and other problems by 2015.

This new agenda also calls for "economic, social and technological progress" that "occurs in harmony with nature."
This U.N. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is nonbinding; that is, it is not a formal treaty. But it is now up to advocacy groups and coalitions like the NGO Mining Working Group and local grass-roots organizations to keep applying pressure on governments for the cause of human rights and environmental protections.

Why focus on mining, or extraction? Local grass-roots organizations say the extractive industries have done great harm and violated human rights in the name of "development." The extractive model of development, the coalition argues, has damaged the Earth, causing water contamination, the disruption of affected communities, the loss of livelihoods for small-scale farmers, and the displacement of communities. In addition, the coalition says, this model of development has also has led to armed conflict and violence as well as the criminalization and persecution of movements that oppose mining.

The NGO Mining Working Group has developed what it calls a "rights-based litmus test" to assess whether instances of "natural resource extraction" can fit into a sustainable model. The four principles of the proposed test:

- Do no harm: Can mining or other extractive activities be carried out without violating human rights?

- Eradicate root causes of poverty: Does the mining or other extractive activity contribute to eradicating poverty, and are human rights respected and even increased as a result?

- People as rights-holders: Can affected communities participate in a process of assessing the effects of mining?

- Sustainability: What are the effects of potential mining activity both in the short and long term?

In a recent interview with GSR, O'Connor, Lyons and their colleague, Sr. Angela Reed, also affiliated with Sisters of Mercy and Mercy International Association, said they realize these are high and demanding bars that are being set. But "people are beginning to connect the dots" between extraction and mining and social ills, Reed said.

With its high concentration of mineral resources, Latin America — and South America in particular — has been a focus of increasing activism about the effects of extractive industries. And the Catholic church is taking an increasingly high-profile role on the issue.

"It's a topic of concern for us because it's a topic of concern in Latin America," said Richard Coll, foreign policy adviser on Latin America and global trade for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a recent interview.

Coll said companies come into communities "painting a rosy scenario about jobs and income," yet the benefits often prove minimal or elusive. Labor is often imported, and few local taxes are ultimately paid.

"Very little trickles down, and it's often easy for the companies to walk away," he said.
One reason mining is becoming an issue of increasing concern is that its impacts are being felt in greater ways because of technological advancements and larger equipment, Coll said.

"Larger equipment can move more earth," he said.

He said investors in companies that do the mining "would be shocked" by some of the impacts extractive industries have, but the issue has not received "the attention it deserves."

Coll praised the Vatican for making the issue a recent focus, saying concerns that Pope Francis raised have been a "coherent part of his message on the environment and the unrestricted role of markets."

In their work, the sisters and their supporters make the same point. They have an important ally in the pope.

"This is 'Gospel time' — to be in this struggle — and Pope Francis has given us an opportunity to be very public about this," O'Connor said.

The pope sent a message of support to communities affected by mining during a Vatican meeting in July organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and a global grass-roots network called "Churches and Mining."

The pope urged the mining industry to change the way it works, citing "negative consequences" that includes pollution, land grabs, wealth that is not shared with local populations that remain impoverished, and violence and corruption that often occurs in communities where mining is prevalent.

Francis also warned against poor working conditions for miners, as well as human trafficking of women for sexual exploitation in mining communities. He also said mining often occurred without civil, local and national governmental bodies living up to their "fundamental duty to promote the common good."

Citing the pope's recent environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Cardinal Peter Turkson, the pontifical council's president, said the church "cannot remain indifferent" to the cry of affected communities. He quoted a letter from a U.S. Catholic bishop, saying, "Some multinational mining operations are associated with 'calamitous public health and environmental consequences.'"

Among those testifying at the Vatican meeting were communities from Africa, Asia and Latin America, though the issue of extraction also weighs on communities in North America, which is dealing with the controversies surrounding fracking.

The conference was not a one-time event or one-time show of commitment to the issue by the Catholic church. One group focused on mining and extractive industries is the Integrity of Creation Working Group, which is part of the wider work of the Justice, Peace & Integrity Commission. The JPIC is part of the ongoing life and mission of both the Union of Superior
Generals, known as USG, and the International Union of Superior Generals, known as UISG, and their member congregations, said Franciscan Sr. Sheila Kinsey, executive co-secretary of the JPIC Commission.

Among the Integrity of Creation Working Group's activities has been compiling a reflective study guide and resource on the impacts of mining. Among the resource's recommendations: Local communities "have a right to be consulted and heard in all natural resource exploration and development in their region." The study urged mining companies to adopt "policies that mandate that they obtain comprehensive local community consent," including free prior and informed consent, before "beginning any industry projects." Local communities, the study said, have a right to reject proposed projects.

The International Council on Mining & Metals, a coalition of 23 mining and metals companies and 34 national and regional mining associations publicly committed to responsible mining practices, "recognizes the important role that the Catholic church and Pope Francis have in engaging with society on issues that matter to them," said Tom Butler, CEO of the association.

Butler told GSR that ICMM "has been fortunate to have met with representatives within the Catholic church to discuss alternative viewpoints on the industry and how we can address some of the challenges. We have found this dialogue to be most constructive and a conversation that we wish to continue in order to reach better outcomes for all."

On the issue of mining itself, Butler said, "While a mine itself is a finite resource, as the NGO Mining Working Group has stated, our belief is that the economic contribution of a mine — whether through job creation, skills transfer, local content procurement, or taxes paid to central government — can be positively transformational for a host country. Our members strive to achieve that, and governments also need to play their role."

O'Connor and her colleagues say they have a cordial relationship with the ICMM but will remain vigilant in their efforts.

The sisters take a long view, which they acknowledge is needed at the United Nations because pitched arguments and debates can hinge on the language of documents.

Asked what constituted a success for her coalition, O'Connor said "sustained advocacy" helped ensure the recognition of water and sanitation as a human right in the declaration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

To outsiders, language in a U.N. document may seem like a small victory. But for advocates like O'Connor, it has important symbolism and implications.

"For the NGO Mining Working Group and water justice advocates worldwide," she said, "the result is a critical step toward empowering peoples to claim their right while also providing a challenge to corporations and extractive industries that continue to abuse Earth's dwindling water resources."
May 9, 2016

Radical art form blazing a trail for environment, indigenous rights

FMT News

PETALING JAYA: An alternative art group born through a love of punk rock has gained popularity across Malaysia in just a matter of six years, from its humble beginnings in Ranau, Sabah, according to a report by the South China Morning Post.

Pangrok Sulap uses woodcut printing for some controversial and confrontational art pieces that aims to address issues affecting locals and the environment, including depleted forests, animals and the indigenous population.

Woodcut printing is used by several radical groups in Southeast Asia. It was a technique that took off after a Yogyakarta-based Indonesia art group Taring Padi produced controversial political designs following the end of former president Suharto’s reign in 1998.

“I was amazed by the beautiful designs,” said Rizo Leong, one of the founding members of Pangrok Sulap. “We kept experimenting and began to develop our own style.”

Leong lives with his wife at Pangrok Sulap’s art studio which was formerly a primary school on the outskirts of Ranau town.

Pangrok Sulap was started by Leong, Jerome Manjat and four other original members in 2010, and has since grown with more talents to incorporate a range of artistic skills, the Hong Kong daily writes.

What they all had in common was a love for punk rock, hence the local pronunciation “pangrok” became the first part of the name for their new venture. “Sulap” is a Kadazan-Dusun word for a type of hut.

The group’s efforts in the front line of the fight to protect the environment and the rights of the indigenous population in Sabah was well received and their art soon spread across the state and subsequently to the peninsula, and even Japan, where a third exhibition is to take place.

“I don’t know how we got famous,” Manjat said, adding that it just seemed to have happened spontaneously.

Manjat said that the woodcut prints are displayed in public places, mostly without permission from the relevant authorities.
“But the authorities see these pieces, yet they don’t come and catch us. I think they know what we’re saying is true and they agree with our message,” he said.

According to SCMP, Pangrok has diversified, now creating art works from beads (similar to the traditional Dusun art form used on ceremonial costumes) and silkscreen prints, besides having a carpenter on hand.

The woodcut prints and other art works from Pangrok Sulap have been on display in major galleries all over Malaysia. Such popularity started to attract attention from major corporations too, one of whom was Petronas.

The group was asked by the national oil & gas firm to paint a mural in Kota Kinabalu, as part of the firm’s sponsorship of Malaysia Day celebrations on September 16, last year.

“They wanted us because we have a name and people know who we are.

“But we declined to work for Petronas after they came with the condition that it should not be political,” Manjat said, adding that the company even asked Pangrok to name its price to create the mural.

“That is the whole reason we do the art. From the beginning, we were all about spreading the message. We needed to because we don’t have media for local people here,” he added.

“We are interested in showing the real situation in Borneo, like the people losing land to the Kaiduan Dam.”

Manjat was referring to a project that the state government says is needed to secure water supply until the year 2030. Several Dusun villages will be destroyed with more than 2,000 people displaced.

“I don’t think the government cares about the people,” Leong tells the SCMP, adding “but the art makes them listen.”


May 10, 2016

First Nation Wins Historic Victory Over Mammoth Coal Export Terminal

US Army Corps of Engineers denies permit for proposed Cherry Point terminal, which would have been the largest in North America

By Lauren McCauley
Common Dreams
In a move being hailed as a landmark victory for the climate movement, Pacific Northwest communities, and tribal members alike, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Monday denied federal permits for the largest proposed coal export terminal in North America.

"This is big—for our climate, for clean air and water, for our future," declared Mary Anne Hitt, director of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign.

For years, the Lummi Nation led the campaign against the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal in Xwe’chi’eXen (also known as Cherry Point), Washington. Last year, tribal leaders asked (pdf) the Army Corps to reject the project on the grounds that it would violate treaty rights and cause "irreparable damage to important crab and salmon fisheries" in the Salish Sea.

The Army Corps, Hitt said, "did its duty by upholding treaty rights and honoring the U.S. government's commitment to those treaties." The decision marks the first time that a coal export facility has been rejected based on its negative impacts to the treaty rights of a tribal nation.

Quinault Nation President Fawn Sharp, who also serves as president of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and vice president of the National Congress of American Indians, called the ruling "an appropriate and just decision."

Sharp said that "everyone who cares about fish and wildlife, the environment and human health should be happy with the Corps’ decision. This is an historic victory for tribal treaty rights as well as for everybody else who lives here."

"Those who understand the great value of our natural resources to our health and culture, as well as the sustainable economy of the entire region, will applaud today’s announcement," she added.

"This is an historic win, and we are grateful to the Lummi Nation for their leadership in delivering a tremendous victory for Northwest families," said Crina Hoyer, executive director of Bellingham's ReSources for Sustainable Communities. "The message rings loud and clear: communities will never accept the health, safety, economic or environmental impacts of dirty coal exports."

The proposed terminal would have exported up to 48 million tons of Powder River Basin coal each year to markets in Asia. That coal would have been carried on coal trains—as many as 18 additional each day—through communities in Washington, Idaho, and Montana, before being loaded on giant ships which would carry the pollutant across the Salish Sea to the Pacific Ocean.

The project's opponents cited a host of negative environmental impacts—from increased coal dust around the terminal and rail lines to the atmospheric effects of burning coal overseas.

Indeed, the denial comes amid a marked decline in the coal industry, including the recent bankruptcies of fossil fuel giants Peabody and Arch Coal.
At the same time, climate campaigners worldwide have launched a series of peaceful direct actions targeting key fossil fuel infrastructure to pressure their governments to commit to a clean energy future.

"The Lummi Nation’s victory brings even more energy to local movements," said Cesia Kearns, who serves as co-director of the Power Past Coal coalition, an alliance of health groups and businesses, as well as environmental, clean-energy, faith, and community organizations working to stop coal export off the West Coast.

"From British Columbia, to Longview, Washington, to the Gulf of Mexico," Kearns declared, "we will continue to stand together to say no to corporate special interests and yes to healthy, community-driven futures."

http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/10/first-nation-wins-historic-victory-over-mammoth-coal-export-terminal

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May 11, 2016

Can India's Sacred But 'Dead' Yamuna River Be Saved?

By Julie McCarthy
NPR

A fire crackles along the banks of the Yamuna River: a cremation of a young mother, struck by a car while she was fetching water.

The stench of the river engulfs the sad assembly.

Before the hissing funeral pyre, floating down the river, white blocks of what looks like detergent appear like icebergs. It is 95 degrees in Delhi this night. This is chemical waste from factories that have sprung up across the city, manufacturing leather goods, dyes and other goods.

Downstream, the living reside along garbage-strewn banks.

A colony of shacks sits beneath the Old Iron Bridge, a vestige of the British colonial era. Its tracks trundle trains across the Yamuna, on the northern edge of the city. Like the Ganges, the Yamuna is sacred to Hindu believers. The faithful dangle garlands from the bridge's hulking girders and pitch ashes and money from its railings.

Steps away from his hut, 8-year-old Ravi, wearing only his underwear, dives into the contaminated water to retrieve their offerings. He clammers out, tugs on some clothes and, magician-like, pulls the coins he's tucked away for safekeeping from his mouth.
Delhi is about a third of the way down the 855-mile Yamuna River. Its source is the Yamunotri glacier, crystal-clear water from the Himalayas. But by the time it moves down the eastern edge of India’s capital, it exits as the dirtiest river in the country.

For the past 18 years, Mohammad Zamir, a laundry man and father of four, has beaten rags against rocks. Washing remnants used on factory assembly lines, he stands up to his knees in the filthy water from dawn to dusk.

But Zamir, 38, says he's not worried about his health. "No," he says matter-of-factly, "the water looks black because of the shadows falling on it. I have no problems. Neither do our elders, who are nearly 80 and did the same work."

Yet according to the Central Pollution Board's most recently published water quality data, from 2011, by the time the Yamuna exits the city, it is lethal. The water contains a concentration of 1.1 billion fecal coliform bacteria per 100 milliliters of water. The standard for bathing is 500 coliform bacteria per 100 milliliters.

"That is the reason why this stretch of the Yamuna is called dead," says noted environmentalist Manoj Mishra. "Because there is no life here. There cannot be life here. There's nothing here."

Mishra walks along the banks, explaining that upstream, huge amounts of water are channeled off to irrigate farmlands, drastically reducing the river's flow. Just before the Yamuna enters Delhi, millions more gallons are siphoned off for Delhi's drinking water, shrinking the flow even further.

"A river that does not flow is no river," Mishra says. He sweeps an arm toward the stagnant water. "And as you can clearly see, there is no flow here. It's a toxic cocktail of sewage, industrial waste and surface runoff. Absolutely unfit for any use whatsoever."

Architect Pankaj Vir Gupta says no fresh water replenishes the entire 13-mile stretch through Delhi. Gupta runs a project with the University of Virginia to rejuvenate the Yamuna, and says only waste flows into this span of the river.

"In fact," he says, "the only time in the year when the river is moderately clean is during the monsoon when fresh rainfall falls directly into the river."

Unbridled urbanization is partly to blame. Over the past two to three decades, new arrivals, drawn to the capital by a liberalized economy and a dearth of opportunities in their own villages, settled wherever they could. About a third of Delhi's 17 million residents live in settlements that are officially illegal — and are not connected to any municipal sewer service.

When this underserved population openly defecates, Delhi Water Board CEO Keshav Chandra says the waste finds its way into drains that dump directly into the river. "The infrastructure to take care of this incoming population could not cope up with this," he says.
But that's not the only thing that hasn't kept up. The Yamuna is a dumping ground because polluters get away with it.

"You will find every law in Delhi, but no enforcement," says Delhi Water Board member R.S. Tyagi, with a wry laugh. He says there's lax enforcement of laws against illegal dumping of arsenic, zinc and mercury, against pouring raw sewage into storm drains and against the illegal cultivation of crops on the contaminated floodplain.

The Yamuna is administered by no fewer than two dozen different local, state and national government agencies, Tyagi says, and that in itself is a problem. "In this way," he says, "nobody can be accountable."

The Yamuna supplies about a third of Delhi's drinking water, which gets channeled to a reservoir in the northernmost corner of the city before the river becomes toxic.

Architect Gupta says residents of the unauthorized slums must depend on "private tankers, bore wells and a water mafia" for their drinking water. "That can't work," Gupta insists, and argues for the need to "democratize the water supply" of Delhi.

But even the condition of drinking water that comes out of the tap has given rise to a lucrative private industry of home water filters, which are relatively expensive. Mishra says families who can't afford them inevitably fall sick.

"That's how their life is," he says. "And it is highly irresponsible, and in some ways, even criminal. But the solution lies in getting the river back."

Some are trying to do exactly that.

An experiment funded by the Delhi Development Authority and overseen by a team of scientists has a small section of the Yamuna floodplain thriving. Concrete high-rises loom on the periphery of this nature reserve, an oasis on the north edge of a noisy and polluted city.

This butterfly- and bird-filled wetland replicates the flora and fauna of what was here 100 years ago, according to field biologist Mohammad Faisal. He says thousands of migratory birds, 20 species of fish and 35 species of dragonflies have returned as a result of nurturing this conservation habitat over the past five years.

"Wetlands act as a nursery for the river itself," he says.

Artist and activist Ravi Agarwal says this 450-acre biodiversity park in the floodplain is the beginning of an overdue healing.

"Nature and the city become two oxymoronic words — they don't sit with each other. Earlier, they used to flow into each other, and there was a beautiful coexistence," he says.

Coexistence can revive the Yamuna, he says, but the residents of Delhi must want it.
May 12, 2016

BC indigenous leaders seek UN support against gas project

WRAL

UNITED NATIONS — First Nations leaders from British Columbia brought their fight against a proposed liquefied natural gas project in the province to the U.N. on Thursday, saying it could threaten the wild salmon habitat on their ancestral lands.

The group sought the support of United Nations members for its demand that the Canadian government reject the $36-billion Pacific Northwest LNG project, which is being advanced by Malaysia's state oil company, Petronas.

The B.C. government believes the project could generate more than 18,000 jobs and produce billions in revenue.

In a statement, Murray Smith, a leader of the Gitwilgyoots Tribe — one of the Nine Allied Tribes of Lax Kw'alaams — expressed deep concerns about the threat the project poses to the wild salmon habitat.

The project is proposed for just south of Prince Rupert on Lelu Island at the mouth of the Skeena River. Opponents say it threatens wild salmon habitat on what is the second largest salmon bearing river in B.C.

"We will not sell our salmon future for any price," Smith said. "We are not against development, but we are against this dangerous, irresponsible, foreign-owned and illegal intrusion into our sacred homelands."

The First Nations leaders' appearance at the U.N. came just two days after the Canadian government earned cheers at the 15th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, where Canada pledged to abide fully with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Environment Minister Catherine McKenna has said a cabinet decision on an environmental assessment covering the Pacific Northwest plant should be made by late June.
May 13, 2016

Pursuit of integral ecology

By Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo and Veerabhadran Ramanathan

Science
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Later this month (23 and 24 May), the United Nations will convene the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, where global and local leaders will commit to putting each and every person’s safety, dignity, freedom, and right to thrive at the heart of decision-making. More than 125 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, a level of suffering not seen since World War II. The social problems are wide and deep, from war and human trafficking to the gross inequality between the wealthy 1% and the poorest 3 billion of the population. Included in the summit's Agenda for Humanity are climate and natural disasters. Indeed, 1 year ago, Pope Francis emphasized, in the encyclical Laudato Si, that complex crises have both social and environmental dimensions. The bond between humans and the natural world means that we live in an “integral ecology,” and as such, an integrated approach to environmental and social justice is required.

The need for an integral ecology approach can be seen, for example, in the coupling of economic activities and wealth inequalities with environmental pollution and climate change. Climate pollutants come primarily from the wealthy 1 billion, but the worst consequences of associated climate change will be experienced by the bottom 3 billion, who had little to do with this pollution.

Last year brought two historic global agreements that renewed optimism about a sustainable future. The United Nations’ (UN’s) declaration of sustainable development goals called for the eradication of poverty and the improvement of human well-being. The Paris agreement was signed by 195 nations to limit global warming to well below a 2°C increase. These global acknowledgements of systemic ecological and social problems have opened a window of opportunity to focus on how problems of poverty, human well-being, and the protection of creation are interlinked. The real innovation is this new synergy between science, policy, and religion.

The origin, transformative potential, and future development of an alliance between science, policy, and religion is based on recent advances at the Holy See, which houses two Pontifical Academies devoted to science: one for natural scientists and the other for social scientists. The members of these academies are chosen not for their religious affiliations but for their scientific preeminence. In May 2014, the two academies of scholars, philosophers, and theologians met to contemplate the sustainability of humanity and nature, and came to a remarkable (for a scientific body) conclusion: The resolution of major environmental problems facing society requires a fundamental reorientation in our behavior and attitude toward nature and toward each other. Both academies convened faith leaders of the major religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam (both Sunni and Shia), and Judaism to state that slavery and human trafficking are crimes against humanity. Although it is hard for different religions to pray at the same altar,
it finally became possible and necessary for them to act together to defend the dignity of human beings and their common home. This new attitude spurred meetings in 2014 and 2015 between scientists, policy-makers, and religious leaders that included UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and governors and mayors from more than 80 large cities. The groups agreed that the mitigation of climate change was a moral and religious imperative, and that the development of a sustainable relationship with the planet also requires a moral revolution. This new alliance also declared that extreme globalization of forms of indifference such as human trafficking and modern slavery should be acknowledged as crimes against humanity.

Pope Francis' effort to unite science, policy, and religion toward an integral ecology approach is just a start. We hope that other religions and moral and political leaders will join this new synergy and nudge society toward equitable solutions to ecological and social justice problems without losing sight of the values of the human person and the common good.

http://science.sciencemag.org/content/352/6287/747.full

May 13, 2016

Catholic social teachings call to the dignity of creation

By Denis M. Hughes and Brian Jordan
National Catholic Reporter

On May 15, 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued the seminal encyclical for workers *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor). This memorable encyclical officially ushered in the transition in Catholic social thought from a basis in agrarian economy to the understanding of the industrial evolution throughout the world through manufacturing and other industries.

Pope Leo XIII secured the foundation that work is at the center of the church's reflection on human identity and activity. *Rerum Novarum* and many papal encyclicals for the past 125 years have argued for the protection of workers and the right to form a union. With each encyclical, each generation addresses the challenge of the central nature of work within the changing and ever complex situation of its time.

Before it was popularly defined, the concept of globalization was addressed in the first paragraph of *Rerum Novarum* in connection with new development of industry, new techniques striking out new paths, changed relations of employer and employee, abounding wealth among a very small number and destitution among the masses. This was written in the context of the industrial revolution. Since 1891, each generation is faced with a similar challenge in its efforts to evaluate how developments in industry and technology affect "the condition of the worker."

Many church historians claim that *Rerum Novarum* is the starting point of an important tradition of Catholic social teaching on the economy, politics, world order, and peace that has served as a compelling alternative to secular politics. For example, within *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XII writes, "...by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated and
helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition." Leo XIII warned of the injustices created by the reliance on the free market while at the same time warning of the dangers of state socialism.

In its day, *Rerum Novarum* had a threefold effect. First, it was seen as a reformist rather than a radical document by workers' associations. Second, priests, not laity, were urged to take up the cause of the workers. (That has practically reversed itself in 2016. There is a scarcity of labor priests but a surplus of committed lay Catholic labor leaders.) Third, the encyclical took on secular socialism as well as rampant capitalism. A large part of the church's social teaching is determined by important social questions to which social justice is the proper answer. As we rediscover *Rerum Novarum*, we also uncover salient issues that were as important in 1891 are they are today pertaining to capital and labor.

The encyclical captures the spirit of the Industrial Revolution and the rights of workers:

*The most important of all are workingmen's unions, for these virtually include all the rest. History attests what excellent results were brought about by the artificer's guilds of olden times. They were the means of affording not only many advantages to the workmen, but in no small degree of promoting the advancement of art, as numerous monuments remain to bear witness. Such unions should be suited to the requirements of this our age -- an age of wider education, of different habits, and of far more numerous requirements in daily life. It is gratifying to know that there are actually in existence not a few associations of this nature, consisting of either workmen alone, or of workmen and employers together, but it were greatly to be desired that they should become more numerous and more efficient. We have spoken of them more than once, yet it will be well to explain here how notably they are needed to show that they exist of their own right and what should be their organization and their mode of action.*(49)

Catholic social teaching states that the right to organize is based on the human right of freedom of association that is found in the natural law. The right of workers to freely choose unions necessarily involves their right to decide how they shall decide for or against a union. More importantly, *Rerum Novarum* marked the bestowal of significant papal approval of emerging Catholic social movements. This gave the impetus to establish the rights of workers to organize into benevolent and protective societies with the twofold objective of implementing corrective reform and encouraging social betterment.

As Catholic union promoters, we staunchly support the Roman Catholic moral teaching on abortion, family values and the danger of the so called right-to-die movement. We also support the 1986 U.S. Catholic Bishops pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*. We support the U.S. bishops' teaching on labor unions: "The purpose of unions is not simply to defend existing wages and prerogatives of the fraction of workers who belong to them, but also to enable workers to make positive and creative contributions to the firm, the community, and the larger society in an organized and cooperative way."

It is our hope that the U.S. bishops are just as consistent with Catholic social teachings as they are with Catholic sexual teachings. Both are called to the dignity of creation. The twofold
purpos
e of marriage is mutual love between husband and wife and the procreation of children
while Catholic social teaching teaches the dignity of the human person and the creation of a just
workforce called unions. However, 125 years later in 2016, the sacramental union of marriage is
also threatened, along with the right of labor unions to exist. The number of Catholic sacramental
unions and Americans joining private sector unions has declined dramatically in the last 10
years.

We believe there are four major concerns regarding the future of labor unions:

**Right to association.** In recent years, the AFL-CIO has witnessed an erosion of the National
Labor Relations Act of 1935 by the courts and the U.S. Congress. In many cases, employers with
deep pockets can make it nearly impossible within the law for employees to organize. Proof of
this claim lies in recent legislative measures in Wisconsin and Indiana to weaken the rights of
public sector unions.

All papal encyclicals dealing with labor unions such as *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II's
*Laborem Exercens*, and Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, have one primary point in
common. Catholic social teaching is not just seeking charity to alleviate the plight of the poor but
true justice for all workers, especially union employees. Nowadays, organized labor faces union-
busting schemes by unscrupulous employers who want to eradicate private sector unions. Also,
there is a growing number of unenlightened elected officials who want to ban public sector
unions in their respective states. Recently, West Virginia became the 26th state to be designated
as "right to work," meaning little or no unions.

Currently, we are grateful for the deadlocked Supreme Court vote allowing the teachers' union in
California to require dues for all in that public sector profession. We understand and support
states' rights and federal law. We hope that our laws continue to support the right to association
as does Catholic social teaching.

**Immigration.** In recent decades, there have been dramatic changes in the age, gender and ethnic
make-up of the workforce. This is largely due to undocumented immigrants competing for blue-
collar jobs as well as the increase of available work visas for highly trained immigrant workers
competing for white collar jobs.

The AFL-CIO is not anti-immigrant. In fact, it supports comprehensive immigration reform with
the hope that the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants will, after legalization, wish to
join unions. We also note that the majority of the undocumented are Roman Catholics who
would formally join their parishes and help support them with their just wages.

**Wage theft: The Seventh Commandment and the right to strike.** We support the
compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic church that the Seventh Commandment, "Thou
shall not steal," is not merely about property and stealing but also about social justice and human
dignity.

Many corporations have the unrestricted ability to move capital to another nation or another state
to exploit the cheapest labor available. This has led to the huge loss of U.S. manufacturing jobs
to other nations or, within the U.S., to states that do not uphold union labor laws. This is wage theft that reduces the wages of many eligible workers. There are corporations today that are emotionally and financially committed to foment a union-free environment. Why? They simply do not want to pay a just wage and offer necessary medical and retirement benefits. That is wage theft and is a matter of social justice and the pursuit of human dignity.

In addition, we support the right of Catholic school teachers to strike whenever necessary. Again we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Recourse to a strike is morally legitimate when it cannot be avoided, or at least when it is necessary to obtain a proportionate benefit." If the Catechism approves a legitimate strike, why do many U.S. Catholic pastors and bishops accuse the labor leaders of being anti-Catholic? Again, that is wage theft.

**Climate change.** *Rerum Novarum* is fulfilled by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si.* Catholic social teaching has been communicated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents.

The relationship between human work and care for the environment is wonderfully addressed in *Laudato Si'* inspired by the "Canticle of Creation" by St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. This encyclical is primarily a message of hope and a call to action. In the first chapter, he alludes to the earth as "our common home" and that we need to take precious care of it. Like Pope Leo XIII 125 years ago, Pope Francis acknowledges that the "acceleration of changes" affecting humanity and the planet coupled with a "more intensified pace of like and work" are at odds with the "naturally slow pace" of biological evolution.

The world has changed dramatically in the 125 years since *Rerum Novarum*. But like his predecessor, Pope Francis warns "the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to the integral and sustainable human development."

In the third chapter of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis also asserts the human roots of the ecological crisis. He maintains the need to protect employment and the conditions of working people. "Any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour … because to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short term financial gain, is bad business for society." The antecedent for this teaching is based in *Rerum Novarum*.

However, the issue of climate change is no longer a scientific debate. It is a political debate that Pope Francis acknowledged in his address to the United Nations in September 2015. He referred to worker justice and the rights of workers as a shared responsibility of all nations. The pope emphasized the common good in society and that everything in the world is connected. By being connected to our ecological and labor crises we can find viable solutions to take care of "our common home" together.

By proclaiming the dignity of work and defending the rights of workers, Pope Leo XIII focused on a theme that would recur in Catholic social teaching throughout the following 125 years. Changed conditions in society have precipitated continual development of this tradition to keep current this aspect of church teaching.
From *Rerum Novarum* until now, additional encyclicals have addressed the rights of workers and the dignity of every human person. We assert that the most important encyclical written since that seminal work, is Pope Francis' *Laudato Si’* which is addressed not only to Catholics but to all of God's creatures everywhere. Pope Francis addressed not only the plight of workers but the plight of the world where we all live and our shared responsibility to take care of Mother Earth. Protecting the environment is the most certain way to protect the rights of workers both now and in the future.

[Denis M. Hughes is the former president of the New York State AFL-CIO and former chairman of the New York Federal Reserve Board. Franciscan Fr. Brian Jordan is a labor priest, chaplain at St. Francis College, Brooklyn, and chaplain to the New York City union construction workers.]


May 16, 2016

Indigenous tribe on Mt. Elgon suffers climate change impacts

By Gerald Tenywa
New Vision

He had never known anything known as malaria until he left the higher parts of Mt. Elgon where he was born 57 years ago.

When Batya Moya, an elder among the Benets got down at Amanang, which is at the edge of Mt. Elgon National Park, he was attacked by malaria. The malaria carrying mosquitoes breed in the lower parts of the mountains because they are warmer than the higher parts of the mountains.

“I had never experienced malaria attacks,” says Moya, adding that he lost a lot of money and time to recover from the disease which is becoming rampant along the slopes of Mt. Elgon.

This is not only restricted to Mt. Elgon, according to Salome Alweny who is the leader, for environment change, development and policy programme of Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS).

As climate change rises, the higher parts of the mountains which were previously unsuitable for the breeding of mosquitoes are becoming favourable for mosquitoes which are referred to as vectors of malaria.

Climate Change is caused by emissions such as carbon dioxide from production processes, which trap heat escaping to the atmosphere thereby causing global warming. The warming of the earth disrupts rainfall patterns and also melts the ice on mountain tops like the Rwenzori.

Alweny said climate change is one of the issues that will be discussed at the 3rd Mountain
Forum to be held at Mbale, from 18th to 20th October, 2016.

The theme of the forum is, “Mountains our future” and is being organised by ARCOS and the Ministry of Water and Environment with the support of the Swiss agency for development and cooperation.

Apart from climate change, the mountain is faced with a challenge of high population pressure as well as settling people such as the Benets, according to Fred Kiiza, the acting chief warden of Mt. Elgon National Park under the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA).

The Benets, an indigenous group of people were evicted from Mt. Elgon National Park in 1995. The Batwa in south western Uganda were also evicted in the early 1990s when Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Mgahinga National Park were protected as national parks.

Bwindi and Mgahinga along with Mt. Elgon were elevated from forest reserves to national parks, which have a higher conservation status in Uganda.


May 17, 2016

Interfaith event focuses on the environment

By Jennifer Burke
Catholic Courier

More than 60 scholars from around the world will present research papers on the environmental perspectives of different religions during an upcoming conference at Nazareth College in Pittsford.

"Sacred Texts and Human Contexts: Nature and Environment in World Religions" will take place May 23-25 at the college and will feature panel presentations and keynote addresses about nature and the environment as seen through the lens of such religions as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The conference is being administered by Nazareth College and its Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue in collaboration with the Department of Religious Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva.

Nazareth College has hosted similar conferences on sacred texts in previous years, but the theme of this year's conference was inspired in part by the May 2015 release of Laudato Si’, Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology, according to Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, executive director of the Hickey Center and a professor of religion at Nazareth.
"The environment and climate is challenging, and especially after the pope's encyclical, we felt the need to have this conference in this year to create awareness in the light of what the pope has emphasized," Shafiq said. "This is (a) unique and significant conference. I believe we are pioneers in America to organize such an academic conference on climate change."

A number of local Catholics will be moderating panel discussions or presenting papers during the conference. Father William Graf, chair of the department of religious studies at St. John Fisher College, will moderate a May 24 panel on Pope Francis' encyclical and what it means for the environment. During that discussion Marvin Mich, director of advocacy and parish social ministry at Rochester's Catholic Family Center, will present a paper titled "Pope Francis, Care for Creation, and Popular Movements." Another panel discussion, titled "Interfaith Approaches to Scriptures and Environment," will be moderated by Dr. Nathan Kollar, cofounder of the Hickey Center and professor emeritus of religious studies at St. John Fisher College.

On May 24 Sister of St. Joseph Monica Weis, professor emeritus of English at Nazareth College, will present a paper on "Personal and Communal Conversion: Key to Environmental Integrity," and the next day Father George Heyman, president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, will present a paper on "Ali al-Khawas and Pope Francis: A Mystical Union with the Created World." A number of other panel discussions and papers also will address topics related to Pope Francis or Catholicism.

The conference will open May 23 with registration from 3 to 5 p.m., followed by dinner and a keynote address. Panel presentations and keynote addresses will take place May 24 and 25, and there also will be an afternoon excursion to Niagara Falls on May 25. On May 26 conference participants will visit Hobart and William Smith Colleges as well as several other destinations in the Finger Lakes region, including a winery, the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls and the Book of Mormon Historic Publication Site in Palmyra.

The registration fee for the conference alone -- not including dinners or lunches -- is $55 per person, or $169 for the conference as well as all the associated meals.

For more information or to register, send an e-mail to interfaith@naz.edu.


May 17, 2016

Greening Group Planting Environmental Seeds

Religious school students get a sustainability crash course.

By Merri Rosenberg
The Jewish Week

It wasn’t your everyday religious school experience.
When Hazon, a Jewish environmental organization, showed up at the Community Synagogue of Rye last month with their Topsy-Turvy bus — powered by vegetable oil — religious school students had the chance to ride a bicycle to power a blender to make their own smoothies.

This was precisely the kind of experience that the Westchester Jewish Greening Group, a new coalition of congregations and members who want to enhance environmental awareness and action, wants to see around the county as a way to feature environmental education within their religious school programs.

“This is a way to revitalize Jewish education,” said Becca Linden, director of the Jewish Greening Fellowship at Hazon. “It’s a way Jewish values come to life, where students are Jewishly engaged. It’s a way to do something more creative. Jewish tradition has all this stuff to say; it’s a great entry to Jewish life. You can energize kids through environmental activities.”

At an early organizational meeting during the winter, the group discussed some of their individual programs, and ways in which they could be scaled or modeled elsewhere throughout the county. Participants belong to a wide range of congregations and organizations in Westchester including Bet Am Shalom, Westchester Reform Temple, Greenburgh Hebrew Center, Community Synagogue of Rye, Congregation Kol Ami, Temple Israel Center and the Hebrew Institute of White Plains.

Much of Hazon’s work in this area is about breaking down the silos that have long separated nature from Jewish education, instead teaching and encouraging students and congregants to see the connection. As Elan Margulies, director of Teva, a Hazon program that works to provide experiential learning incorporating Judaism, ecology and food sustainability, said, “This movement is a great equalizer, and a lens into Judaism, moving into the larger world and about the impact we can have in the world.”

Rooting the concepts in Torah—like the brit adamah, or covenant with the earth—educational activities can include other aspects of ritual, like growing herbs to use for Havdalah, making cheese for Shavuot or grinding their own wheat. At the April 13 session in Rye, participants planted micro-greens and discussed how to build a city, including how to get rid of garbage. A conversation about what kinds of plant species should be part of a garden included a list of the 10 species of Jewish life.

“We want to make children much more mindful,” said Dale Oberlander, director of the early childhood center at Community Synagogue of Rye, where nursery school children participated in planting and tending a vegetable garden. There is also a composting program. “We’re looking to ‘green’ the playground, to have more of an outdoor classroom and have more children involved with natural materials.”

Other efforts at the Community Synagogue of Rye, according to Cantor Melanie Cooperman, include having bnei mitzvot families commit to having an environmentally-friendly event that reflects “Jewish values” and using a trail on the grounds, to “bring classes outside and studying outdoors in nature as a prayer space.”
Congregation Kol Ami combines art appreciation with nature appreciation for their 4- and 5-year-olds, and will be adding a class for 3-year-olds next year. Temple Israel Center’s Ellen Weininger shared that her community’s focus is on composting and energy auditing. Nancy Sklar of Greenburgh Hebrew Center said their in-house catering committee is composting and working with the congregation.

The group met at Westchester Reform Temple in April for a presentation on that congregation’s zero-waste program. “Anything held at our temple is reusable, recyclable and compostable,” said Michelle Sterling, a member of Westchester Reform Temple and the Westchester Greening Group. “We’re not throwing out food anymore.” Caterers who work in the building are brought up to speed about this initiative. “We want to get all houses of worship to zero waste.”

Although the projects may differ, Cooperman said that the Westchester Greening Group members are making progress. “The focus remains on education,” she said.


May 17, 2016

Taj Mahal Under Attack by Bugs and Their Green Slime

By Nida Najar and Suhasini Raj
New York Times

NEW DELHI — Over the centuries, the Taj Mahal has endured its share of attacks — plundered by the Jats of northern India and looted by British soldiers, among other indignities. In recent years, officials have worried that growing air pollution could permanently darken the tomb’s brilliant white exterior.

But few people anticipated the latest affront — millions of mosquito-like insects, their numbers supercharged by nutritious algae blooming profusely along the banks of the polluted Yamuna River nearby. Like generations of romance-driven human couples before them, the bugs have swarmed the Taj Mahal on a mating flight, excreting a green substance on parts of its marble walls.

The Yamuna has suffered mightily in recent years from the dumping of solid waste in its waters, said an environmental activist in Agra, India, the site of the Taj Mahal.

“I have been constantly watching how the river pollution has gone from bad to worse,” said D.K. Joshi, who filed a petition over the insects in the National Green Tribunal, an environmental court last week. “The encroachments on and around the riverbed, the sewage going directly into the river” are choking it, he said.
On Monday, the National Green Tribunal issued notices to the central and local authorities, including the Ministry of Environment and Forests, telling them to respond to the petition this month.

With India’s cities ranking among the most polluted in the world by the World Health Organization, public concern over toxic air and water is mounting. The central government has pledged billions of rupees to cleaning the Ganges River. But the effect of pollution on India’s cultural heritage, though less obvious than its health effects, is also worthy of attention, experts say.

Sohail Hashmi, a Delhi-based writer and expert on heritage monuments, told Press Trust of India in an interview that the recently revived white limestone doors of the historic Red Fort, a former residence the Mughal emperor that was completed in 1648, “have become yellow in about six years.” Like the Red Fort, the Taj Mahal was built on the orders of Shah Jahan, a Mughal emperor, as a mausoleum for his beloved wife, and it was also finished in 1648.

The green secretions on the back wall of the Taj Mahal, a residue of the chlorophyll the insects consume, are not themselves harmful to the monument beyond the discoloration, said Girish Maheshwari, the head of the department of entomology at St. John’s College in Agra, who analyzed the problem for the Archaeological Survey of India.

But the explosive numbers of the insects — called Goeldichironomus — were an alarming indication of how polluted the river has become, he said, since their eggs thrive on phosphorus and sediment in the water. And he worried over the “highly synchronized” swarm of insects that descend on the monument in the evening.

“They can create problems for the visitors,” he said.

The walls have been cleaned with clay packs, said Manoj Bhatnagar, an official in the Agra office of the archaeological survey. The excretions could also be removed with water, but the day-to-day cleaning is “very challenging.”

The insects do not seem to have deterred tourists, as yet. Samir Uboeri, who runs a tour company based in Mumbai, visited the Taj Mahal with groups twice in the last two weeks and did not notice a change. When asked what would happen if there was a significant recurring greening on the most loved monument in the country, he said, “I’m only hoping to God they find a solution before that.”

Puneet Dan, a tour guide in Agra, said he noticed the discoloration on the boundary wall of the Taj Mahal and on the back of the monument. So did his tourists, who he said flew into “semipanic mode.”

He said all he could do was assure them that officials were not about to let one of the greatest monuments in the world turn green.

May 19, 2016

From Independence to Interdependence

By Cassandra Farrin
Westar Institute

When you trek up a mountainside and pass over a ridge into a gorgeous vista of peaks bathed in the colors of sunset, and when later that night the stars spangle out over your tent and an alpine lake, reflecting back their own infinite mass, don’t the words that come to mind feel strangely religious? Awe. Wonder. Beauty. Surely this, if nothing else, reassures us that the chasm between science and religion is not as wide as it all-too-often feels.

We welcomed with delight Mary Evelyn Tucker’s comments on this subject as part of the Westar Institute’s Spring 2016 national meeting in Santa Rosa, California. Tucker is in a good position to speak on the subject of religion, climate change, the value of nature, and all that goes with these deeply intertwined fields of interest: she is the co-director with her husband John Grim of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, where she teaches in the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and the Divinity School. She opened her talk at Westar with an overview of current ecological efforts and the key values driving those efforts in her presentation, “The Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology,” followed by a screening of her Emmy Award-winning documentary Journey of the Universe (2011).

Nature in Secular and Spiritual Systems

Tucker encouraged us to see that nature is valued in both spiritual and secular systems. While for the most part the ecological movement has been driven by people who love nature and don’t necessarily identify as religious, nevertheless religious communities are emerging now as crucial actors in the ecological movement.

The late arrival of religion, especially Western religions, to the ecology question is the unfortunate result of issues like fundamentalism, intolerance, and antipathy to science—part and parcel with the challenging struggles presented by modernity. This struggle isn’t limited to Western traditions but in Western traditions it has taken the particular form of a response to the critical question: “How are we going to re-examine our truth claims?”

This should be an all-too-familiar question to anyone who has been following the work of the Jesus Seminar and subsequent Seminars sponsored by the Westar Institute: in some sense, it was the question that got us started.

How do you cultivate yourself to be part of a larger society and contribute to society, not just for your own enlightenment but for the greater good?
Not all religious traditions have struggled with the inherent instability of truth, of course. When Tucker went to southern Japan to teach, she became fascinated with the values she found there, values that are rooted in non-exclusive religious systems. In taking up the study of Confucianism and Buddhism, she learned that these traditions, which are of immense textual complexity and still not well understood in the West, have a lot to offer us as we attempt to rethink our values in this ecological age. To cite just one example, the value for education in Japan (and across China and East Asia) derives largely from Confucianism: in Confucianism, education is a moral act. How do you cultivate yourself to be part of a larger society and contribute to society, not just for your own enlightenment but for the greater good?

That’s not to say these Asian and indigenous traditions ought to simply replace the great Western religious traditions. The transformation of all these traditions with good critical thought still needs to happen. *We can do that*—but where do we begin? Tucker suggested we might try re-examining the views of nature in the various religious traditions. What can we retrieve and reevaluate in the sacred texts, rituals, and practices of each tradition? She and her husband John Grim organized ten conferences on each of the major world traditions at Harvard from 1996-1998 to explore these types of questions. From this project, which resulted in 10 edited volumes from Harvard several common themes within world religions emerged, among them the following:

- Daily and seasonal cycles
- Agricultural rhythms
- Biodiversity and bioregions
- Cosmological connections

Through our religious language, we are weaving ourselves into the deeper patterns of nature and the cosmos. As poet Mary Oliver put it, “I’ve never missed a full moon.” We are part of these cycles. Mircea Eliade, the highly influential history of religions professor at the University of Chicago, also saw this. As he observed, rediscovering the depth of our religious symbols as derived from nature revives their power.

**From Independence to Interdependence**

It is important to understand that many of us in the West live according to Enlightenment era values that prioritize the individual: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—or rather, as one attendee reminded us, Locke’s *original trinity* was not in pursuit of happiness but property! Missing, however, is a much needed respect for the interconnectedness of life. This is the gift of the ecological movement and the sciences: interdependence, relationality, flourishing. Mary Evelyn Tucker encouraged us to go beyond “sustainability” language, which suggests we’re remaining static—instead, let’s embrace the notion of “flourishing”! This means:

- Life is the interdependence of species.
Liberty is relationality.

Happiness is living in a flourishing Earth community.

In our present moment, communities are transitioning from a Declaration of Independence to a Declaration of Interdependence. This can be seen in the Earth Charter (drafted from 1992–2000), the preamble of which reads as follows:

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe
Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life.

This lends itself well to an approach that can welcome religion into the ecology conversation rather than assuming religion as an antagonist or part of the problem. Religious ecology, Tucker suggests, is “the symbolic understanding of ecological interdependence.” Think of kosher laws, the Eucharist, and so on. What are we saying when we participate in such rituals? If we use polluted water and genetically modified grains to prepare the Eucharist, what does that mean? Our lives depend on our understanding that we have emerged from biological processes and patterns. We’re emerging out of a 14-billion year unfolding process, and we share a profound interconnection with other species in the whole world.

In such a context, what is empathy? What is love? What is compassion? As one attendee put it, “Most of us are on our way to somewhere else. People who are here with more awareness of their body and their place, are more likely to care for both.” Tucker observed in response that one related problem, especially in Western traditions, is rooted in some religious communities’ focus on otherworldliness and the quest for salvation elsewhere.

Both ecologists and religious practitioners are discovering more comprehensive voices in relation to the value of the Earth – its ecosystems and its species. Ecology as a discipline began with a sense of holism and dynamism, and in this religion may find common ground. By valuing nature in a more aesthetic, spiritual and holistic way, we reach a crucial point of connection that can perhaps overcome the otherworldly focus that has so dominated religious discourse in the West. This brings together eco-justice concerns for both people and planet. As Thomas Berry said to liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and others many years ago, you can’t heal humans if you’re ignoring a diseased Earth.

The Catholic Pope and the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch have used a simple human connection—friendship!—to overcome thousands of years of unwillingness to work together on this. The Green Patriarch, Bartholomew, has spoken out about our destruction of the environment as “ecological sin” and “crimes against creation”. Other key people mentioned were Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori from the Episcopal Church, and Joel Hunter from the Evangelical community. As many of us already know, the Dalai Lama has been speaking on environmental issues for the past thirty years. Now there is also the Tibetan 17th Karmapa, who has the fifty-five monasteries under his influence working on climate change issues, training monks to help people with local issues. In China, an “ecological culture” is emerging, drawing upon Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, which is now built into the constitution and even appears
in speeches of Chinese leaders. Among the values emerging from this new ecological culture drawing on Chinese religious traditions are:

Interdependence of cosmos, Earth, and human

Micro-macro relations of humans and nature

Seasonal and agricultural cycles

Harmonizing with nature

Cultivating nature

Part of the challenge here is that we depend fully on the Earth no matter what religious tradition we have inherited: “The scriptures of the Earth are looking to us for understanding,” Tucker explained. “How do we understand the ecosystems that keep us alive, and keep our children alive?” As she said to a group of Texas oil men, “Only consider what would drilling in the Arctic be like? It would be like tearing pages from the Bible!” These are scriptures of nature, scriptures of the human heart. Our creativity needs to pour itself out in response at this critical moment.

How can we recover mutually enhancing human-Earth relations? Clearly, the majority of people are involved in religious communities, and that is a force of enormous proportions that is needed to make a difference. How can we collectively participate in this? Tucker recommended that we try thinking of a dynamic like this:

FIELD (Education) ↔ FORCE (Society)

On the one hand, we need knowledge to help us understand what we’re up against and also to actually prepare ourselves to live in the future of human-Earth flourishing that we are hoping to create. On the other hand, we need to take concrete action to make changes. This comes about on a deeper level than we sometimes realize. Many problems in North Africa and the Middle East are about the survival of a people in the context of drought—not a matter of terrorism!—and the refugees from this largely ecological crisis are overflowing into Europe.

Impact of the Papal Encyclical

Have you read the papal encyclical on care of the Earth, the *Laudato Si’* or “care for our common home”? If you haven’t yet, Tucker urged us all to read it and consider its significance ([HTML version](#) | [PDF version](#)). *Laudato Si’* has done something incredibly important for the issue of the environment: it has placed the moral heart of it on a world stage with such language as this:

This sister [Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the
water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the Earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.

Nothing in this world is indifferent to us.

This is by no means the only religious response to the environment and climate change in recent years, but it is a highly public act by a very well respected pope that has already shown a ripple effect. That is because there are more than one billion Catholics and another billion Christians in the world. Among other watershed moments, the COP 21 Conference in Paris in December 2015 was deeply influenced by the moral call of the encyclical. In addition, the presence of indigenous peoples was powerfully felt in Paris and in the Climate March in New York in 2014. The involvement of indigenous peoples worldwide is driven by a simple and wonderful thing: they are seeing their cosmology reflected in the ecology movement. The values at the heart of many indigenous religious perspectives are deeply tied to ecology and resonant with it. In a way, as one attendee said, the West that once colonized the world now needs to allow its hearts and minds to be colonized by those it once oppressed. We need it for our own survival as a global human community.

Where can we go from here?

Religious communities can contribute resilience and inspiration like no other community can. Hope is what religious traditions have offered throughout history, and hope is what we can offer. As one attendee put it:

What are we to do as responsible people of faith and scholars and students? … People place sites that are dangerous or toxic in the poorest parts of this country. Christians are often associated with pacifism—“we need to forgive”—but in reality we have a revolutionary concept, too, that needs to be brought out in a responsible manner. We’re seeds and little pilgrims who go back to wherever we go and can become the leaders in those communities.

An important step taken by Tucker along with cosmologist Brian Thomas Swimme, with an outpouring of support from numerous friends and partners, was to narrate the story of the universe in a way that brought religion and science together. At the heart of the Journey of the Universe project is the belief that a “Great Story” (knowledge/inspiration) leads to “Great Work” (action/perspiration). As Thomas Berry noted epics have changed whole civilizations—and we need one now more than ever! His essay “The New Story” (1978) was an inspiration for the Journey film, book, and conversations. Journey of the Universe

This, of course, is the first attempt to tell the new evolutionary story in film form. There were other inspirations for this ten year project. Alexander von Humboldt (d. 1859) was one of the most famous scientists of his era, an inspiration to Darwin to travel and study, and he cared deeply about evolution. In his book Kosmos, he says, “I have the extravagant idea of describing in one and the same work the whole material world—all that we know today of celestial bodies and of life upon the Earth…” He wanted to tell a coherent story of the universe.
Other scientists have followed in his footsteps, people like Carl Sagan (Cosmos), E. O. Wilson (Epic of Evolution), Neil DeGrasse Tyson (Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey), Eric Chaisson (Cosmic Evolution), and the historian, David Christian (Big History). These are people who appreciate that the humanities are needed in order to help the human community recalibrate their priorities, and yet over and over again many such individuals have underestimated or oversimplified the role religion might play in this project. In spite of some genuine efforts at dialogue, other tellings of the universe often suffer from reductionistic thinking. Moreover, some scientists are instrumentalists, saying we need the religious communities to be involved because they are such big players in the world. Scientists who want to be taken seriously by other scientists tend to avoid religion. Reductionist science tends to trump everything in these attempts to retell the story.

The film that emerged in response, the Journey of the Universe, powerfully conveys that life and consciousness were the inevitable result of the ordering principles that were present at the Big Bang 14 billion years ago. This isn’t an overly simplistic or idealistic portrait. Our awareness of deep time has led to…

awareness of evolution – beauty

awareness of extinction – destruction

This reality can be overwhelming for us. How do we hold these two dynamics together going forward? How do we avoid collapsing under the burden of the “sixth extinction”? Geologists have defined the current age as the “Anthropocene”: the age of human-induced planetary change. Yet even as we’re dealing with the direct fear of extinction not only for ourselves, but for all life on this planet, we’re also awakening to new intimacy with the universe and the Earth community, a transition to full awareness of what it means that “we are stardust.” What is true well-being, true fecundity, in such a world? Who are we sharing this Earth with?

Journey of the Universe attempts not to falsely step outside the religious part of the conversation. By broadening participation in the whole, we return to awe that evokes action. This is where religion and science meet. Tucker proposes we revise the role of humans to embrace this all-important orientation that we are:

Citizens of the universe

Members of the Earth community

Kin to all other species

In short, we belong here. This is our new and ancient realization, and it is what must guide us into the future at this critical juncture.

Thank you for reading this report on the Westar Institute Spring 2016 national meeting, which took place in Santa Rosa, California. To see all meeting-related reports, visit the Spring 2016 program page.
Cassandra Farrin joined Westar in 2010 and currently serves as the Marketing & Outreach Director. A US-UK Fulbright Scholar, she has an M.A. in Religious Studies from Lancaster University (England) and a B.A. in Religious Studies from Willamette University. She is passionate about books and projects that in some way address the intersection of ethics and early Christian history.

https://www.westarinstitution.org/blog/from-independence-to-interdependence/

May 21, 2016

Cultivating peace: Qur'anic and Abrahamic Botanic Gardens

UNESCO

From the first, the Qur'anic botanic gardens project aimed to enhance linkages between cultural and biological diversity, by linking traditional Islamic respect for natural habitats, the cultures inspired by the Holy Books of Islam, with the protection of environment and biological diversity. They also provided an opportunity for education and environmental awareness, as exemplified by the recent excursion that brought together sixteen inspired students and young professionals from Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates to visit protected areas in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Fujairah and Sharjah, including the Islamic Botanic Garden in Sharjah, in April 2016.

The proposal to establish a series of Quranic Botanic Gardens emerged in 2006, as part of UNESCO's efforts to enhance linkages between cultural and biological diversity. It defined a vision of new gardens influenced by scientific and cultural concepts from the Islamic civilizations and from oral and written masterpieces of the Islamic cultures, particularly from the Holy Qur'an, that would be the physical embodiment of garden traditions and preserve the botanic diversity of the environment in the region.

The Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohamed al Qassimi was the first to embrace this idea, followed by the State of Qatar under the leadership of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. International Advisory Committees were established, and UNESCO led the production of specific guidelines and master plans. After years of efforts, workshops and conferences to produce plant-species checklists and books, and comprehensive collections of plant-propagation materials of the indigenous flora of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the first Quranic Botanic Garden was opened in 2014 within Sharjah's Desert Park, next to the Natural History Museum.

As the gardens slowly took shape in Sharjah and Qatar, an even more comprehensive idea arose in Ethiopia: to establish an Abrahamic Botanic Garden in Addis Ababa, functioning for biodiversity conservation and environmental best practices while contributing to the Rapprochement of Cultures. This garden aims to embrace the linkages between traditional
Judaic, Christian, and Islamic respect for natural habitats, the cultures inspired by the Holy Books, for the protection of the environment and biological diversity.

This unique garden would undertake four core functions: education, recreation, research and conservation. Ethiopia is a melting pot for the Abrahamic faiths ' Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, together with other faiths and cultures. The garden would echo the principle symbolized by yellow colour of the Ethiopian national flag: mutual respect of different faiths including religious freedom. '

The establishment of Faith Gardens is not new. Biblical Gardens can be found in Europe and the United States of America; there is a Biblical Botanic Garden in within the Missouri Botanical Garden in St Louis, USA and a Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, as well as a number of Islamic Gardens. The establishment of such gardens requires a thorough investigation of the Holy Books, to identify the main biodiversity resources cited in the Holy Books, while also studying and conserving the Afro-montane flora. Since many of the plants used in the past are still used today; this is another way of reconnected with our cultures and traditions. Ethiopia's botanical resources are particularly well documented. Once identified, the relevant resources could easily be brought together in the garden. UNESCO supports this idea and is exploring opportunities for further collaboration.

Contributors: Prof. Sebsebe Demissew (Keeper, National Herbarium, Professor of Plant Systematics and Biodiversity, Addis Ababa University); Benno B'er, Bernard Combes and L. Anathea Brooks (UNESCO)

Sources: Quranic Botanic Gardens Project (UNESCO, 2006); Qur'anic botanic Garden in Sharjah, UAE (UNESCO, 2007)

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Excursion Ethiopia and United Arab Emirates for environmental education, a binational programme in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ethiopia. The first took place in Ethiopia, where the same group learned about environmental management issues in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserves of Kafa and Lake Tana in November 2015.


May 24, 2016

5 Huge Climate Success Stories 10 Years After the Release of Al Gore’s ‘An Inconvenient Truth’

The Climate Reality Project
EcoWatch
Here’s something to smile about. Check out five of our favorite climate successes in the past decade.

Ten years ago, *An Inconvenient Truth* brought the issue of climate change out into the open and into mainstream culture like never before. People began asking tough questions about our climate and wanted to know what they could do to make our planet a safer, healthier place for us all. And 10 years later, we can see the results. Last week, we shared in this blog post what’s changed for our climate, for better or for worse, over the past decade. But with so many climate successes to choose from, we felt they deserved their own story. So today on the 10th anniversary of *An Inconvenient Truth*, here are five of our favorite moments of progress the world has made in solving climate change.

1. **China—the World’s Largest Carbon Emitter—Stepped Up**

You know how U.S. fossil fuel interests used to stall pro-climate policies saying, “Well what about China? It doesn’t matter what we do if they don’t do anything.”

Today, they’re scrambling for a new line. You see, China is ahead of the game when it comes to deploying renewable energy and working to solve climate change. Last summer, China made one of the strongest national commitments to climate action leading up to the UN’s COP 21 climate conference, pledging to expand total energy consumption from non-fossil fuel sources to around 20 percent by 2030. It will require China to deploy roughly 800–1,000 gigawatts of non-fossil fuel power by 2030 or about the total current electricity generation capacity in the U.S. This commitment solidified the progress China has made in recent years in combatting its dangerous air pollution problem.

As the world’s largest carbon emitter since 2006, China making a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and using more and more clean energy is a major breakthrough. And if China can get serious about cutting emissions and embracing renewables, other nations are going to have to follow suit.


Renewable energy has surged in the past decade, with the cost of clean energies like solar and wind falling each year. And as the price continues to fall, demand continues to increase, which means the industry needs to expand to meet it. The result? Thousands of new jobs added each year.

Let’s look at the solar industry. There are already more than [705,000 jobs](https://www.100percentclean.org/jobs/) in solar energy in the U.S., employing Americans in all 50 states. The industry added more than [35,000 jobs in 2015 alone](https://www.100percentclean.org/jobs/) and is showing no sign of slowing any time soon with solar companies projected to add more than 30,000 new workers in 2016.

The wind industry isn’t far behind. The U.S. Energy Department predicts there will be more than 600,000 wind-related jobs by 2050, according to its Wind Vision Report, with high growth expected in fields like manufacturing, transportation and offshore wind. By the end of 2014, the
U.S. had more than **73,000 jobs in wind energy** and the state of Texas alone employed more than 17,000 people in wind-related jobs in 2014.

### 3. Pope Francis United People From All Faiths to Protect Our Planet

In 2015, [Pope Francis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Francis) made headlines when he released his landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*. In the letter—written not just for Catholics, but for people of all faiths—he stressed some of the most important issues facing the world today, including climate change, the environment, poverty and the world economy.

The pope followed up *Laudato Si’* with a historic visit to the U.S. where he met with top government officials. Here, he echoed themes of his encyclical in public statements and private conversations and made the case for growing our economies through clean energy and new technologies. Above all else, Pope Francis urged the world to come together to take immediate action to protect our planet and allow people from all walks of life to flourish.

### 4. World Leaders Came Together to Reach the Paris Agreement

In the years following *An Inconvenient Truth*, world leaders attempted to reach a consensus about how to solve climate change throughout various global summits, but never truly succeeded. That is, until last December, when world leaders came together at the UN’s COP 21 climate conference in Paris. The world watched as leaders from 195 countries negotiated for two weeks and finally reached a global agreement—known as the [Paris agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Agreement)—to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the primary factor driving climate change.

World leaders formally signed the Paris agreement this Earth Day, marking a turning point in the movement for climate solutions by setting a long-term goal of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. This is the most ambitious target ever formalized at this level—and a really big deal.

### 5. A Global Movement for Solving Climate Change Began

*An Inconvenient Truth* sparked a new kind of movement—one where people all over the world wanted to know how they could get involved in helping solve climate change. People realized their everyday actions had an impact on our planet and that they could be part of the solution instead of contributing to the problem.

Part of this movement involved a [new group of activists called the Climate Reality Leadership Corps](https://climatereality.org/). These activists—called Climate Reality Leaders—are people from every level of society working to educate and inspire others in their communities about the climate crisis. Shortly after the film’s release, former U.S. Vice President [Al Gore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Gore) trained the very first group of Climate Reality Leaders in Carthage, Tennessee in 2006. Since then, the Climate Reality Leadership Corps has trained thousands of citizens in 135 countries around the world.

If you want to learn more about becoming a Climate Reality Leader, [sign up for information here](https://climatereality.org/).
Let’s Recommit to Climate Action

Yes, we’ve seen a lot of great progress like the examples above over the past 10 years. But there’s still more to do to ensure we stay on the path to ending climate change and building a safe, healthy future for our planet. First and foremost, we need to ensure our leaders fulfill their commitments in the Paris agreement to cut greenhouse gases. Pledge now to recommit to climate action and help us make certain world leaders live up to the promises they made in Paris.

https://ecowatch.com/2016/05/24/al-gore-inconvenient-truth/

May 24, 2016

Laudato Si’ turns one year old: Time for action

By Michael Sean Winters
National Catholic Reporter

One year ago today, Pope Francis signed his encyclical Laudato Si’. We didn't know it at the time: The encyclical was leaked on June 15 and published officially on June 18. But, I hope this morning’s reflection will be the first of many attempts to take stock of the issues raised in that encyclical.

There have been many, many academic conferences studying the text of Laudato Si’. Some have been better than others, as is always the case with academic conferences, but it seems to me that the really fruitful ones were multi-disciplinary, in which climate scientists engaged theologians, and political analysts encountered both, and all three tackled the economists. As Pope Francis made clear in the document itself, the problem posed by climate change is a Hydra, a many-headed set of interlocking challenges. At the same time, both the urgency and the enormity of the problem warrants an "all hands on deck" approach, so it is not only conducive to truthful analysis to bring many people to the discussion, it is necessary if we literally are going to save the planet.

It is a good sign that the opposition to the encyclical came and went pretty quickly. The Acton Institute complained that the document insufficiently valued the market economy and the role of fossil fuels in alleviating poverty. The devotees of laissez-faire railed against the encyclical's call for government regulations, indeed for international regulations, to help curb the toxicity of man's involvement with the planet. Those who deny climate change made a brief, nettlesome, but inconsequential effort to sidetrack the discussion the Holy Father accelerated. Indeed, it was the frank and thorough manner with which Francis set forth the scientific evidence that led to one of the happier developments this year: More and more commentators acknowledge that if the deniers were to be believed, we would have to accept that there has been some kind of conspiracy conducted by 95 percent of the world's scientists, all working in tandem, to foist the science of climate change on an unsuspecting world. Many of us who are scientifically illiterate are not in a position to examine the scientific data, but we know that such a conspiracy is impossible.
Public opinion has evidently been moved by the Holy Father's intervention. A study conducted by the Yale University Program on Climate Change Conversation indicated that within six months of the encyclical's release, 11 percent more Catholics in the U.S. said they were worried about global warming than had been before, and 8 percent more of the general population. The percentage of people who think global warming will harm people here in the U.S. and abroad also increased: 17 percent more Catholics thought global warming would harm people in developing countries and 13 percent more thought people in the U.S. would be harmed. This shows the effectiveness of groups like Catholic Relief Services, to say nothing of the reporting of outlets like NCR, in helping people to realize the dire consequences of global warming, especially for the poor.

There is still work to be done. At the Africa Faith & Justice Network, they just posted several links to articles that detail the degree to which multinational corporations respond to regulations on toxic waste disposal in their own countries by turning sub-Saharan Africa into the world's toxic waste dump. This is outrageous, and those who think the market can resolve a problem like this misunderstand the power of the market. Only government action, prompted by popular outrage, will ameliorate these horrors being perpetrated on the poorest of the poor.

The U.S. Bishops did a good job with the rollout of the encyclical last summer. The President of the USCCB, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, and Washington's Cardinal Donald Wuerl held a press conference at the National Press Club the morning the text was released. There were so many reporters, they had to commandeer an adjoining room for the overflow. Many bishops wrote columns about the encyclical. But, the bishops declined to re-draft their document on voting to better reflect the magisterium of Pope Francis last November and the Vice President of the conference, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, sneered at the one bishop who suggested they do so, San Diego's Bishop Robert McElroy. I would also point out that if the bishops had donated as much energy and attention this past year to embracing environmentally friendly technologies in the physical plants at our Catholic institutions as they had to making sure those institutions did not have to cover contraception in employee health insurance programs, we would be leading by example, showing the whole country that it is possible to take steps right now to help save the planet.

The Catholic Climate Covenant (CCC) has undertaken several programs in the past year. They have been busy training Creation Care teams, training clergy in how to educate their people on the themes of the encyclical, forming a group of Latino leaders who are focused on spreading the good news in that fast-growing community. And, in an email sent out the other day, the CCC said they were working to "implement a diocesan-wide pilot program to encourage the embrace of renewable energy and energy efficiencies for parishes, schools, and other Catholic facilities." This makes me hopeful. We have had a year to study the text and to ponder it and to pray over it. Now it is time to take action.

The Catholic Church in the United States has a large plant. We own a lot of properties from Catholic schools to cemeteries to rectories. We employ a lot of people. If we choose to set an example in caring for creation, we can. Indeed, many of the steps that can be taken now represent low-hanging fruit, such as switching to LED lighting or installing solar panels on our facilities. Down the road, if we do not pick the low-hanging fruit now, we will only face tougher and
tougher choices. It is my hope, and it is a confident hope, that the leaders of the Church will take actions this year in the spirit of *Laudato Si*. As Pope Francis said, "Reality is more important than ideas."

[Michael Sean Winters is a Visiting Fellow at Catholic University's Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies.]

[link](http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/laudato-si-turns-one-year-old-time-action)

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**May 27, 2016**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Revokes Sovereign Lands Construction Permit for Dakota Access Pipeline in Iowa

Indigenous Environmental Network

**Des Moines, IA** – The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has revoked its approval of a construction permit for the Dakota Access pipeline through the Big Sioux River Wildlife Management Area in Northeast Iowa. This permit is called the Sovereign Lands Construction Permit and was revoked because a significant Native American archaeological site was discovered along its proposed path. Due to the permit revocation, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources has ordered that Dakota Access LLC stop all construction work for its Bakken oil pipeline until a survey of the area is conducted and consultation with local agencies and tribes is completed.

The Dakota Access project is a 1,168-mile Bakken oil pipeline proposed to carry up to 450,000 barrels per day. The pipeline would cross the “Breadbasket of America” through the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois.

**Dallas Goldtooth, Keep It In the Ground Campaign Organizer for The Indigenous Environmental Network** gives the following statement:

“This action by Fish & Wildlife Service sets a precedent we hope other local and federal agencies, like the Army Corps of Engineers, take notice of and follow. We must not allow Big Oil to trample Indigenous rights, landowner rights, and federal policies that aim to protect the land, water, and culturally significant sites. Dakota Access is against the ropes, now is the time to deliver the final blows and stop this pipeline.”

Press Contact:
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[link](http://www.ienearth.org/u-s-fish-and-wildlife-service-revokes-permit/)
Lake Atitlán, in the Guatemalan highlands, draws hundreds of thousands of tourists annually to the vast blue waters and towering cliffs of its scenic volcanic crater. But the lake is in crisis. In early March 2016, the lake's Indigenous Mayan communities and the National Indigenous Observatory, with support from a number of local organizations, filed an official complaint against the 10 municipalities around the lake about the continued deterioration and contamination of the lake due to corruption and the mishandling of official funds.

Protesters across the department have united to demand that the government clean up the contamination. In July 2015, a movement called Atitlán Sano, or Clean Atitlán, began on social media. It quickly picked up speed, focusing primarily on drawing the attention of area businesses, local municipal governments and the Authority for the Sustainable Management of the Basin of Lake Atitlán, a government body formed in 1996.

"The situation in the lake is very critical," said Marvin Romero, from the Scientific Committee of the Atitlán Basin and one of the founders of Atitlán Sano. "Because the contamination is reaching dangerous levels. The municipalities have the legal responsibility [to protect the lake]. But they have done little to resolve the contamination. They have little interest in investing in the environment. And when residents have demanded that the municipality do something, the municipal mayors have claimed there is no money."

The systemic failure to resolve the rampant contamination reflects a larger problem within Guatemala: the historic racism against Indigenous communities. This racism has guaranteed that Indigenous communities are repeatedly left to bear the environmental costs of industry. As a result, these Indigenous communities are often at the forefront of resistance efforts against environmental contamination.

**An Explosion of Cyanobacteria**

Women from the southern town of San Juan La Laguna -- who regularly wash their clothing in the lake -- were the first to formally denounce the municipalities. They traveled to the Human Rights Ombudsmen office in the nearby municipality of Santiago Atitlan to raise their concerns after observing a massive bloom of cyanobacteria, a potentially toxic bluish-green algae. Residents have observed regular blooms since Hurricane Stan, a tropical cyclone that hit in 2005. The blooms jeopardize the lives of the thousands of residents who rely on the lake for drinking water.
"According to our grandparents, in the 1940s or 1950s, it was a lake that was incredibly clean; the lake was a place where you could drink the water straight from the lake, and not have any problem," Francisco Quiacaín, a Tzutuj'il Maya and member of the Community Committee for Development of San Pedro La Laguna, told Truthout. "But today you can get sick from drinking the water. This is because of the increase in population."

On the other hand, some tropical lake experts have suggested that the cyanobacteria blooms are the result of the lake healing itself after severe tropical storm damage.

"After a major storm there is a lot [of] organic material and soil entering the lake. The cyanobacteria is a process of healing [for] the lake," said Juan Skinner, an environmentalist, expert on tropical lakes and a member of the Japan-based International Lake Environment Committee. "It multiplies and consumes those excess of nutrients, then dies and sinks to the bottom."

Skinner also suggests that the cyanobacteria blooms occur more frequently than communities have realized. He has found scientific articles from the early 1900s that reference the blooms.

Some local fishermen have confirmed that they had seen the cyanobacteria in the lake before the hurricane. "The cyanobacteria has always been in the lake," Nicolas Tumax, a representative of the Association of Fishermen of San Pedro La Laguna, told Truthout. "We saw it every day in the lake, but we have never seen it explode like it has since 2009."

**Failures and Corruption in Resolving the Contamination**

Pollution of Lake Atitlán has increased significantly in the last 10 years, and was exacerbated by the destruction of the wastewater treatment plant in the lakeside city of Panajachel during Hurricane Stan in 2005.

"Prior to 2005, the treatment plant in Panajachel functioned very well," Romero told Truthout. "The plant had the capacity to capture 82 percent of wastewater. But when Hurricane Stan hit, the plant was destroyed." As a result, raw sewage was dumped into the lake.

After the storm, the municipality of Panajachel, with encouragement from the Inter-American Development Bank, opted to build a new plant, rather than repair the very minor damage to the existing plant. The new $90 million plant had a monthly operating cost of 150,000 quetzal (roughly $20,000). Due to these high costs, the new plant never operated beyond 38 percent efficiency, while the original processing plant -- built with assistance from the European Community -- was designed to be low cost and low maintenance, and had been operating at 82 percent efficiency before the hurricane to clean the pollution from wastewater. The $90 million replacement was shut down by another hurricane a year after its completion.

Little can be done to save the lake until officials address the amount of wastewater entering the lake every day. But potential solutions are prohibitively expensive, or are themselves wrapped up in corruption and special interests, or both.
"Because of corruption, the more they construct, the more they can steal," Skinner told Truthout.

**A Growing Problem**

The population around the lake basin has grown significantly since the 1950s and is augmented exponentially by the Atitlán-based tourist industry. The Guatemalan Ministry of Tourism, INGUAT, reports that 2,142,398 people visited Guatemala in 2014 alone, a majority of who visited Lake Atitlán while in the country. Each one of these visitors contributed -- directly or indirectly -- to the lake's contamination.

"Tourism brings impacts," Romero told Truthout. "It brings with it garbage that isn't managed in a good manner, and it generates residual waters, and sadly due to the lack of infrastructure, these waters end up in the lake."

According to Romero, in 2004, there were 600,000 cubic meters of wastewater entering the lake. In just 10 years, due to a combination of hurricane damage to the treatment plants and the expanding tourist industry, that number had grown to 1.4 million cubic meters per year.

**Special Interests and Companies Propose Solutions to Contamination**

To address the pollution problem, members of Amigos del Lago, a private nongovernmental organization made up of wealthy recreational homeowners along the lake, have collaborated with professors from California and the Authority for the Sustainable Management of the Basin of Lake Atitlán to introduce the multibillion-dollar Integral Management Plan. The plan centers on the construction of a super-collector designed by experts from California State University, Chico, and University of California, Davis, based on the waste disposal system at Lake Tahoe in the United States. The system would include a pipe network that would connect to each community, and then would transport wastewater outside the basin to be used for farmland irrigation on the southern coast. It would also generate electricity.

The plan has been presented as the only option to save the lake, and is also supported by large landowners on Guatemala's southern coast, who see the construction of the pipe system as a means of cheap fertilizer and water for their vast fields of African oil palm and sugar cane.

But experts fear that this mega-project will only lead to new problems. "They got the private sector to support the plan," Skinner told Truthout. "The risk is that they always will want more water for agriculture. So to solve one problem, you're creating a larger threat."

The production of export agriculture, such as African oil palm and sugar cane on Guatemala's southern coast, has ravaged the region. Other than the loss of land for production of staple crops, big agriculture has monopolized the access of water for small farming communities across the region. Furthermore, the production of monocultures has led to the destruction of forests and biodiversity.
In addition to potentially worsening the environmental problems caused by large-scale monoculture, the proposed project could decrease water availability for campesinos and small farmers. For the last 15 years, campesinos in the Madre Vieja river basin -- which neighbors the Atitlán basin and is in the path of the proposed pipeline -- have struggled against the palm firm HAME. The company has regularly diverted rivers for its crops, cutting off the campesinos’ water supply. HAME is among the groups that stand to benefit directly from the regional wastewater collector that is proposed as part of the Integral Management Plan.

Skinner also warns of the potential of a situation like that in Bolivia, where a national emergency was declared in 2016 when Lake Poopó evaporated due to climate change. According to Skinner, the lake was also undermined by the diversion of rivers for agriculture and mining.

"The overextraction of water from the lake is the greatest threat," Skinner told Truthout. "It is this that has killed the most lakes around the world."

"[The lake authorities] have presented this [mega-collector] as the only solution. They are fooling everyone. They need to know you don't solve a problem by lying to people," he added.

As authorities debate how to clean up the lake, local fishermen and residents have taken it upon themselves to remove garbage from the lake. For example, the Association of Fishermen of San Pedro La Laguna, who have been heavily impacted by the contamination of the lake and who have received little support from the municipal government, have set aside the last Saturday of every month to clean the garbage, parasitic plants and cyanobacteria from the lake.

**Guatemala's Wider Movement for Water Rights**

The Atitlán debate is unfolding in the context of a national conversation about water rights. On April 11, hundreds of campesinos left the northern border town of Tecun Uman for an 11-day, 260-kilometer march to Guatemala City to demand that the Guatemalan government respect their right to water. Along the way, they were joined by thousands more. The march was organized to draw attention to the problems rural communities across the country face when their water supplies are contaminated or diverted by monoculture farming, mines and hydroelectric projects.

"I am here defending my right to water," Esperanza B'atz, a Kaqchikel woman from San Juan Sacatepéquez, told Truthout during the march. "Our rivers have been contaminated by the transnational companies."

According to Guatemala's minister of the environment and natural resources, Sydney Samuels, the ministry has identified 50 rivers that have been devastated by agribusiness on the southern coast alone. "There are countless industries and countless farms that divert rivers," Samuels told the press. "We thought we would find a few, but all farms of the south coast who are handling cane, oil palm, banana and other products are diverting rivers at will."

Residents of the Atitlán basin joined the protest in Guatemala City to demand an end to the super-collector project, the water pollution and plans to divert water out of the lake basin.
Contamination and Environmental Racism

Indigenous communities across Guatemala are regularly blamed for the contamination and environmental destruction that companies and the wealthy create.

"Most of the powerful people always blame the poor and the Indigenous for destroying nature, when it is actually the opposite," Skinner told Truthout. "They always blame the victim."

The department of Sololá, where Lake Atitlán is located, is among the poorest departments in Guatemala, with one of the largest Indigenous populations. According to the 2002 census, 75 percent of households in Sololá have "dry" latrines that don't produce sewage.

"Poverty is directly related to low consumption and production of pollutants," Skinner told Truthout. "People in poverty barely have money to eat, much less to buy soap or a toilet."

The contamination has hit the Indigenous communities of the lake hard. "The lake is very important to us," Francisco Quiacaín told Truthout. "From the point of view of the cosmovision of our grandparents, the lake is our mother that gives us life. The lake for our ancestors is something that is very sacred. From the perspective of our Mayan culture, everything from nature is sacred, especially the lake. The lake is the energy that is transmitted to us to purify us spiritually and physically, and it is a resource that we have that allows us to survive."

The contamination also impacts Indigenous communities' traditional economies, especially fishing. "When I began to fish in these waters, there were a lot of fish," Nicolas Tumax told Truthout. "Before, we could catch 50 pounds of fish daily. But sadly, this has all stopped due to the contamination, especially in Panajachel. I don't understand why the authorities don't care."

Fishermen like Tumax have worked on the lake their entire lives. But as their catches continue to decrease, they are forced to seek other opportunities, such as coffee production.

"It pains me to see the lake this way," Tumax said.

Effectively, much of the cleanup work has been left to the Indigenous communities who live around the lake. As a result, many people accuse both local and national authorities of environmental racism.

"When they have big blooms of cyanobacteria, [the local municipalities] get the local women to go out and scoop it up off the lake," Padma Guidi, a long-term resident of Panajachel, told Truthout. "It is disgusting. It is just another example of the racism [in Guatemala]."

Furthermore, local authorities and experts have blamed the communities themselves for the contamination. Experts have blamed contamination on the women who wash their clothes in the lake, on the misuse of fertilizers by campesinos around the basin and on the poor disposal of garbage. While these factors have in some part contributed to the contamination, the effects of industrialized tourism and agriculture have been far more damaging, and are largely ignored by the government.
"If this lake was in [the mainly white department of] Zacapa, we would have a lot of money, it would be privatized and the government would pay much more attention," Skinner told Truthout. "But because the lake basin is in an Indigenous stronghold, it suffers from the same exclusion that all Indigenous lands suffer from within the country."

Skinner added, "This is a tourist mecca, an incredible natural wonder, it is still abandoned and excluded because the majority is Indigenous. Because this is a racist country."


May 29, 2016

Women Deliver: Young Women Climate Warriors Speak

By Stella Paul
Women News Network

(WNN) Copenhagen, Denmark, EUROPE: Seven years have gone by since then, but Majandra Rodrigues Acha of Lima still cannot forget the day she saw the true face of a woman’s vulnerability. It was June 2009 and television channels across Peru were broadcasting the news of a riot that erupted between the country’s indigenous people and the police. In the riot, known as the “Devil’s Curve Battle” 32 indigenous environmental activists had died defending their land rights.

A particular image on TV screen haunts her even today: “It was an old woman, pointing at the dead people on the street and trying to express her sorrows. But since she spoke no Spanish, nobody seemed to understand her. There was such an air of helplessness around her!” she recalls.

The battle at the Devil’s Curve was a direct conflict between the state police force and a large group of indigenous people who were protesting a government policy that made it easy to grab local’s land for large corporate. Although the protest was peaceful, it turned violent when the police began to crackdown on the protesters. Soon, shots were fired, 32 indigenous people and injuring over a hundred. Nine policemen were also killed in the riot.

Seven years later, it is such women victims of such environmental conflicts who drive Acha – now a known activist in Lima, campaigning for women’s right to a world freed of pollution, disasters and climate change. This week, Acha was in Copenhagen, at the 4th global conference of Women Deliver – world’s largest conference on women and girls’ health and well being. Alongside several others of her fellow activists, Acha was at the conference, drawing the crucial link between climate change and the well being of women around the globe.

According to Acha, climate change affects women and girls disproportionately. From drought and water shortage, land degradation, falling fish stock to decline in farm yield, women and girls are the worst sufferers of every climate-induced crisis. And since girls and women who
traditionally have the least access to resources, they also have the thinnest defense against such crisis. “Do you know 70 percent of the people who died in the (2004) Asian Tsunami were women? Majandra reminds.

Acha’s thoughts resonates well with Betty Barkha, a 25 year old woman from the Pacific island of Fiji. In the Women Deliver conference Barkha was heard in a number of sessions stressing on the vulnerability of people in the Pacific islands and appealing for strong climate action. “Islands in the pacific are disappearing fast. We are fighting for our survival,” says Barkha who works to empower fellow grassroots women on climate resilience in the Pacific.

According to the 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment report by the Inter Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), since 1993, sea level has been rising at a rate of around 3 mm yr<sup>–1</sup>, significantly higher than the average during the previous half century.

This has been posing a direct threat to most of the small island nation, including Fiji which have already begun to lose parts of the land to the rising sea. But, even as they fight for their survival, young people of Fiji are also ensuring that the government climate policies are brought in consultation with the youths. In Fiji, the government is now legally mandated to consult youths and women before bringing in any laws or policies. This is because we intensively fought for them,” Barkha proudly informs.

The Women Deliver conference that concluded on Thursday, saw nearly five hundred other young people participating from Africa, Asia and the Americas. Many of them have also witness women in their communities living in extreme environmental, economic and health vulnerability.

Alicia Moncada, project manager for Indigenous Women Organisation in Venezuela is one of them. The young firebrand woman has impressed hundreds of participants here with her fiery narration of on women’s rights to a safe environment. “Women are not just objectives and goals to achieve. They are human beings denied of their rights of equality in land, health, resources and dignity. They also lack full control over their own body and their voice,” Moncada was heard saying.

The young women have shared the space with renowned leaders from various spheres. One of these leaders is Marie Claude Bibeau – the young Canadian minister of international development and francophone who appears to be in full agreement with the young women. According to Bibeau, climate change is now an established scientific fact. For example, one in every 3 girls get married before they turn 18 and a majority of them in societies affected by poverty, environmental conflict and disasters.

“You need strong political leadership to act on the facts and empower women, so they can go from being the victims to a real power of change” she observes.

One of the most urgent actions, feels Acha, is to gather gender desegregated data. According to her, despite the common knowledge that women suffer more from climate change, there is no way to get a complete picture of that. “You have to go to 15 places and read 15 different reports because there is no gender-specific data. And without that data, you cannot create a policy
framework. So, we need investments into collecting that data because that is the key to draw real policies that will address women’s issues in the climate change scenario, says the young activist who also trains young people in her country in climate change advocacy.

The power and the crucial role that it plays in development has been stressed upon by Melinda Gates – co-chair and trustee of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation who has pledged 80 million dollars to close gender data gaps and accelerate progress for women and girls. “We simply don’t know enough about the barriers holding women and girls back, nor do we have sufficient information to track progress against the promises made to women and girls. We are committed to changing that by investing in better data, policies and accountability,” said Gates at the conference.

However, Barkha cautions the world to not think of women activists or their communities as only people eyeing money. “We are not asking for charity or the money from the rich. What we are asking is those who are responsible for global warming, must take the responsibility.”

https://womennewsnetwork.net/2016/05/29/women-deliver-young-women-climate-warriors-speak/

May 31, 2016

Priest promotes care for earth

By Jennifer Burke
Catholic Courier

Pope Francis’ concern for the poor and his promotion of mercy are well-known worldwide. Thus, early in the spring of 2015, many Vatican watchers thought the first encyclical penned solely by Pope Francis would focus on either mercy or care for the poor, according to Father Emmanuel Katongole, associate professor of world religions and the church at the University of Notre Dame.

In May 2015 Pope Francis released the encyclical, titled, "Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home," and through this encyclical on the environment, the pope actually highlighted the connection between mercy and care for the poor, Father Katongole said.

"Mercy and tenderness and the poor go hand in hand," Father Katongole said during an April 8 lecture at Nazareth College.

Father Katongole was one of four speakers who gave presentations on the Pittsford campus as part of the school's annual Shannon Lecture Series on religious issues. On April 7 Father Katongole, who is from Uganda, led a discussion on tenderness, which he said is another word for mercy. The next day he spoke about the relationship between mercy, the environment and the poor in his lecture "Planting Tenderness: Laudato Si' and the Bethany Land Institute in Uganda."
"We aren't facing two separate crises, one environmental crisis and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. The two are deeply connected," he said.

The environment is affected by a host of complex political, economic, social and cultural issues, Father Katongole said. Pope Francis has paid attention to all these different issues and states in his encyclical that a wound caused by sin lies at the heart of the current environmental crisis.

"What is the wound, what is the sin? It's that we have forgotten that we are sinners, dust of the earth," Father Katongole said. "We have forgotten what it means to be creatures. We have distanced ourselves from the story of creation in which we were made as creatures."

Many times in today's society, people look down upon those whose hands are soiled from working with the dirt of the earth, Father Katongole said. The second chapter of Genesis, however, recounts the story of God forming man out of the dust of the earth, so Father Katongole said he likes to imagine God as a farmer whose hands are dirty after working with soil. Dirt and the earth are not something to be looked at with disdain, he added.

"Man and the ground are deeply, deeply connected. Man is created out of the earth ... and then of course, man takes care of the earth, tills it, protects it," Father Katongole said. "Our own vocation is connected to the earth. So what Francis is saying is we have forgotten our connectedness, we have forgotten our vocation, our call to ... nurture the earth, so that the earth can nurture you."

Father Katongole and two of his fellow priests hope to rectify that sin of forgetfulness and disdain for the earth through the Bethany Land Institute, which they founded in 2013. The Bethany Land Institute consists of 72 acres of land outside of Kampala in Uganda and is an educational initiative designed to address three interrelated challenges currently facing Africa's people: food insecurity, deforestation and land depletion. The founders of the Bethany Land Institute responded to these challenges -- as well as a fourth challenge caused by Africa's lack of highway rest stops -- through the three facets of the land institute.

The first, called Mary's Farm, is a demonstration and teaching farm where Ugandans from rural areas will learn small-scale, sustainable farming practices. These students, called Bethany Caretakers, will live on the farm for a year and also will learn the business skills they'll need to run a small farm and after finishing the program will return home to set up their own model farms and hopefully be leaders in their communities, Father Katongole said.

The second component of the institute is Lazarus' Trees, a portion of the institute's land that will be replanted as a forest. Father Katongole hopes to have 1 million trees planted by 2050, and the forest also will be home to an educational center that will promote ecological literacy and reforestation.

The third and final component is Martha's Market, which will include a roadside market, a retreat center and rest stops complete with restaurants and bathrooms. This business arm of the institute also will train students in principles of business and entrepreneurship and organize farm tours and festivals.
May 31, 2016

Environmental challenges – a forceful argument for global citizenship

UN News Centre

While global citizenship means many things to many people, discussions at the sixty-sixth United Nations/Non-Governmental Organizations Conference maintained that cultivating empathy, a scientific appreciation for the natural world and responsibility towards future generations must be at the core of education for global citizenship.

During a roundtable discussion entitled ‘Global Citizens as Stewards of the Planet: Energy, Environment and Climate Change,’ Alexander Leicht, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) section chief of Education for Sustainable Development, saw challenges posed against the environment as a strong argument for global citizenship.

“Political agreements, technological solutions or fiscal incentives are not enough. We need a change of mindsets and actions that only education can bring about,” he said from the dais.

In today's era of global pollution, natural resource depletion and threats to biodiversity, societies are reassessing the value placed on the natural environment and exploring how formal and informal education, training and grassroots advocacy can strengthen humankind's capacities to exist on the planet.

Mr. Leicht underscored the importance of understanding the scientific facts of climate change and the economic processes that bring it about. He urged all to "participate in societal and political processes that address climate change, and take steps in the local environment to mitigate it.”

While global education has, for years, been taught in schools under the social sciences, the voices and teachings of indigenous cultures are helping to identify the values and skill sets necessary for sustainable production and consumption to protect all life.

According to Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Coordinator of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, indigenous peoples can impart vital knowledge on protecting the environment. She considered Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13, on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, as the most important of the 17 SDGs, because it serves as the basis for all the others.
“Indigenous peoples have used their knowledge to keep their communities healthy. They have been properly managing natural resources for centuries with ideologies that have been developed over generations,” Ms. Ibrahim pointed out.

She explained that the rules defined by indigenous populations can help. “People must respect Mother Nature first. They must respect the water, respect the trees, respect the animals.”

Indigenous teachings affirm reverence for all relations, the kinship of all life.

“Our elders and we have been observing changes in the planet for a long time – sadly of our own making. We noticed that the glaciers in the Andes were disappearing and that animals in the north were moving to the south because of the changing weather,” said Leonzo Barreno, a Guatemalan Mayan, who moderated the discussion.

Mr. Barreno expressed gratitude that the UN is leading the combat against climate change.

“Now people around the world can see nature as part of themselves. When we indigenous used to say ’Mother Earth' or 'Father Sun' people would laugh, but for us it was real. This is why so many indigenous people around the world would defend the land with their lives. There was no disconnection between us and the earth, between us and the animals, between us and the lakes and the rivers.”

Youth Ambassador for Native Children's Survival Ta'Kaiya Blaney shared a similar perspective.

“Having a deep connection of belonging and a kinship with both each other and the land is a founding principle of indigenous ideology,” she said. “This concept is severely lacking in our current society and there are many untold indigenous stories that are crucial in changing the narrative, which can change the mainstream perspective of the truth of this world.”

Ms. Blaney also asserted that indigenous peoples had a valuable part to play in combating climate change, since the majority of corporate industrial operations – most likely to contribute to climate change – were on indigenous territory.


Spring 2016

Creation Justice Ministries Newsletter

http://www.creationjustice.org/capsules.html

June 1, 2016
“The Importance of Indigenous Knowledge in Curbing the Loss of Language and Biodiversity”

By Benjamin T. Wilder, Carolyn O'Meara, Laurie Monti, and Gary Paul Nabhan


Biodiversity inventory, monitoring, and species-recovery efforts can be advanced by a dynamic collaboration of Western, citizen, and ethnoscience. Indigenous and local traditional knowledge of place-based biodiversity is perhaps the oldest scientific tradition on earth. We illustrate how an all taxa biodiversity inventory network of projects in collaboration with the Comcaac (Seri people) in northwestern Mexico is advancing not only biosystematics but also species recovery, habitat restoration, language conservation and maintenance, and the maintenance of traditional livelihoods. We encourage scientists to establish collaborations with indigenous and other place-based communities to better understand the wealth of knowledge held in local categorization systems. It is essential to not merely seek out one-to-one correspondences between Western and indigenous knowledge but also to recognize and respect the creative tensions among these different knowledge systems, because this is where the most profound insights and fruitful collaborations emerge.

http://bioscience.oxfordjournals.org/content/66/6/499.full

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**June 1, 2016**

Pope thanks Jains for commitment to care for environment

Independent Catholic News

Pope Francis today thanked the Jain community for its commitment to protect "our sister Earth." The Pope's words came as he received members of the Institute of Jainology in private audience in the Vatican before leading the weekly General Audience in St Peter's Square.

Expressing his joy for the encounter, Pope Francis welcomed the Jains saying that "this encounter nurtures our responsibility to care for creation", and calling creation a "gift that we have all received" he said "creation is God's mirror, the mirror of the Creator, the mirror of nature, and it is our mirror too."

"We all love mother Earth, because she is the one who has given us life and safeguards us; I would also call her sister Earth, who accompanies us during the journey of our existence. Our duty is to take care of her just as we would take care of a mother or of a sister, with responsibility, with tenderness and with peace” he said.

And he thanked the Jains for what they do to protect and care for the earth and said "we remain united within this ideal ... in the awareness that healing and caring for the Earth is healing and caring for the whole of humanity".
Jainism is an ancient religion that originated in India. The Institute of Jainology was established in 1983 and it was subsequently registered as a Charitable Trust. Compassion and non-violence towards all living beings are the fundamental principles of Jain philosophy. Its mission is to propagate Jainism and its values through art, culture and education.


June 2016

Carbon Rangers/Ecozoic Times Newsletter

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June 2016

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute Newsletter

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Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

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June 2016

Voices for Earth Justice Newsletter

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June 2, 2016

Saints oppose move to sell Ganga jal online

Warn Modi govt to roll back the decision or face agitation

The Tribune

Haridwar - The saint community has expressed resentment over the Union Government’s move to sell holy Ganga jal through post office bookings. They have warned of resorting to intense agitation.

Many renowned saints have demanded that the government should roll back its decision, terming it an act that hurt religious sentiments of saints and millions of devotees who regard the holy Ganga jal as pious.

The governing body of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad has expressed displeasure over the government’s move.

Spokesperson for the Akhada Parishad Baba Hatyogi said people worship the Ganga and its water was used in religious rituals. It was sacred, not a commodity to earn revenues or be put on sale. If Ganga jal was sold, it would have serious ramifications, he said.

Bhooma Peethadeeshwar Swami Achutyanand Maharaj termed the Ganga as the identity of the country and questioned the idea of selling the holy water.

“On the one hand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Ganga Rejuvenation Minister Uma Bharati spoke highly of the Namami Gange scheme to clean the Ganga and its sub-tributaries, simultaneously, they are trying to sell the water of the pious river,” he said.

Jai Ram Ashram spiritual guru Brhamaswarup Brahamchari called the move another proof of using religion and related aspects to garner power. He said first the BJP ignited people’s sentiments over the construction of Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya, which it seemed to have put on hold to ensure that it remained in power. Now, it was trying to commercialise Ganga jal, which was no ordinary water but was regarded as having properties of nectar.
Warning the Union Government of the fallout of selling Ganga Jal, Hari Har Ashram head Mahamandaleshwar Swami Harichetnanad Maharaj said the holy Ganga was one of ‘panchamrit’, in which nectar fell during the war between deities and demon. Selling its pious water would only bring curse, he stated.

Radha Krishan Dham spiritual head and former Haridwar municipal chairperson Satpal Brahmachari said the Ganga is a national river but still the BJP-led Union Government was mulling selling its water.

The Ganga Sabha, which manages the affairs of the sanctum sanctorum of Brahma Kund, Har-ki-Pauri, has also opposed the move.

Terming it unethical, Ganga Sabha president Purushottam Sharma Gandhivadi said Ganga jal was worshipped as the water form of deity Ganga.

“People go to temples for worshipping, so is the case with the Ganga river, where devotees arrive to take a holy dip and fetch Ganga jal. Selling it through post offices or online does not augur well for the religious faith of the people. The Ganga is regarded as a living deity, how can we think of selling it or purchasing it,” Gandhivadi said.

Swami Hansdevacharya has also warned the Union Government that if it went forward with the online sale idea, saying that the saint community and religious organisations would not allow this to happen.

Congress Mahangar unit president Anshul Shrikunj has also opposed the Ganga jal sale scheme. It was a disrespect to Mother Ganga, who was regarded as a deity having immense spiritual, medicinal properties and a river providing salvation, he added.


June 3, 2016

Eco-halal becomes fashion trend

By Vestnik Kavkaza
Vestnik Kavkaza

Today, Moscow hosted the opening of the 7th Moscow International Exhibition Halal Expo 2016. This year, the exhibition presented not only new platforms and new participants, but also new trends. One of them is eco-halal. The director of the Environmental Certification Center Green Standards, Rashid Ismailov, spoke about what there is it at the exhibition opening.

"At the moment, the topic of environmental protection and environmental management is becoming extremely relevant and socially, economically and politically important both in Russia
and around the world. Today, the issues of climate change, natural resources scarcity, primarily limitation of access to potable water, waste management, development of green technologies and green energy are on the agenda of the leaders of states not only in the Islamic world," Ismailov stated.

Speaking about the connection between ecology and Islam, Rashid Ismailov said that "considering their harmonious and natural interosculation, we can make a conclusion about the existence of common ideological approaches between ecology and Islam in the formation of the life values of a person and ensuring his vital activity. A 'green', environmentally motivated, environmentally responsible approach to life, which is also based on green standards, is, in fact, a lifestyle by the laws of eco-halal. A clean house, clean surrounding area, thriftiness in relation to the gifts of nature, food naturalness, naturalness and purity of thoughts – those are the rules of life of every Muslim."

Rashid Ismailov emphasized the social doctrine of Russian Muslims, published by the Council of Muftis of Russia: "It's chapter 'Care for nature and animal world' specifically highlights that 'man and nature are great and sacred creations of the Creator. Not only your own house must be clean, but also the house of Allah, which is any piece of land. We must not forget to thank the Almighty for the nature, which our Creator generously bestowed upon humanity.' Thus, Islam directly demands a caring and respectful attitude towards nature from every Muslim."

In addition, Ismailov said that, by presidential decree, 2017 will be the Year of the Environment in Russia: "With this in mind, we have prepared a number of proposals on the development of environmental direction in the activities of the Council of Muftis of Russia and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia. It includes issues of international cooperation in environmental protection, the environmental enlightenment of Muslims, especially the younger generation, for whom the concept of eco-halal should become a modern and fashionable trend."

However, Rashid Ismailov complained that right now a environmentally responsible approach in business has a huge, but underrated importance: "It includes increasing competitiveness, supporting the government, consumer choice in favor of environmentally friendly products, goods and services, which increases all over the world. The principle of eco-halal may manifest itself in various industries. In the energy sector it is the development of renewable natural energy sources; in construction it is safe housing; in agriculture it is land that is free from chemicals; in aquaculture it is thriftiness; in the meat industry it is ecologically natural products; in the medical industry it is adherence to ethical standards. This list can be endless. Even in the fashion industry the eco-approach is gaining momentum today. Naturalness in fabrics and production, refusal to use animal fur and chemicals are becoming fashionable and popular. Today, all of these industries have great potential for investments both in Russia and in other countries of the Middle East and Asia regions for so-called "green" financing, which can surely be described as eco-halal investments."

http://vestnikkavkaza.net/articles/Eco-halal-becomes-fashion-trend.html

June 5, 2016
Venezuela Analysis

Caracas – Activists from grassroots organizations protested outside the Venezuelan Supreme Court Tuesday to demand that the body put a halt to a controversial mega-mining project spearheaded by the Maduro government.

The demonstration was organized by the Platform for the Nullity of the Mining Arc, an alliance of diverse movements and leading public intellectuals that emerged in response to a law authorizing open-pit mining in 12 percent of the nation’s territory.

In February, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro used emergency economic decree powers granted by the Supreme Court to declare nearly 112 square kilometers of the mineral-rich eastern Amazonian state of Bolivar a “strategic development zone”, which will be opened to as many as 150 national and transnational firms for the extraction of gold, iron, diamonds, and coltan.

The government has defended the initiative as a necessary step towards a post-oil productive economy amid a severe economic crisis triggered by the collapse of global crude prices, the principal source of Venezuela’s foreign currency earnings.

Nonetheless, the project has sparked vocal opposition from prominent leftist academics and former high officials under late President Hugo Chávez, including ex-Environment Minister Ana Elisa Osorio, internationally-renowned sociologist Edgardo Lander, Major General Cliver Alcala, former Minister of Education and Electricity Hector Navarro, Indigenous University of Tauca Rector Esteban Emilio Mosonyi, ex-Commerce Minister Gustavo Marquez, and former 1999 constitutional assembly member Freddy Gutierrez.

Also raising their voices in outrage over the decree are a plethora of indigenous, environmental, eco-feminist, and socialist collectives, who rallied together with the ex-officials outside the Supreme Court in Caracas in order to deliver a formal nullity plea to the body requesting an injunction against the mining project on constitutional grounds.

**Constitutional violations**

“The indigenous peoples of the region are the principal victims because they haven’t been previously consulted and they are the ones who will see all of the miserable consequences of mining from the private security firms to the prostitution, human trafficking, drugs,” explains Max Gomez, who is a researcher at the Venezuelan Institute of Scientific Investigation and member of the eco-feminist collective La Danta Las Canta.
Under Venezuela’s 1999 Constitution, indigenous peoples exercise inalienable collective property rights over their ancestral lands and must be consulted prior to any plan to extract natural resources from their territory.

Last month, the indigenous Ye'kwana, Sanema, and Pemon peoples of the Orinoco River basin issued a public statement manifesting their unequivocal rejection of the Mining Arc, which they condemned as a “violation of our legitimate right to health, our own safeguarded territory and quality of life.”

The Orinoco Mining Arc may also violate the Bolivarian Constitution’s environmental protections, which mandate an ecological and sociocultural impact study before the approval of any development project, adds Gomez.

“And then there’s the water crisis, how is it possible that there are barrios in Caracas that don’t have steady access to water, yet these corporations are allowed to utilize massive quantities of water for mining?” he stated.

Facing the worst drought in 47 years, the Venezuelan government has implemented strict water and electricity rationing in order to avoid further decline in water levels at the El Guri hydroelectric dam, the source of 70% of the nation’s power supply.

According to experts, open-pit gold mining—which utilizes between 450 and 1060 liters of water per gram of gold extracted—will likely further exacerbate water and electricity scarcities across the country.

Others expressed concerns over threats to labor and civil rights.

“As a special economic zone— which by definition are designed to circumvent the legal framework of a country— the Orinoco Arc can ‘flexibilize’ labor protections under the Organic Work Law and even contains certain clauses that encroach on the right to protest,” said Andrea Pacheco of the Trotskyist organization Marea Socialista.

In particular, she pointed to article 25 of the law which states that “no particular interest of unions, guilds, or other associations will prevail over the general interest of the completion of the objective contained in the present decree” and authorizes security forces to take action against those engaged in “the total or partial obstruction of activities”.

**An inflection point**

For some at Tuesday’s rally, the Orinoco Mining Arc evidences a widening fissure between social movements and the socialist administration of President Nicolas Maduro.

“We believe that this [the Mining Arc] is an inflection point for the project of the current government, and we at Marea Socialista argue that neither the government nor the opposition have the solutions for the major problems facing the country,” asserts Pacheco.
Last year, Marea Socialista officially broke with the ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV) and launched their own candidates in December parliamentary elections, citing high level corruption.

Others, however, continue to back the leftist government while stressing the need to step up pressure from below.

“I’m not a revolutionary to say ‘yes’ to the government, I’m a revolutionary to be critical of what the government is doing wrong,” affirmed Intifada Genesis Blanco, 25, who is a student at Misión Sucre and member of the Hugo Chávez Patriotic Front.

Amid the increasingly tense standoff between the beleaguered Chavista administration and the right-wing opposition-controlled parliament, social movements have been under pressure to close ranks behind Maduro.

“Often they brand us counter-revolutionaries,” Blanco continued. “But it would be more counter-revolutionary to watch and remain silent as the government make errors, harms the people, loses its horizon.”

**Indigenous struggles and international law**

Indigenous anti-mining movements have, in particular, been stigmatized for their opposition to extractivist projects pushed by state governments and the national executive.

Indigenous rights and environmental activist Lusbi Portillo has been accused by PSUV Vice-President Diosdado Cabello of conspiring against the leftist government for his prominent role in the campaign to seek justice for the assassinated Yukpa indigenous leader Sabino Romero.

“When we began this struggle in 1985, the governments of the Fourth Republic accused me of being part of Sendero Luminoso and when Chavismo came to power, I instantly stopped being considered a guerrilla to become an agent of the CIA,” the president of the environmentalist organization Homo Et Natura Society stated.

For Portillo, the only hope of stopping the Mining Arc is militant grassroots action. He says it's unlikely that the Supreme Court will strike down the executive decree.

“Given the pressure from the government and from the mining companies, the Supreme Court is going to rule in favor of the Mining Arc. Our only salvation is in the streets, occupying Miraflores [presidential palace], occupying the Vice-Presidency, the ministries of mines and indigenous affairs, the embassies, we have to exert political pressure.”

Last year, Homo et Natura and other Zulia and Caracas-based indigenous and environmental organizations took part in a campaign against a government decree expanding coal mining in the Perija Mountains, which was successful in negotiating a scaling down of the project.
In addition to street pressure, some Venezuelan indigenous activists have called for fighting the Mining Arc in international legal bodies such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

“It’s not anti-nationalist to defend the rights of indigenous peoples in international institutions if White criollo law fails to deliver justice,” declared Juan Carlos de la Rosa of the Zulia-based indigenous Wayuu collective Wainjirawa, which translates to “the heart of what we do”.

For De la Rosa, there is, however, no contradiction between continuing to struggle for revolutionary change in Venezuela and appealing to international legal tribunals.

“We are leftists if nothing else, but we are people loyal to the struggle for the land that we sow and harvest.”

At the conclusion of the demonstration, former Environment Minister Ana Elisa Osorio announced that the delegation of ex-officials had successfully held a meeting with the President of the Supreme Court, who agreed to hear the case.

The high court will study the nullity request and present a ruling in the coming months.


June 5, 2016

Protecting those who work to defend the environment is a human rights issue

On World Environment Day, we urge governments to address the growing threat to activists and indigenous people by bringing those who harm them to justice

By John H Knox, Michel Forst and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz
The Guardian

The enjoyment of a vast range of human rights, including rights to life, health, food, water, and housing, depend on a healthy and sustainable environment. Today, on World Environment Day, let us remember that those who work to protect the environment are not only environmentalists – they are human rights defenders. And they are increasingly at risk.

As the international demand grows for the exploitation of natural resources in developing countries, so the threats to environmental defenders increase. Those who oppose development projects are often treated as enemies of the state and, all too often, they are targeted for assassination.

Recent cases include the assassinations of Berta Cáceres, a leader of the Lenca indigenous people in Honduras, and Sikhosiphi “Bazooka” Rhadebe, a community leader in Xolobeni in
South Africa. For years, both received death threats for opposing huge projects – dams in Honduras and a titanium mine in South Africa – that would displace their people.

Such murders happen all the time. The deaths of Cáceres and Rhadebe are unusual only in that they received international attention. Mostly when environmentalists are murdered, their deaths go unnoticed beyond their communities. For example, a photographic exhibition in Geneva drew attention last month to the murders of 60 environmentalists over the past two decades in just one country, Thailand. Most had received little or no attention in the international press.

The human rights organisation Front Line Defenders reports that, of the 156 human rights defenders killed in 2015, the largest single group, 45% of the total, were those defending environmental, land, or indigenous rights. Another organisation, Global Witness, has found that an average of two environmental and land rights activists are being killed weekly – and the numbers are getting worse.

The situation is particularly grave in Latin America and south-east Asia, but it affects every region of the world. It is truly a global crisis.

Last year, the international community reached consensus on new sustainable development goals as a roadmap to a more sustainable, prosperous and equitable future. But these goals cannot be met if those on the frontline of sustainable development are not protected.

It is ironic that environmental rights defenders are often branded “anti-development” when, by working to make development truly sustainable, they are actually more pro-development than the corporations and governments that oppose them.

The brave women and men who risk their lives to protect the environment and rights of others should be lauded as heroes. Instead, the authorities typically fail to protect them, to investigate their deaths, or to punish those responsible.

This March, the UN human rights council adopted a landmark resolution requiring states to ensure the rights and safety of human rights defenders working towards the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights.

That was a good initial step, but governments must do far more. They have obligations under human rights law to protect environmentalists’ rights of expression and association by responding rapidly and effectively to threats, promptly investigating acts of harassment and violence from all parties including business and non-state actors, protecting the lives of those at risk, and bringing those responsible to justice.

Environmental rights defenders are often branded ‘anti-development’ but they're working to make development sustainable

States must also adopt and implement mechanisms that allow defenders to communicate their grievances, claim responsibilities, and obtain effective redress for violations, without fear of intimidation.
They must take additional steps to safeguard the rights of members of marginalised and vulnerable communities, especially indigenous peoples, whose cultures, identities and livelihoods often depend on the environment and whose lives are particularly susceptible to environmental harm, placing them on the frontline of conflict.

Moreover, international financial institutions should explicitly tie their continuing support for development projects to the implementation of safeguards for human rights, including rights of freedom of expression and association. Multinational businesses should make clear in actions as well as words that they will not undertake projects in countries where these basic protections are not accorded. If they fail to keep their commitments, they should be penalised in their home countries and in the marketplace.

Protecting environmental defenders is not just the right thing to do. It is also the only way to ensure sustainable development.

Two decades ago, Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged for peaceful protests against oil pollution in his native Ogoniland, in Nigeria. The Niger delta has since become one of the most polluted environments in the world. This week, the Nigerian government and the UN announced that clean-up of this blighted region will finally commence, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, and in a timeframe that may span a quarter of a century.

If we continue to fail to protect those fighting to protect the environment, what new disasters will we face in another 20 years?

• John H Knox is the special rapporteur on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Michel Forst is the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz is the special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples


June 6, 2016

Global citizenship and education key to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals, sisters say

By Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report

Women religious who work at the United Nations and attended a recent United Nations conference in South Korea on education and global citizenship say the U.N.’s affirmation of human rights-based education is an important step in efforts to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development.
"Global citizenship is needed in so many ways," Sr. Eileen Reilly, director of the School Sisters of Notre Dame U.N. office, said following the U.N.'s 66th annual conference for non-governmental organizations, held May 30-June 1 in Gyeongju, South Korea.

"So much of the news of the news in the world today revolves around a sense of nationalism, of 'protecting my turf,' of 'my country' and 'my values,' Reilly told GSR upon returning to the U.S. from the Korean conference, which focused on the theme of "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together."

Achieving the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals — 17 global goals agreed to by U.N. member states to reduce poverty and promote a sustainable environment through the year 2030 — will require more efforts to encourage global cooperation, Reilly said. "Education is crucial to the whole thing," she said.

The affirmation of education is exactly what participants at the event affirmed in an action plan at the end of the three-day conference. "Education is a human right, essential to well-being and dignity, and is key to achieving Agenda 2030," participants said, citing the formal name of the U.N.'s goals through the year 2030.

To do this, an "ethos of global citizenship is required." Goal Number Four, ensuring "inclusive and equitable quality education" and promoting "lifelong opportunities for all" remains a guiding principle, they said.

The statement also affirmed that education for global citizenship "is an essential strategy to address global challenges as well as to promote gender equality, facilitate the eradication of poverty and hunger, build skills, eliminate corruption, and prevent violence, including violent extremism."

Such education can also promote efforts to promote "sustainable production and consumption" and mitigate "climate change and its effects."

In further explaining what global citizenship means, Reilly said "in any news cycle our attention is grabbed by items with which we have a connection. True global citizens have a connection with all of it. I share citizenship with the refugee who died fleeing Syria. I share citizenship with those whose land and homes are destroyed by fracking."

Sr. Winifred Doherty, the U.N. representative of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, told GSR that the conference's locale in South Korea had special significance, with a notable focus "on South Korea's progress of [rising from] poverty in the post-war era through the promotion of education. Korea wants to share this experience with other countries experiencing poverty," she said. "Education is the key."

Reilly said she was struck by the same emphasis, noting that U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, a Korean, spoke personally of his education following the Korean War. Reilly said Ban had been educated "under a tree by U.N. aid workers who came to Korea after the schools had been destroyed."
Without the education he received from the UNICEF, the U.N.'s education fund for children, Ban said he would never have become the global body's secretary general.

Another participant at the conference, Sr. Teresa Kotturan, the U.N. representative of the Sisters of Charity Foundation, said in an interview prior to the event that the importance of such conferences should not be underestimated. They become part of an ongoing dialogue about the role of education in promoting a more just and sustainable world, she said.

The idea of global citizenship, she added, is about communities and individuals affirming the idea that fighting poverty and promoting human rights, peace and a sustainable environmental future should be the concern of all.

That is a "tall order" and an ambitious agenda, Kotturan acknowledged. But she said the precepts are basic and understandable. Asked to describe the ethos of global education, Kotturan said it would be, "I care about the human rights of everyone, and ensure that no one is left behind."

"If I have to stand up for you, I have to have a feeling that you are my sister or brother," she said. "We can't be building walls anymore."

An awareness of human rights of others, even in other countries, has to be added "to civic learning."

In a presentation at the conference, Kotturan said that education was the undergirding foundation for all of the U.N.s Sustainable Development Goals. "Education for global citizenship will be the key to the future of sustainable development," she said.

To do that involves advancing a "social justice approach" that analyzes "how social, economic and political forces in society produce patterns of injustice, and to better understand and address the root causes and change structures.

Catholic sisters have a role to play in this, Kotturan said, both with their long tradition of teaching as a vocation and their strong commitment to social justice.

In a presentation she made for members of the Vincentian Family in Seoul, South Korea, about global citizenship and the work of the United Nations*, Kotturan cited Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si*’, in affirming the need for education that promotes global citizenship.

"Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life," the encyclical says, adding, "Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature."

More than 2,000 attended the conference, and included representation from religious congregations who have non-governmental organization status with the U.N., educators, activists, business representatives, local officials, U.N. personnel and others.
June 6, 2016

International innovators to share green savvy at UNT rural sustainability conference

By Julie Ryan
Green Source DFW

North Texans seeking sustainable solutions for a growing demand for water and energy in the region can learn from world experts when the University of North Texas hosts an international conference unlike any seen hereabouts this week.

It’s UNT’s first international conference on rural sustainability, hosted by the departments of Anthropology and Philosophy & Religion.

On June 10-11, sustainable agriculturists, ecopreneurs and community organizers from rural communities around the world will share their work on the front lines of agricultural innovation – amid climate disruption and globalization.

“In many parts of the world, villagers are departing from ecologically degraded rural environments for overcrowded urban centers,” says Prof. Pankaj Jain, conference co-organizer. “They leave rural ecosystems vulnerable to further exploitation and degradation.”

Local NGOs, he says, are addressing these conditions, enabling villagers to gain a sustainable income from rural ecosystems. Making rural areas more productive, the people are able to remain on their lands and maintain them, via development strategies that protect the local ecosystems.

Practitioners of just such restorative, sustainable development will take center stage at the conference.

Innovators, land stewards and community organizers from nine nations in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East will present current projects. Some of these apply traditional, sustainable agriculture technologies to save subsistence-farming villages that had been further impoverished by large-scale, Western-style development projects, such as hydro-electric dams and monoculture lumber plantations that destroy fragile forest ecosystems. Their efforts are remediating damaged land, growing food crops adapted to the locale, restoring ecosystems and establishing sustainable green economies.

What makes this conference relevant to North Texas city-dwellers?
“Oddly enough, some things they face are not so different from our challenges,” says Keith Brown, a research assistant in Philosophy & Religion working on the event. “Given the highly unsustainable nature of DFW, how can we bring sustainability into our lives? We want to see how we can apply the methods these people use… Their successes are inspiring people on the outskirts of the cities near them, with how they garden, how they get their water supply and develop wind power and other alternative energy sources.”

The UNT forum intends to foster community-based responses to major global, cultural and environmental pressures, in Dr. Jain’s vision. One means will be to “focus on non-Western ways of thinking, doing and acting” in addressing the repercussions of globalization on rural regions.

Panels of speakers from Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mexico, Nigeria, Tunisia and elsewhere will address natural resources, eco-entrepreneurship, education, preservation and community engagement. Women’s movements for sustainable communities are represented. A Guatemalan group working with Agronomists and Veterinarians without Borders will participate. (See links below for presenters.)

One of India’s highest honorees keynotes Friday’s events: Anil Prakash Joshi, founder and director of HESCO, the Himalayan Environmental Studies and Conservation Organization, whose mission is to develop sustainable agriculture technologies. HESCO reports it has provided villages with “water mills, composting pits, plant-based medication, herbal pesticides and rainwater harvesting techniques… helped more than 10,000 villages develop beekeeping and fruit… and grain processing as local enterprises,” as well as use local, renewable resources to manufacture furniture and other products.

Dr. Joshi, a previous colleague of Dr. Jain and Philosophy & Religion professor Dr. George James, sparked the conference when he shared with Jain his desire for a symposium that would go beyond the prevalent focus on urban sustainability at United Nations-sponsored conferences. The two UNT scholars responded, successfully landing foundation grants “to bring people all over the world with similar experiences but different techniques in rural areas, to work with urban areas,” recounts Brown. UNT agreed to host the event, and Dr. Alicia Re Cruz, a UNT anthropologist, joined the effort. (Dr. Jain is associate professor in both Anthropology and Philosophy & Religion.)

The conference is also a chance to meet “the first tree-huggers” of India, in the person of legendary Indian activist Panduranga Hegde. Hegde brings the determined movement of Appiko (to hug) to Dallas. Appiko carries on a 25-plus year tradition begun in the Himalayan state of Uttarkhand, of village resistance to forest destruction by hugging trees to save them from being felled by the State. (Outlook India, 6 October 2012). The Appiko movement began to fight monoculture crop-growing in the Western Ghats mountains of South India, and is now known as the “first ever people’s green movement in South India to save our natural resources… A model of sustainable development,” according to Hegde. An Indian “tree-hugger” community recently exhibited at Earth Day Texas.

One hundred or more attendees are expected at the UNT conference. The general public is welcome, and admission is free.
It’s worth noting that this event comes at a time when indigenous leaders around the world are in the news, questioning corporate-supported U.S. and European development projects in their communities. Their resistance has met with armed suppression in southern Mexico, Brazil, Honduras and elsewhere.

But who knows what positive synergy will spark, when eco-activists from around the world come together with North Texas beekeepers, urban gardeners and solar-power engineers?

**Rural Sustainability Workshop**

**When:** June 10-11, 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

**Where:** University of North Texas, Environmental Education, Science and Technology Building, 1704 W. Mulberry St., Denton, TX 76201

**Contact:** Keith Brown at 940-206-9354 or Keith.Brown@unt.edu.

**Presenters**

**Register**

**More info**


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**June 8, 2016**

GreenFaith Newsletter

[https://www.z2systems.com/np/clients/greenfaith/viewOnlineEmail.jsp?emailId=54cbdf1e828f780747d288b2eedc68ee5m032054354c](https://www.z2systems.com/np/clients/greenfaith/viewOnlineEmail.jsp?emailId=54cbdf1e828f780747d288b2eedc68ee5m032054354c)

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**June 9, 2016**

How Pope Francis inspired a Thailand parish to plant 800 trees

Inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical on caring for creation, and concerned by environmental threats around them, Catholic parishioners in Thailand are planting hundreds of new trees.

Herald Malaysia Online
BANGKOK: Inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical on caring for creation, and concerned by environmental threats around them, Catholic parishioners in Thailand are planting hundreds of new trees.

“Pope Francis has enlightened us and appealed to us in his encyclical ‘Laudato Si’ for collective action and bold cultural revolution to tackle environmental issues,” said Father Daniel Khuan Thinwan.

“As pastors it’s our responsibility to take these teachings to the peripheries so that the faithful can find their true meaning in practice,” he said.

The priest is from Mount Carmel Church in Paphanawan in the Diocese of Thare and Nonseng in the far northeastern region of Thailand. The parish community’s reforestation program planted 800 saplings to celebrate World Environment Day, held on June 5.

“Pope Francis has touched the key points of the environment, which has been a universal reality and especially in the local area a challenge,” Fr. Daniel said. “The question is: how to put these teachings into reality?”

The Thai priest said that environmental and climate change discussions had been mainly confined to scientists, activists, universities, and others engaged in politics and economics. Pope Francis has opened a new dimension on the issues and brought a broader perspective, engaging the question with the eyes of spirituality and faith, he added.

For the reforestation program, families helped grow plant saplings and brought them to the church. After Sunday Mass, young and old began digging and planting the saplings to help replenish the forest and bring greener plant life to the hills. The monsoon season is gradually picking up its pace, and the rains will naturally help the plants to grow.

The trees will help contain air pollution, prevent soil erosion and maintain soil fertility. They will also give new life to wild flora and shelter to animals and birds. The trees will help bring rain and maintain temperature and ground water level in the area.

Fr. Daniel said the effort is “a small step which will help to make an impact on climate change for a better world.”

“We need to tackle these issues and challenges before it too late to save our planet, our ‘common home’.”

The priest said that the parish catechesis on “Laudato Si” motivated the community. There are also environmental problems in the region, including acute water scarcity.

Thailand is suffering its worst drought in the last 20 years. The water level in the river basins, dams and reservoirs is very low, at 10 percent. This has adversely affected the farmers in many regions.
In addition to water scarcity and deforestation, the environmental issues facing the country include pollution and decline in wildlife population.

The government has adopted several measures to combat the drought-plagued areas. It has also forged a global alliance with other countries to reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption. Thailand has ranked in the top 30 carbon dioxide emitters in the world and is a significant carbon emitter in the East Asia and Pacific region.—CNA


June 9, 2016

Greening Ramadan

Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute

http://us6.campaign-archive2.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=20cb38bd2a&e=d85b57a294

June 10, 2016

Indigenous Climate Adaptation Tool May Soon Go Mobile

By Ciro Calderon
Ecosystem Marketplace

Brazil’s SOMAI Alerta Indígena platform helps indigenous territories plan for climate change, but so far it’s only been available in places with reliable internet. A new mobile app could spread the access and make it more responsive – but only if funding materializes. Thanks to Google, that may be about to happen.

The indigenous people of the Amazon have always worked in partnership with the forest – so much so that some of their traditional farming practices even created, rather than depleted, topsoil at the rate of one centimeter per year.

Those practices faded with the arrival of more intense but less sustainable farming, yet climate change is bringing them back as more and more indigenous territories face droughts and floods.

To effectively adapt to climate change, however, indigenous farmers have to understand how climate change will impact their territories – and that’s where an online platform called SOMAI Alerta Indígena comes in.

Launched in 2014 by the Amazon Environmental Research Institute’s (IPAM) Indigenous Study Center, with funding from USAID through the Accelerating Inclusion and Mitigating Emissions
(AIME) program, SOMAI Alerta Indígena is short for “System of Observing and Monitoring of the Indigenous Amazon”, and it provides the latest science-based projections through the year 2050 on a territory-by-territory basis. It works by blending 17 climate models from the IPCC (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change) with historical data from 2000 to 2014, which helps understand the deforestation patterns and its climate impacts in the Amazon and the changes that might occur in the future.

Although much of the technical data is readily available, it wasn't presented in a way that could be accessed by indigenous territories. IPAM worked with indigenous leaders through federations like COIAB (Coordination of Indigenous Organization of Brazilian Amazon) to create a platform that indigenous people can relate to, and that lets users zoom in on their territory to see rainfall and temperature projections, as well as seasonal extremes.

Phase Two calls for the introduction of a mobile-phone app to provide constant feeds about droughts, rains, and temperatures while making it possible for indigenous groups to upload data collected in their territories into SOMAI’s database, providing a feedback mechanism that can fine-tune projections.

That phase, however, has been on hold due to lack of funding – a hold that could end if SOMAI earns one of the top four slots in Google’s Impact Challenge 2016, which would net it roughly USD $430,000 (Brazilian Real $1.5 million). The challenge identifies regional nonprofits that use innovation to improve a variety of global situations and then allows the public to vote on the projects they feel are delivering the most impact. SOMAI is one of ten finalists to be selected by this popular vote, which ends on June 13th. The winners will be announced the next day at an event in Sao Paulo.

“The Google recognition over the SOMAI project translates into having the support to decrease the gap between the information produced by researchers and the people that need that information to develop adaptation strategies – namely, the indigenous people of Amazon,” says Fernanda Bortolotto, a researcher in the Indigenous Study Center at IPAM.

A Harvest of Information

Researchers are currently updating SOMAI with 2015 data gathered through Google and official images banks such as PRODES – Brazil’s deforestation monitoring database – which is available online. These databases were used for mapping deforestation, precipitation, drought and biodiversity with a primary focus on indigenous territories.

While the current scope is the Brazilian Amazon, Bortolotto says it’s entirely possible for SOMAI to include all Amazonia countries and every climate in Brazil once data is available for these regions.

Currently, climate projections have a long term scope, forecasting to 2070. However IPAM is working with indigenous people in the field to monitor changes that are already happening in their territories, and then cross this data with predicted changes to prioritize needs and inform decision-making.
To facilitate the understanding of the platform, the site also contains videos with indigenous testimony and presentations about climate change impacts.

**User Feedback**

During 2015, IPAM held three workshops to obtain feedback: one with indigenous peoples, one with Brazil’s National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and one with students from the Indigenous Studies Master of the [Federal University of Goias](http://www.ufg.br).

“After these workshops, we realized that besides having a technical component, we also have an educational side where discussions can occur,” says Bortolotto.

Since the platform depends on official data, updates are made once a year, but thanks to climate impact projects in the territories, participants want to achieve more frequent updating and generate weather alerts for indigenous people.

Enhancing the platform’s accessibility, so it’s not just for those with a reliable Internet connection, is another goal. Translating the information into suitable languages for indigenous people is one such way to do that.

**Monitoring and Control**

Ideally, the SOMAI will be linked to some sort of government program, so if the satellites monitoring deforestation detect irregular activity in an ecologically significant area, the authorities can investigate these actions and hold the right people accountable.

This tool is constantly evolving as researchers continue to improve on it and this regulatory component is something they have planned for down the road. However, late last year IPAM, along with Brazil’s Ministry of Environment, presented SOMAI to the Secretary of Climate Change, allowing the secretary to include the platform in a special chapter of adaptation, currently in development, and perhaps sealing the tool’s fate as a climate adaptation tool. Brazil’s national adaptation plan was in public consultation last year and the new version is about to be launched.

For now though, the satellite focuses on demonstrating how ongoing deforestation is connected with climate change. On some maps it is evident that in the most deforested regions, there are more droughts.

“A control platform is an informative tool. With this data, correlations and mitigation plans are made mainly for the insulated territories with high rates of deforestation,” says Bortolotto.

**Moving on Up?**

SOMAI was chosen by the Ministry of Environment to be part of the [Nairobi Work Plan](http://unfccc.int), established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a mechanism to
facilitate knowledge sharing on climate adaptation across sectors. Bortolotto says what the platform needs most now is direction, instructions on how to proceed.

“We have the government approval, we need the development,” she said. That may take time, so during the wait Bortolotto said they will work on deepening collaboration with organizations to prove the platform’s functionality and creating synergies with the government’s existing work.

IPAM is a part of the Forest-Based Livelihoods (FBL) Consortium, a partnership of nine environmental and indigenous organizations led by Ecosystem Marketplace’s publisher Forest Trends. FBL initiated AIME, a five-year program with the support of USAID to empower forest-dependent communities in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Central America and Mexico to more fully contribute to and directly benefit from climate change mitigation and forest conservation efforts.

Ciro Calderon is a Program Associate at Ecosystem Marketplace. He can be reached at ccalderon@valorandonaturaleza.org.


June 14, 2016

Laudato Si’ Week renews awareness ahead of encyclical anniversary

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Prayer services, social media campaigns, workshops and webinars are set to celebrate the one-year anniversary of Pope Francis’ social encyclical on the environment, “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home.”

A year ago on Saturday, June 18, the Vatican published Laudato Si’. Since that time, Catholics communities, as well as secular groups, have used the text as a rallying point to engage environmental issues and take steps toward transforming its teachings into actions.

The days leading up to Saturday’s anniversary will highlight the steps already taken as well as revisit some of the text’s major teachings.

To that effect, the Global Catholic Climate Movement has marked this week as Laudato Si’ Week. Through its 500-member Laudato Si’ animator program, it has at least 300 events scheduled across six continents. The activities range from prayer services and special petitions during Masses, to training workshops, film screenings and art exhibits.

Both the Global Catholic Climate Movement and U.S.-based Catholic Climate Covenant, itself celebrating this month its 10-year anniversary, have produced parish guides to help communities
shrink carbon footprints and waste while growing awareness and advocacy efforts related to environmental degradation and the people put in danger as a result.

During a teleconference Monday, Dan Misleh, Catholic Climate Covenant executive director, said he was “enormously proud” of the church’s efforts so far in responding to Francis’ moral call in *Laudato Si’* for all of humanity to act in the face of global environmental degradation and climate change.

“Pope Francis affirms the clear link between the importance of caring for God’s creation and the dire consequences for the poor from a climate-threatened world,” he said.

Misleh said it’s difficult to keep up with all activities that have stemmed from the encyclical, such as parishes reducing energy use and waste, religious orders divesting their portfolios from fossil fuels, academic institutes hosting multi-disciplinary conferences, and others engaging in advocacy for policies reflecting its teachings.

At the beginning of June, the Covenant launched a social media campaign aimed at sharing how people have been inspired by *Laudato Si’* so far. Users can share their thoughts by downloading a campaign card from the covenant website and sharing it on social media using the hashtag #CreationCare. A similar campaign from Global Catholic Climate Movement asks people to post a selfie on Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag #LiveLaudatoSi to share how they are doing just that.

While the first year showed signs of noticeable progress, leaders on promoting the encyclical recognize the long path still ahead.

A May poll released Monday from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University found 32 percent of U.S. Catholics (28 percent of Americans) had heard or read about *Laudato Si’*, while 56 percent (61 percent of Americans overall) had not heard of it. CARA pointed out that, in general, there is generally low awareness of papal documents.

At the same time, six-in-10 Catholics in the CARA poll agree that global warming is occurring and is largely a result of human activity -- a percentage roughly on par with U.S. adults overall but trailing believers in non-Christian faiths (79 percent) and the religiously unaffiliated (70 percent).

The survey’s overall results, Misleh said, make it “clear our collective efforts [in the past year] have made a difference,” pointing to findings that a wide majority of Catholics, whether aware of the encyclical or not, support societal climate action.

As part of an effort to reintroduce and re-engage the actual text, the Global Catholic Climate Movement has scheduled a series of five webinars dissecting and discussing the encyclical’s six chapters from the perspectives of a diverse field of religious and secular experts.

Among the speakers are: Cardinal Peter Turkson; Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences; Michel Roy, secretary general of
Caritas Internationalis; Carolyn Woo, president of Catholic Relief Services; Franciscan Fr. Michael Perry, minister general of the Order of Friars Minor; Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Yale University Forum on Religion and Ecology; eco-theologian Columban Fr. Sean McDonagh; Marcia McNutt, editor of Science magazine; and Jeffrey Sachs, director of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

The webinar and *Laudato Si’* Week are an extension of awareness-raising around the encyclical, said Tomas Insua, co-founder of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. That’s been an important component, given that many in the wider church are new to the issue, especially compared to other faiths.

“There has been a lot of awareness raising, and it will continue to be a priority,” he told *NCR.*

Overall, Insua pointed to the Philippines and Brazilian churches as taking a lead on implementing the messages of the encyclical, with both well-engaged in environmental issues pre-*Laudato Si’*. In the U.S., Bishop Oscar Cantú, chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on International Justice and Peace, said during the Monday teleconference that the conference has integrated care for creation into its long-term priorities planning, and that it will introduce a “multi-faceted implementation plan” during their annual fall meeting.

In addition, Cantú said the conference is dedicating additional staff resources to its environmental justice program so to better analyze and form official positions on national and state legislation related to the encyclical’s themes. In the past year, the bishop estimated conference staff met with and briefed “well over” 100 members of Congress and their staffs and White House officials on issues related to creation care and climate change.

Maria Vorel, senior vice president for disaster operations for Catholic Charities USA, said the encyclical provided an opening for collaboration at the federal level, with the Obama administration inviting them to identify natural disaster preparedness measures, with particular focus toward vulnerable populations.

“*Laudato Si’* crystallizes the reality of disasters in the U.S.,” she said, adding it calls not just for compassionate care to those impacted, but an assessment of environmental and land-use policies toward addressing the needs of those at risk.

Cantú added that beginning in the fall, the conference, in partnership with Catholic Climate Covenant, a pastoral education program on the encyclical, with an aim of reaching at least 30 dioceses and 500 priests in the next three years.

“In our own nation, the bishops of the United States are doing our part to foster this critically important dialogue about our common home,” he said.

Misleh told *NCR* that increasing pastoral engagement is a priority, as he senses a lot of people are still trying to absorb the encyclical and all its teachings.
“But I also feel like people are rising to the call of *Laudato Si’*, as well, and saying, yeah, this is going to take a while to study it, this is going to take a while to absorb it, but there are things that we can do right away to reduce our energy use,” Misleh said.

One thing that has struck him from the talks and presentations he has given in the past year is that Francis has been able to “really put the moral argument front and center.”

The CARA poll found 68 percent of Catholics (63 percent of U.S. adults) recognizing a personal moral responsibility to address climate change. However, the same percentage said papal statements did not strengthen that belief. Thirty-two percent of Catholics acknowledged some level of papal influence, but that percentage dropped with each of the lower-ranking clergy and parish leaders.

The impact of recognizing the moral dimension to environmental issues, Misleh said, is that people begin to develop a more personal connection to the environmental disruptions they see in the news, such as flooding in Texas or the drought in California, and with those who suffer as a result.

“People who stop and reflect on these things really begin to have a deep empathy for what’s happening, and I think maybe make the connection between these awful weather events and climate change, and then hopefully between that and their own behaviors,” he said.


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**June 16, 2016**

Year-old *Laudato Si’* has stirred up action for Earth

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Last year's arrival of Pope Francis' encyclical *"Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home"* marked a significant moment as the Catholic church substantially entered the realm of environmental concern at a time when global attention toward the Earth's degradation, in particular by climate change, was nearing a peak.

Since then, signs of the encyclical's impact have already appeared. Many *parishes, schools and communities* have studied, reflected and discussed the text, often through multidisciplinary conferences and much as Francis requested in its introduction: "I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home."

More ambitious corners began taking first-step actions at institutional levels by forming green teams, improving energy efficiency and reducing wasteful consumption. For those long engaged
in environmental issues, the encyclical proved a valuable rallying tool, one that opened doors, spurred mobilization and generated not-seen-before excitement within Catholic circles.

"I cannot wish for anything better," said Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice, which oversaw the first draft of the encyclical. Since its publication last June 18, Turkson has served as its chief promoter, traveling across the globe to deliver countless talks on *Laudato Si’*.

"I think it has proven to be really transformative," said Tomás Insua, co-founder of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. "But there's definitely a long way to go to really get this encyclical to really sync in our Catholic identity and really drive transformational change."

**Out of the gate**

While few anticipated the encyclical would yield immediate, far-reaching changes, it produced some out-of-the-gate impacts. For one, Francis placed environmental concern on the Catholic calendar by designating Sept. 1 as the annual World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

Within nations, Turkson pointed to several African countries that have organized around the encyclical to move away from fossil fuels and forests as energy sources and adopt solar technology.

The Philippines church -- residing in one of the most climate vulnerable regions and long active in environmental issues -- organized rallies, petition drives and prayer services around the *encyclical*. As part of global "Break Free from Fossil Fuels" events in May, Lipa Archbishop Ramon Arguelles led a 10,000-person march against new coal-fired power plants.

Last year, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences established a climate desk. In Brazil, bishops are planning a "*Laudato Si’* road show" for later this summer.

As positive efforts proceeded, so too did the realization of the degradation Francis described, said Joan Rosenhauer, executive vice president of U.S. operations for Catholic Relief Services. Recent trips that Rosenhauer took to the Philippines, where storms have worsened in the central islands, and Nicaragua, where warmer temperatures have disrupted growing seasons, showed how people are dealing with already-present effects of climate change.

"They're going to have to live their lives differently," she said.

In the U.S., numerous dioceses have undertaken their own encyclical implementation efforts. In Atlanta and San Francisco, they've formed preparatory plans. More concrete steps are underway in Chicago, where the archdiocese is pushing energy efficiency in its buildings, and San Diego, which has encouraged all parishes to install solar-power systems.

"Things are just popping up all over the place," said Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant.
A Yale/George Mason survey at the encyclical’s six-month mark found one in three Catholics acknowledging a papal influence on their views of global warming. A quarter of them were aware of *Laudato Si’*, and there were increases of 11 percentage points and 20 percentages points in becoming worried about global warming (64 percent) and believing it will harm the poor (62 percent), respectively.

A survey released Monday from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University also found a third of Catholics having heard of or read the encyclical -- a percentage that has roughly held steady since July 2015. On the flipside, the CARA survey found 56 percent of those polled were not aware of the document. Still, six-in-10 Catholics agreed that climate change was occurring and largely a result of human activity. Additionally, 68 percent of Catholics (63 percent of U.S. adults) recognized a personal moral responsibility to address climate change, with 32 percent of Catholics saying the pope strengthened that belief; 68 percent reported no papal influence on their moral views regarding the climate.

On the international scene, maybe the encyclical's greatest impact came at the Paris climate negotiations in December. There, *Laudato Si’* "played a key role," said Turkson, a member of the Vatican delegation at COP 21, the United Nations climate change conference. The Vatican received credit, along with other faith groups and island nations, for its endorsement of the Paris Agreement attaching a 1.5 degrees Celsius target to its central 2-degrees (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) commitment to limit average global temperature rise.

**Mobilizing Catholics**

Beyond Holy See intervention, the encyclical helped mobilize 900,000 Catholics to sign the Catholic Climate Petition (which included the 1.5 degrees target) and 40,000 Catholics to join Global Climate March rallies ahead of the Paris summit. Amid both those efforts was the Global Catholic Climate Movement, itself an anticipatory response to *Laudato Si’* in its formation ahead of Francis’ January 2015 visit to the Philippines.

The network, which began with 19 member organizations and now counts 300-plus, organized and delivered the Catholic Climate Petition to key leaders at the Paris climate talks.

The COP 21 mobilization "would have been absolutely impossible without the encyclical," Insua said.

The type of cooperation demonstrated in the Global Climate March, with religious and secular groups joining as a single force, can be attributed in some part to the encyclical, said Lorna Gold, head of policy and advocacy for Trócaire, the Irish Catholic development agency.

Gold, who has 14 years in policy advocacy, said the encyclical has given "a real boost" to the climate movement both within and outside the church, especially in uniting fronts along shared interests.

"You can see a convergence between the more secular actors and the faith-based actors on a number of big issues in the encyclical," she said.
That convergence marks a stark change from past interactions, where Gold described Catholic agencies more left "out in the cold" on broader discussions of human rights and environmental issues. The encyclical has changed that, she said, with Catholic groups experiencing a "sea change" in the role they play in civil society, where they now act as quasi-gatekeepers for Francis, viewed as one of the most influential leaders on global environmental issues.

While the agenda of a more sustainable global society has existed for years, it's becoming clear, Gold said, that the necessary transformative changes in policy, lifestyle and consciousness cannot happen without greater collaboration among individual initiatives.

"What Laudato Si' has done has made us look at, well, first the urgency and the depth of the challenge that we're facing, but also to think that we won't be able to do this unless we do it together," she said.

Gold added that the pope "has really thrown open the agenda. ... It's almost like he said the unsayable," and broadened the accessible public policy discussion for Catholic agencies.

One door he's opened wider is the issue of fossil fuel divestment. A favorite citation of activists has been Paragraph 165, where Francis states the need to move away from "highly polluting fossil fuels ... without delay."

Those types of divestment ideas weren't being discussed much in the mainstream pre-encyclical, Gold said. Trócaire has committed to divesting their stock pension plans from fossil fuels in the next two years and is engaging Irish dioceses and universities in the divestment conversation.

On Thursday, four Pacific-area religious orders announced they will divest from coal, oil and gas companies. According to Global Catholic Climate Movement, the decision was the first-ever joint Catholic divestment announcement. The divesting orders are the Marist Sisters Australia, Presentation Congregation Queensland, Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga, and the Passionists of the Holy Spirit Province Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Zealand and Vietnam.

"This is a key part of the way we engage in God’s mission, especially at a time when the challenge to address global warming is so urgent," said Presentation Sr. Marlette Black, congregation leader of the Queensland Presentation sisters, in a statement.

The joint divestment announcement was a result of a working group recently formed by Global Catholic Climate Movement. Insua said as that group develops and organizes, he anticipates more Catholic orders and institutes will follow suit in divesting in the next two years, beginning with another expected joint pledge in October near the Feast of St. Francis (Oct. 4).

Turkson told NCR he has heard the conversations around divestment pick up among religious orders, but so far, those haven't developed similarly in the Holy See.

"There's not yet been any policy from the Vatican against any such investment," he said.
While Francis urges a shift from fossil fuels, Turkson recognized the message comes off as corrosive in regions highly reliant on coal mining, such as Poznan, Poland, which he visited in November. The pope's intent, Turkson said, is "a gradual weaning" as alternatives develop, and not one that leaves masses of people instantly without wages or work.

**The people lead**

Despite noticeable progress, those engaged in environmental issues say there's still much to do in terms of bringing the encyclical to life. While many bishops wrote or spoke about the encyclical in the days and weeks after its release (Catholic Climate Covenant counted nearly 100 in the U.S. in the first month), Insua said only a few bishops' conferences have really raised the environment to central issue status.

That means not only writing statements, he said, but engaging in advocacy, specifically "for bold climate action." He predicted that step would only come if the people lead their prelates toward it.

"I think that the bishops of many countries will follow when they see that the Catholic grassroots are taking action by themselves," Insua said.

Gold senses "a nervousness" among the Irish hierarchy and clergy, who may feel out of their element on environmental issues. She and others have suggested a synodal process on the environment as one channel to more immerse *Laudato Si’* into the heart of the church, or including those discussions as part of the rumored synod on peace.

Misleh of Catholic Climate Covenant said he was pleased by the work he saw at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which produced prayer and study guide resources for the encyclical, in addition to continued advocacy on Capitol Hill for full U.S. funding of the Green Climate Fund and national carbon standards on coal-fired power plants via the Clean Power Plan.

"Nobody can say that their resources haven't expanded exponentially in this area," he said.

At the same time, Misleh also acknowledged one of the biggest challenges is developing a greater comfort with the encyclical among clergy and lay leaders.

To that end, the Catholic Climate Covenant is developing a pastoral training program to help pastors become more comfortable discussing the encyclical and the theology behind caring for creation and addressing environmental issues. A similar effort is underway between Trócaire and the Irish bishops' conference.

In addition, the Global Catholic Climate Movement plans to expand its *Laudato Si’* animator program from the 500 people in 60 countries it's trained to mobilize local advocacy efforts. Likewise, Catholic Climate Covenant hopes to grow its ambassador network of encyclical speakers and is working on separate programs reaching out to Latino communities and church facilities managers.
As far as the long-term impact, Turkson placed *Laudato Si'* into the larger compendium of social encyclicals, describing them together "like a big river," with new tributaries forming as it flows forward. Like past encyclicals, such as *Rerum Novarum*, it too will stimulate future teachings and ideas, he said.

"But it is forever going to inspire the church's teaching on ecology and integral ecology."


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**June 16, 2016**

*Laudato Si': Putting faith on the frontline of the climate justice fight*

By Jennifer Butler and Aaron Mair
National Catholic Reporter

Last year, Pope Francis challenged the Catholic church and the world to be more proactive in combatting climate change and preserving the environment in a historic document titled "*Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home*." As we mark the one-year anniversary of this momentous spiritual document, the need for action couldn’t be more urgent.

Communities of faith across the globe should heed Pope Francis’ words. The Bible says that the highest heavens belong to God, but the earth he has given to humanity. As believers, we have a moral obligation to protect our planet and the life-sustaining resources that it provides.

Environmental degradation is a social justice issue that cannot be ignored. Too many Americans are robbed of life’s most basic necessities: clean air and clean water, because they stand on the lowest rungs of our nation’s economic ladder. We have what Pope Francis calls "a grave social debt towards the poor" and we need "a global ecological conversion."

We know that communities of color are far more likely to live adjacent to a landfill, incinerator or coal-fired power plant than white Americans. They are also disproportionately impacted by polluting emissions that damage the earth and contaminate our bodies, causing asthma, lung cancer and other respiratory illnesses. As Pope Francis reminded us, the relationship between the environment and justice for the poor is inseparable.

In Louisiana, there is an 85-mile stretch between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, known as "cancer alley." It’s is home to more than 150 oil refineries, and scores of poor residents with inexplicable illnesses.

It’s no coincidence that Louisiana has the highest concentration of oil, natural gas and petrochemical facilities in the Western Hemisphere, and is also the third-poorest state in the U.S. This is just one example of many where our nation’s poorest residents are the most at risk.
At its core, environmental justice is about preserving life, and faith leaders have a unique responsibility to promote sustainable development and to encourage a thriving culture of life that protects human dignity.

The toxic pollution released from coal-fired plants and the chemicals spewing into rivers and oceans present especially grave risks for life in the womb, young children and the elderly. The costs of delay and politics as usual are unacceptable.

As Pope Francis reminded us one year ago, "A healthy politics is sorely needed." Therefore, we are urging elected officials across the country as well as the presumptive presidential nominees of both parties to reflect on the pope’s climate challenge in *Laudato Si’* and to take action.

Every community and every person deserves clean air and clean water. The absence of either is unconscionable.

[Rev. Jennifer Butler is CEO of Faith in Public Life. Aaron Mair is president of the Sierra Club.]


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**June 17, 2016**

Green Church Newsletter

http://us13.campaign-archive2.com/?u=d9e8a3947f2f12635e017888f&id=54e3bd52ef&e=f5c5dd627a

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**June 19, 2016**

Violent 2015 sees three environmental activists killed each week

By Anastasia Moloney

Reuters

BOGOTA (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Three environmental activists were killed per week last year, murdered defending land rights and the environment from mining, dam projects and logging, a campaign group said on Monday.

In 16 countries surveyed in a report by Global Witness, 185 activists were killed, making 2015 the deadliest year for environment and land campaigners since 2002.

"The environment is emerging as a new battleground for human rights,” the report said.

The reported killings rose nearly 60 percent from 2014. Brazil fared worst with 50 activists murdered, followed by the Philippines with 33 deaths, and 26 in Colombia, the report said.
"A major reason behind the big jump in killings is impunity, people know they can get away with these crimes," Billy Kyte, campaigner at Global Witness, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Increasingly, communities that take a stand are finding themselves in the firing line of companies' private security, state forces and a thriving market for contract killers," Kyte said.

"For every killing we document, many others go unreported."

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has also raised the alarm about growing violence and intimidation against land and environmental activists in rural Brazil.

In April, the IACHR, the body that monitors human rights across the Americas said at least six land activists were killed in Brazil during the first two months of this year.

Brazil's environment ministry did not respond to requests for comment on the rise of killings against environmentalists.

According to Global Witness, conflicts over mining projects led to more deaths of activists than any other sector.

Large-scale agricultural plantations, cattle ranching, hydroelectric dams, and logging were also to blame for the growing violence against campaigners, the report said.

Worst hit by violence were indigenous people, accounting for 40 percent of the activists killed in 2015, the report found.

Indigenous groups campaigning to protect their lands and livelihoods in Brazil's Amazon rainforest from illegal loggers were particularly hard hit, as were the Lumad indigenous tribe in the Philippines in the Mindanao region, rich in coal, nickel and gold, protesting against mining projects, the report said.

The failure by governments and companies to recognize the rights of indigenous people to decide about happens on their lands is a key driver of violence, the report said.

"Indigenous people come into conflict with companies, often with state backing, looking to develop their ancestral land without their consent," the report said.

The murder of Berta Caceres, a prominent Honduran environmental campaigner shot by gunmen in her home in March, drew international condemnation and brought attention to abuses of indigenous people.

(Reporting by Anastasia Moloney, Additional reporting from Chris Arsenault in Rio de Janeiro editing by Billy Perrigo.; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, corruption and climate change. Visit news.trust.org)
June 20, 2016

Sisters' school stands out in Guatemalan dump town

By J. Malcolm Garcia
Global Sisters Report

Global Sisters Report is publishing a special series about how trash is managed in the world and how sisters are helping people affected by landfills. We start this project to mark the one-year anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, Laudato Si', about climate change, pollution and waste, which warns that: "The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."

The sisters who teach at the Francisco Coll School know all too well the difficulties their students confront daily.

The students live in a barrio near a massive garbage dump not far from the school and less than a half-hour drive from the posh tourist attractions of downtown. The children suffer from malnutrition, they suffer at the hands of drug-addicted parents and gangs, they suffer from toxic pollutants released into the air from the dump. And sometimes, the very thing they lean on for survival — the 40-acre dump and its mounds of plastic, glass and cardboard that can be sold to recycling centers — threatens them, too.

On April 28, at least four people died after a mountain of trash collapsed on men, women and children — known as "guajeros" (garbage pickers) — who had been scavenging for recyclable material to sell. About 10 people were taken for medical treatment after the collapse. A garbage truck was also buried. Twenty-six people are still listed as missing and presumed dead.

The Guatemala City garbage dump is the largest landfill in Central America. More than a third of the country's trash goes there. The scavengers take out and recycle a million pounds a day. In the process they expose themselves to toxic fumes and hazardous materials.

The most senior scavengers rush garbage trucks to attempt to take over the newest items before anyone else. Tragic tales abound about people in their haste getting crushed by the trucks. Recyclable items include glass and aluminum among other material. Scavengers with the most experience know what different trucks carry; trash from supermarkets and restaurants is valuable, and people collect that to eat or sell later. The trash piles can reach several stories and collapse like one did in April.
"I was home when I heard the news about the collapse," recalled Sr. Gloria Xol, 42, a day after the collapse. She stood in the courtyard of the school surrounded by unusually subdued children. Three children said their grandparents were among the missing.

"We had a special prayer," Xol said. "We had candles and prayed for those affected."

Xol is one of three nuns with the the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin teaching first through sixth grade. The school, established in 1995 and named after Saint Francisco Coll, stands in a barrio dubbed by locals as simply "el basurero," the dump. Students who graduate become eligible for a middle school next door run by International Samaritan.

The families of the barrio live in a network of trash-choked alleyways and hovels cobbled together from corrugated metal, cardboard and wood. Old mattresses buttress thin walls. Families and their animals share beds. Split sacks of recyclables take up the corners of the one or two rooms the shacks have been divided into. More trash fills the alleys. The homes of the scavengers totter on land that had once been part of the basurero above thin layers of sand and rotting garbage that often becomes unstable when it rains. Foul-smelling smoke of garbage fires hover above the barrio like fog.

"I have stopped expecting to work in tidy places," Xol said. "It is part of my work to be in dangerous areas. I am happy to be here. I have a calling and a mission to be here. We believe the Gospel should be taught in everyday life no matter the circumstances."

Most of the adults living in the barrio and working in the dump have little to no formal education. Some fled gang violence in El Salvador and Honduras only to run out of money and stop here. A majority of families are illegally squatting on the land they live on. The Francisco Coll School uses as its address Aguilar One, one of the settlements or squats.

Amidst this blight, the sisters offer what little hope their students have of receiving an education and escaping the life of poverty led by their parents, most of whom scavenge 12 hours a day in the dump, earning just U.S. $1 to $5 a day, seven days a week.

"Many are orphaned," said school principal Sr. Gloria Marlen Guadron, 38.

"They don't get proper nourishment. Another thing, they face gang violence. Thank God I've never had a problem with gang members. As a sister, I'm respected in the community."

But that respect goes only so far inside the classroom when students exposed to violence on a daily basis.

"The thing is the children bring the reality of their lives into the classroom," Xol said. "They are violent. If I start to correct them, they will talk back to me. 'Hey, you don't know who I am. I know gang members.' If I respond with threats, it will only get worse. I calm them down, try to get them through the episode. I don't criticize. I try to understand their situation."
In one instance, for example, Xol learned that a boy who often started fights was being physically abused by his mother. She would beat him with wires.

"He started crying," Xol recalled. "He told us about the situation at home. He was only 9. I told him the way he felt when his mother beat him was the way the other students felt when he fought with them. I'd like to get into his heart and remove his pain because he hasn't changed."

The pain hasn't stopped for Fernanda Mayen, 12. Both her parents were murdered.

"People say my parents got mugged," Mayen said. "My father, I don't remember when he died. My mom, I was in the second grade three years ago; she died near our home. A friend found her."

Mayen now lives with her maternal uncle in a shack that floods when it rains.

"Mud gets everywhere, and we cannot walk freely because everything gets dirty," she said. "A rug absorbs all the water, so the furniture doesn't get wet but the rug smells."

The financial meltdown and world-wide recession in 2008 made life even more difficult for families here who had little to nothing to start with. Construction jobs that poor people had traditionally depended on vanished. Remittances from friends and relatives abroad have dropped.

"In this area, 25 percent of the whole population is living in extreme poverty," said psychologist Marcelo Colussi, who meets with children from the Francisco Coll School once a week. "The problem is that the broader society equates poverty with criminality and ostracizes this area. That creates an aura that life has no value. People get used to that kind of thinking. They look at it as normal."

About 300 students attend classes from 7:30 a.m. to noon. Many drop out to earn money for their families. An after-school tutoring program focused on math and language skills meets from 2 to 5 p.m. three times a week to offer additional instruction and to keep students off the street after school lets out. About 40 students show up. One, Francisco Ixcoy Socorec, 11, uses the after-school sessions to practice handwriting and multiplication and division.

"I'd like more police so we wouldn't get mugged and jumped in the street," Socorec said. "Sundays it is common to hear shouting and drive-by shootings."

As a result of deep budget cuts, some classes have ballooned to as many as 50 students, said fourth grade teacher Jessica Gomez, 27. She grew up in the barrio and attended school here. Her mother, who works as a janitor at the school, moved into the area when she fled the violence of El Salvador in the 1980s.

"I feel reflected in the children," Gomez said. "I was extroverted and I know how the environment affects the kids. When I was studying to be a teacher, I felt it would be great to come back and give back."
Gomez’s late father was an alcoholic. Her mother, Altagracia Arevalo, raised Gomez and six siblings by herself in part by working in the landfill for 12 years, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week.

"It was very difficult," said Arevalo, 52. "I had to learn how to pick up food that was still edible for us. I feel sad for the children who don't have support from their parents. Of course, I'd have preferred not to have had to work and support my children but that was my life."

That type of perseverance inspires Guadron, the principal. She joined the order in her native El Salvador after she read a biography of Francisco Coll and began attending prayer groups. She took her vows last year. The shocking conditions of the barrio and the recent deaths in the landfill, she admitted, at times test her faith.

"I think sometimes, 'How can I help my students so they don't become the next victim?'" Guadron said. "I don't know sometimes if we're really helping. I wonder how many of these children will pull through and have a chance in life. How many will fail? Every day when I pray, I put this school and these children in God's hands. It is all I can do."

[J. Malcolm Garcia is a freelance writer and author of The Khaarijee: A Chronicle of Friendship and War in Kabul, What Wars Leave Behind: The Faceless and the Forgotten. He is a recipient of the Studs Terkel Prize for writing about the working classes and the Sigma Delta Chi Award for excellence in journalism.]

View photos:


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**June 24, 2016**

One year later, how a Pope's message on climate has resonated

Catholics worldwide are showing a new zeal for combatting climate change since Pope Francis highlighted the issue in 2015, experts say.

By Cristina Maza
Christian Science Monitor

For Catholics around the world, climate change is a heightened priority – and many are taking action in the wake of efforts by Pope Francis to focus on environmental stewardship.

It’s a story that runs counter to popular perception, which holds that religious people do not believe in climate change – or believe that it falls outside the realm of human control.
In truth, people of faith have played important roles in environmental causes for generations. Yet, at the same time, polls find that devout Americans are generally less likely to be concerned about global warming than their nonreligious peers.

But among Catholics this may be starting to change. In the year since Pope Francis released his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, imploring his followers and fellow believers to care for the earth and its creatures, observers say more and more Roman Catholics are beginning to view climate change as a moral issue in which caring for the earth and caring for the poor intersect.

Environmentalism among Catholics wasn’t absent before, but now it’s running higher than in years.

“What helped to connect the dots between the Catholic faith and the environment was, of course, the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*,” says Tomás Insua, the Boston-based co-founder and coordinator of an international network of over 300 Catholic organizations engaged in protecting the environment and fighting climate change. “That was the big moment that really galvanized a lot of momentum in the Catholic community.”

**Action from Brazil to India**

The group, the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) was founded in 2015 just a few months before the encyclical’s release. Since then it has organized about 40,000 Catholics from around the world to participate in a march demanding that world leaders take action during the Paris climate negotiations.

They also mobilized almost 1 million Catholics to sign a petition asking world leaders to keep global warming under 1.5 degrees C below pre-industrial levels. Then in May 2016, around 30 Catholic organizations joined an amicus brief in support of President Obama’s clean power plan.

These collective efforts are echoed by initiatives that local organizations are pursuing in many nations.

In Brazil, Catholic groups have been instrumental in fighting logging and deforestation. In India, too, churches and parishes across the country launched projects in the spirit of *Laudato Si*. To mark Earth Day in April, the Catholic non-profit organization Caritas initiated a tree planting campaign in the Karachi region, planting thousands of trees to help beat the region’s extreme heat. Church organizations also run campaigns to cut down on waste, promote organic farming, and start transitioning towards the adoption of solar power.

Likewise, GCCM released its own eco-parish guide, which it distributes to Catholic churches around the world that are aiming to reduce their carbon footprint. The guide provides instructions on how Catholic churches can reduce emissions by adopting a low carbon lifestyle, advocate for climate justice, and care for populations harmed by climate change.

“The actions were totally unprecedented because Catholics pretty much were overwhelmingly passive on the climate issue before,” says Mr. Insua in a telephone interview. “Mobilizing nearly
1 million Catholics for climate justice last year, that would have been absolutely impossible without the encyclical, there was no way we could have achieved anything nearly as close to that.”

**A shift in opinion**

In 2015, on the eve of the release of Pope Francis’s encyclical, research showed that Catholics in the United States were divided over global warming. Their differences mirrored the partisan divide found among much of the population, with around 80 percent of Catholic Democrats claiming there is solid evidence that the Earth is warming, and only half of Catholic Republicans claiming the same. Meanwhile, around 60 percent of Catholic Democrats said that global warming is a serious, man-made problem, while just a quarter of Catholic Republicans agreed.

But over the past year, perceptions began to shift. Just 6 months after the release of Laudato Si, the percentage of American Catholics who thought climate change is a moral issue jumped from 34 percent to 42 percent, according to a study conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. Meanwhile, a study released by the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University of America found that Catholic Republicans who read Laudato Si were 10 percent more likely to agree that human activities are responsible for climate change.

Lonnie Ellis, associate director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, a US-based climate advocacy group that formed in 2006, agrees that things have changed over the past year.

“We were doing this before Pope Francis made it cool, and it’s been a great 10 years. But in the last year Pope Francis just elevated our work immensely and we’ve been able to do some really big things,” says Mr. Ellis.

The group now has around 205 “creation care teams”, or groups that meet to promote environmental education and discuss a faith-based approach to caring for the earth, working around the country.

It’s not that concern about climate change is absent among people of other faiths. For example, although Evangelical Christians show up as among the least concerned about climate change, in one recent poll fully 59 percent say that human actions are behind the rise in greenhouse gases versus 67 of the US public overall.

And like other religious and nonreligious groups, Evangelicals are are far more likely to call climate change a “very” or “somewhat” important issue than to say it’s only “a little” or “not” important, according to the recent study by Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

The poll found, however, that Catholics are more likely to be concerned about climate change than any other US Christian group.
A deep-rooted tradition

The name of the encyclical, Laudato Si (“praise be”), is taken from a line in St. Francis of Assisi’s Canticle of Creatures, a religious text that extolled the virtues of nature. Born in 1182, St. Francis of Assisi is considered the Catholic Church’s foremost ecologist.

But some historians point to 1971 as the year when the environmental tenets of Catholicism began to make a comeback. That was when Pope Paul VI published a letter called Octogesima Adveniens, or “a call to action.”

“Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation,” he wrote.

Not long after, Pope John Paul II, elected to the papacy in 1978, told the United Nations that, “the Church’s commitment to the conservation and improvement of our environment is linked to a command of God.” He also called for moral solidarity on the environment between industrialized and developing nations.

These calls for environmental justice were then absorbed by other parts of the Catholic leadership, including the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). All this gave added legitimacy to local church leaders who wanted environmental conservation to count among the Catholic church’s central teachings.

Bolivia speech

Despite this rich history, including Pope Benedict XVI ordering solar panels for the Vatican’s roof, experts say no Catholic leader has placed been so urgent and radical on the issue of ecology as Pope Francis.

During a speech last year at the World Meeting of Popular Movements in Bolivia, the Pope called for an immediate change to the way the world economy is run.

“Today, the scientific community realizes what the poor have long told us: harm, perhaps irreversible harm, is being done to the ecosystem,” he said.

“Let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change.”

While many Catholics were unaware of the church’s stance on the environment prior to the current Pope’s vocal advocacy, experts say that changed dramatically over the last year.

Distrust of 'liberal agenda'

Bill Patenaude, an engineer with the state of Rhode Island’s Department of Environmental Management and a member of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, said the idea of ecological protection is now sinking in among people who were traditionally climate-change skeptics.
“Environmental issues and climate change have been spearheaded by the political left for a long time, and there is a lot of distrust,” says Mr Patenaude, adding that the issues supported by the political left are often in conflict with the positions of American Catholics. “I think some climate skeptics are reacting to the liberal agenda, not so much to what the science is showing and what people are experiencing. But I think there is a trend of people putting that aside.”

In developing countries with a large Catholic population, the faith-based connection between social justice and environmentalism was already evident to many, experts say. That’s because people see the effects that extreme weather conditions and natural disasters linked to climate change have on the poor.

But in much of the industrialized world, the connections weren’t as apparent. The effort by Pope Francis has opened up new conversations, says Mr. Ellis of the Catholic Climate Covenant in the US.

“Even in corners that you wouldn’t expect, like in the Rust Belt, people are talking about it,” Ellis says. “It’s been phenomenal in the last year, we have to turn down a lot of talks being planned around the country on Laudato Si.”

'A hopeful vision'

“Even in corners that you wouldn’t expect, like in the Rust Belt, people are talking about it,” Ellis says. “It’s been phenomenal in the last year, we have to turn down a lot of talks being planned around the country on Laudato Si.”

‘A hopeful vision’

“The poor and vulnerable are disproportionately impacted by disaster,” adds Maria Vorel, Catholic Charities USA’s senior vice president for disaster operations, during a conference call with reporters to mark the one-year anniversary of the encyclical. “Laudato Si crystallizes the realities of disasters in the US. Pope Francis called on all to look at our impact on the environment and the interaction of the environment on people, especially the vulnerable.”

Meanwhile, a plethora of small Catholic groups are working around the country to assist vulnerable populations in poor regions such as the Appalachian Mountains as they grapple with the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

Ultimately, many Catholics say that the Pope’s message has resonated so widely because of its emphasis on unity and its contrast with the often gloomy narrative surrounding climate change.

“There is a hopeful vision,” says Ellis. “The advocacy, not only does it change the system as a whole, but it helps pull us all in to meet this challenge together.”

http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/2016/0624/One-year-later-how-a-Pope-s-message-on-climate-has-resonated

June 25, 2016

Global Indigenous youth taking the planet in their hands

By Lucy Cormack
Amelia Telford remembers the moment huge slabs of her country were swallowed by the sea. It was 2009 and a severe storm had battered Kingscliff, her home on the east coast of Australia. Several metres of beach and dune disappeared, while cranes were needed to shift whole buildings back to save them from the water's edge.

The Kingscliff coastline was "barely recognisable".

"The swells picked up, we had high tides. It was washing away the banks and the sand dunes ... the erosion was incredible."

Ms Telford, a young Indigenous Australian from Bunjalan country, said it was the first time she realised she had a lifelong responsibility as an Aboriginal woman.

"We are the ones that have looked after the land sustainably for generations, over 60,000 years and we know best how to manage our land," she said.

"So I feel a real sense of responsibility, as so many of our young people do, to stand up and protect what we fought for, for so long."

Ms Telford is a member of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and was the 2015 Australian Geographic Society Young Conservationist of the Year.

The 22-year-old is the founder and director of Seed, a "young, black and powerful" network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people fighting for "a just and sustainable future ... powered by renewable energy."

"We look at climate change with a focus on energy," Ms Telford said, "looking at coal and gas, how we need to transition our energy systems and our economies from a reliance on fossil fuels to systems that can be powered by the sun and the rain."

Seed has connected Indigenous youth from around Australia, working to campaign against coal seam gas, mining, and calling on the Australian government to phase out fossil fuel subsidies.

"For myself in Australia, I often look to different stories from overseas, particularly around the US and Canada where indigenous communities are sick of waiting around, sick of promises made by governments and are standing up and building solutions themselves."

It was Ms Telford's interest in First Nations people around the world that led her to Joseph White-Eyes of South Dakota, more than 13,500 kilometres from her home of Kingscliff.

At only 20, Joseph White-Eyes has already been campaigning on behalf of his own indigenous community, the Lakota people, for six years.
He was among indigenous representatives to set up teepees in front of the White House in Washington DC in 2014, to protest the Keystone XL Pipeline, an oil pipeline system that runs from Canada to the United States.

"When you have the indigenous and the youth as a whole or as one, it really opens it up to new ideas about keeping your land and your culture," Mr White-Eyes said.

On his most recent visit to Australia Mr White-Eyes was part of a one-day blockade which stopped any coal from going in or out of the world's largest coal port in Newcastle, on the north coast of New South Wales, Australia.

"I do travel a lot and when I do, I visit the indigenous communities. With the indigenous people I don't feel like I'm in a whole other culture," Mr White-Eyes said.

"The Aboriginal people of Australia and the indigenous of North America, we've been been exchanging different perspectives about how to save the environment as well as preserving our culture."

Culture is central to Mr White-Eyes' work with the Indigenous Environmental Network, an alliance of grassroots Indigenous groups in the US, working to address environmental and economic justice issues.

He said he only had to look back at his "culture and coming of age ceremonies" to understand his responsibility in the fight for climate justice.

"We have a war chief back home, his name is Crazy Horse. Before he died, in the 1800s, he created a prophecy. He called it the seventh generation. Me, I'm part of that seventh generation."

The prophecy pointed to a change at the arrival of the seventh generation, when cultural and environmental revitalisation would restore the earth.

"I've shared this with the First Nations people from Australia and I've noticed the same exact thing. The youth are leading this and we are bringing back our identity, our culture and restoring balance within the environment."

While it is the cultural messages and traditions that connect First Peoples around the world, Ms Telford believes it is also the systemic struggles that communities have faced that bring them together.

"The impacts of colonial destruction of our land, genocide and the ongoing impacts of colonisation, we share a lot. We are the ones being hit first and worst by climate change," she said.

"Sometimes I have to remind myself that we live in a world where there isn't much value placed on Indigenous people, or people of colour, I guess maybe the tables would be turned if other communities were facing the direct impacts of climate change."
While she has, so far, committed her life to conservation, Ms Telford said she would never wear the label "conservationist".

"I just don't identify with the term conservationist. I identify as a young Aboriginal woman and to me, just the fact that I'm Aboriginal [drives] my cultural responsibility to look after the land. So whether you call that a conservationist, or environmentalist, well, it's different for everyone."


June 26, 2016

Baltimore archbishop: Addressing climate change is a 'moral imperative'

By William E. Lori
The Baltimore Sun

One year ago this spring, Pope Francis released his landmark encyclical letter on ecology, Laudato Sí, which called upon all of us to serve as diligent stewards of creation. Pope Francis delivered this message with great urgency — and with good reason. Climate change is already having severe impacts around the world that prevent some people, especially the poor and vulnerable, from enjoying the goods of creation, which God intends for everyone. If we fail to take action, we ignore our moral obligation to protect human life, prevent suffering, care for the poor and leave behind a safe world for future generations.

One year after Laudato Sí, issued on May 24, 2015, I am concerned that our country has yet to fully reckon with this powerful message. While covering a host of ecological issues, Pope Francis points to the deepest cause of our societal problems: our disconnection from one another. We see this disconnection clearly in the issue of climate change: While the seas rise and diseases spread in a warming climate, we must remember that we share a common home and our lives are intertwined. Drought, water scarcity and violent conflict — whether here or abroad — affect people everywhere. In the words of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Pope Francis gives us the moral and spiritual framework to realize our interconnectedness and to do right by our sisters and brothers around the world and for future generations.

Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment echoes a long Christian tradition concerned with protecting creation, making him the latest such moral leader to point out that care for creation is deeply connected to the protection of human life. Precious lives are being lost already. Climate change is not a problem for the distant future — the World Health Organization estimates that climate change already causes more than 150,000 deaths annually through greater heat stress, malnutrition and spread of diseases.
My hope is that a year after the Pope's encyclical, we may hear Pope Francis' message anew and take inspiration from the individual and local actions that Catholics and other people of faith are already taking.

Here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, we have taken new strides to responsibly care for our common home. In December, we entered into a power purchase agreement that will supply 20 percent of the archdiocese's energy needs with solar power. This energy will come from over 17,000 solar photovoltaic panels in Harford County. The new solar panel system will allow our archdiocese to manage our energy costs and devote more funding to ministries. Just as importantly, it will also reduce our environmental impact and put into practice the values of Laudato Si. Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese teach sustainability and conservation in their curricula and nearly two dozen have received the "Green School" designation from the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education. And many Catholic parishes are engaged in practices from community gardens and management of stormwater runoff to energy conserving initiatives and use of "green" eco-friendly materials in building projects.

We Catholics still have more work to do, but the shift toward more environmentally conscious initiatives is well underway. I have seen firsthand how a tangible action, like a parish going solar, has a compounding effect: The solar panels are a wonderful conversation-starter and an invitation to greater reflection for each of us to discern how to better care for the gifts and resources we have received from God.

Our individual and local actions are critically important, but also ultimately insufficient given the immense urgency of climate change. We need to come together as a country to do the big things that we cannot do as individuals. For many years, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has urged our national leaders to address climate change. Riding the wave of Laudato Si, we bishops became even more vocal this past year. Leading bishops called for strong national standards on carbon pollution from power plants, such as through the Clean Power Plan. Our leading bishops also urged Congress to allocate money through the Green Climate Fund to assist poor countries struggling to adapt to climate disruptions like water scarcity and crop failure.

Climate change is not an issue that is decades away; it is affecting us right now. And addressing climate change is a moral imperative for all of us. How well we uphold our obligation affects our brothers and sisters across the globe and will have enormous consequences for the health and safety of our children and grandchildren. With immense impacts facing our country and the world, climate change deserves a more prominent place in our national conversation.

William E. Lori is Archbishop of Baltimore. He can be reached at communications@archbalt.org.


June 27, 2016
Sisters change lives for waste pickers of central India

By Saji Thomas
Global Sisters Report

Global Sisters Report is publishing a special series about how trash is managed in the world and how sisters are helping people affected by landfills. We start this project to mark the one-year anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, Laudato Si', about climate change, pollution and waste, which warns that: "The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."

Sarika Dhamke was only 10 when the onus of looking after her seven-member family fell on her shoulders.

Her mother, the family's only breadwinner, had fallen ill, and Dhamke, being the eldest of three girls and two boys, had to take up the challenge.

The only apparent option for the illiterate, untrained girl was to join hordes of slum children who scavenged in the streets and landfills of Indore, a central Indian city of 1.5 million.

That was 12 years ago. Now Dhamke owns a three-room house in the same slum where she grew up in a tiny hut. A year ago, she married a truck driver; one of her younger sisters also was married, and the youngest siblings now attend school.

"What I am today is because of the sisters. They helped me save money and get a proper price for the waste materials I collected. They also trained me to lead a better life," Dhamke told Global Sisters Report as she squatted with her siblings in the front room of her 350-square-foot house.

Dhamke is among some 2,000 women in the Indore slum who credit Catholic nuns for the drastic changes in their lives.

The nuns work in the Jan Vikas (People's Development) Society, a church social service center in the commercial capital of Madhya Pradesh state. Dhamke recalls that, after her mother fell ill, she was forced to do something to feed the family. "My father was an alcoholic who never bothered about us," she says.

She had seen her mother collecting discarded items — plastics, metals, wires, glass bottles, paper — from roadsides, dumping grounds and other places. "Since waste collection does not require any skill and training, I started to do it," she says.

Unlike other waste pickers who wear tattered and soiled clothes, Dhamke dresses in clean, colorful saris with a matching blouse whenever she is off work. "The nuns also taught me the value of cleanliness and hygiene," explains the woman, who works independently.
The Jan Vikas Society labors among 10,000 people living in 35 of the 559 officially recognized shantytowns of Indore. It was started by Divine Word Fr. George Payattikattu in 2001 as part of his order's decision to serve the people living poorly in urban areas. Before that, the Divine Word priests had mostly worked in rural areas.

Payattikattu says their field studies convinced them that waste pickers in the city were mostly women who were exploited in various ways. "Even though they are doing a great service to society by clearing waste, they are treated as outcasts or untouchables," the priest laments.

Because priests had limitations in working with women in India's conservative society, Payattikattu approached Augustinian Sr. Julia Thundathil, a social worker, to help him in the mission. The nun began to interact with the waste pickers soon after she joined the church center in May 2002.

"When I first met them, they were very hesitant to even talk as they suspected we were there for converting them," recalls Thundathil.

Madhya Pradesh is one of the Indian states that consider religious conversion a criminal offense.

As her traditional approach to influence the waste pickers failed, she decided to become one of them. For over a year she worked as a scavenger, going to the waste pile and "doing everything that they did," Thundathil told GSR. She learned that waste pickers leave home around 4 a.m., collect garbage until noon and then go sell it in a scrap shop.

"I also followed their schedule, just like one of them," she says. Asked how she coped with the stench and filth of landfill, she says, "When you work for Christ, no difficulty can stop you from achieving your target," adding, "I became a rag picker for Christ and help his people."

She says street dogs and pigs often attack the women while they are working. The workers also suffer needle pricks and other dangers because people do not separate wastes before dumping them into garbage bins.

Thundathil says her experience as a scrap collector helped her gain "immense insight" into the women's lives.

Their main problem is their alcoholic husbands, who physically assault them, she says. "The husbands do not do any work and cling to their wives like leeches," the nun says, and adds, "It was really disgusting and painful to listen to their stories."

When Thundathil started working among waste pickers, they earned an average 30 to 50 rupees a day (U.S. 65 cents to $1.10). The husbands commonly snatched up half the money for drinks, and any resistance met with a thrashing.

Moreover, the scrap dealers underpaid the women, who were illiterate.
Payattikattu said Thundathil took the initiative to start a financial self-help group and a cooperative society for the women in 2004. The members included waste pickers and domestic workers who lived in the slums.

"We wanted to bring value to their life, bringing qualitative changes in their lives," the priest says.

With the help of the nuns, the center educated the women about separating the garbage according to its commercial value. This practice helped improve their earnings.

"There are 16 varieties of plastics, and their prices vary from 2 rupees to 20 rupees a kilogram," the priest explains.

Enterprising women such as Dhamke now earn more than 300 rupees (about $4.50) a day. Thundathil says the women found the cooperative society to be a big boon for them as they began to save up to 5 rupees from each day's income. This helped them avoid moneylenders, who charged exorbitant interest for loans. The society charged only 1 percent interest for money the women borrowed whenever they were in need.

All this allayed the slum dwellers' misgivings about the Catholic priests and nuns. "They started believing that we were there for their welfare and not conversion," Thundathil says.

Dhamke says she managed to build her house with a loan from the cooperative society and other savings.

To circumvent swindling by dealers, the church center opened two garbage shops for the women. But it had to close them after scrap dealers complained, Payattikattu recalls. However, the initiative to train the women to sort better prompted the scrap dealers to pay them three or four times more than before.

The center has pressed civic authorities to issue identification cards to waste pickers to protect them from unwanted harassment from police and local people. Divine Word Fr. Roy Thomas, director of Jan Vikas, says the police first suspect the slum dwellers whenever a theft takes place in the city.

After ensuring economic stability for the women waste pickers, the center began training them in health and hygiene and conducted awareness classes on HIV/AIDS.

For young people, the center offers English language classes, introduction to computer use, tailoring and embroidery, and several other courses.

In 2015, the center turned its attention to those working in landfill areas in the city. Thomas says women working in landfills do not come in direct contact with the waste pickers who work on demarcated roads. The work is the same, but it's easier not to have to roam the city streets looking for waste and risking unwanted attention, he says.
More than 590,000 people live in 114,000 slum households in Indore, according to the 2011 national census. Every day the city generates about 700 tons of waste, which is transported by trucks and dumped at the landfill at the city's outskirts.

Sr. Sushila Toppo, an Our Lady of the Garden sister, began working among women in landfill areas a year ago. "They are more comfortable than those on the roadside, in terms of work and earning," the 38-year-old nun told GSR. Toppo and Thomas estimate the landfill covers about 500 acres of land in Indore.

One of the women working in the landfill area is Pinki Goswami, a widow. "I opted for this work after my husband's death three years ago," says the 25-year-old mother of three.

She is happy now because she can earn more and without reporting to a boss. She had first worked as a domestic. "I had struggled to support my family as I could hardly earn even 2,000 rupees a month," she recalls. Now, she takes home an average 500 rupees a day ($7.45).

Toppo also organizes occasional medical check-ups camps for Goswami and other women, taking care not to disturb their work.

Another worker, Maya Prajapati, says scavenging in landfills is safe for widows like her. "We get paid for the work we do. We are accountable to ourselves. We have work all the time in all the seasons," says the 30-year-old mother who wants to send her two children to school.

Toppo says Prajapati is an exception. "Most rag pickers don't send their children to school as most of them are illiterate." The prime objective of most women is to eke out a living for their family. "They are not bothered about anything else," she says.

However, the nuns want the women and their children to join skill development and awareness programs to better their lives.

Toppo's efforts seem to have succeeded. Kiran Gadwal, a waster picker at the landfill, said the nun visits them often and treats them with compassion.

"The landfill is a place where nobody likes to come. It is dirty and stinking. But the sister keeps visiting us and is very warm and friendly," says the 30-year-old mother of five children. She says people always looked down on them.

Kaushalya Bakawala, another landfill worker, says before joining Jan Vikas they had led a primitive life with no knowledge about the world outside the garbage cans. "But now things have changed," she says.

The 46-year-old mother of five says their association with the church center has emboldened them to oppose those trying to oppress them.

"I was very shy before coming into contact with the nuns, but now I do not fear to go to the police station or meet local leaders," she says.
F&ES Faculty Receives Award in Iran Recognizing Work in Religion and Ecology

By Timothy Brown
Yale School Forestry & Environmental Studies

American media often portrays Iran, a nation of roughly 78 million, as a dangerous threat not only to the region, but also to the United States and other western countries.

But according to Mary Evelyn Tucker, a senior lecturer and research scholar at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES) and the Yale Divinity School (YDS) many Iranians are more concerned about their deteriorating environment than terrorism. And with the lifting of sanctions, Iran is reaching out to join the international community, she observes.

In late April, Tucker and her husband John Grim, also a senior lecturer and research scholar at F&ES, travelled to Tehran for the “Second International Seminar on Religion, Culture, and Environment: Promoting Intercultural Dialogue for Sustainable Development”. The two-day conference – the third that Tucker and Grim have attended at the invitation of the Iranian government – featured discussions by international scholars, environmentalists, religious leaders, and public officials on the roles of religion and culture to help achieve sustainable development goals.

Tucker, who co-directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with Grim, was also presented with a special award from the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, recognizing her “efforts and achievements in preserving the essence of life and the global environment.”

During a recent interview, Tucker discussed the historic conference, her impressions of Iran, and the role of religion in promoting social and environmental change.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Q: Tell me about the origins of this conference.

MARY EVELYN TUCKER: John and I went to Iran in June 2001 and May 2005 at the invitation of the Iranian government – the Islamic Republic of Iran – whose [then] President Mohammad Khatami recognized that religion, culture, and values can make a huge difference for environmental attitudes, behavior, change, and solutions. The first two conferences involved the Iranian Environmental Protection Organization and UNEP [United Nations Environment Programme], while this one also included UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization]. Earlier, President Khatami called for a Dialogue of Civilizations (that was endorsed by the United Nations) as a means of achieving a peaceful and sustainable future.
At the heart of these conferences was this spirit of cultural dialogue for a flourishing of the planet and a recognition that we cannot achieve this without developing a sense of a shared future.

There’s also a real personal element here – namely the efforts of Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar, Iran’s Vice President and Director of the Environmental Protection Organization under Khatami and Rouhani. She’s been a great inspiration for these conferences because she brings both scientific understanding and ethical valuing of nature. She and many others in this Islamic culture have a deep appreciation for the beauty and complexity of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Q: Our media often portrays Iran as defiant and dangerous, but you’re suggesting that Iran is reaching out and wants to be a part of the world community. In what ways did this conference illuminate this other side of Iran?

TUCKER: All of these conferences are a great education for us and that’s why we go. The biggest learning for us was seeing the reaching out of the Iranian government, which is why cross-cultural exchange is one of the most important things for grounding a sustainable future. We have to ground it in respect for different cultures and difference, and yet find our common ground. And that’s the promise of dialogue among the various world religions. We’re not trying to deny that religions have their problems. But we have also seen their ability to affect social and environmental change. The promise with a conference like this is that we can integrate the future of humans and the planet in new and fresh ways through the lens of culture.

Q: How do you respond to critics of religion who say we simply need more and better science to create a sustainable society?

TUCKER: The empirical method of science is to be celebrated. This is how we have become aware of environmental problems. But when it becomes the only way we view nature, it has limitations. There are other ways of knowing, namely the humanities - the arts, literature, history, philosophy, and religion – where people over the centuries have been inspired about non-quantifiable aspects of life and what sustains us. It’s why we need to affirm multiple ways of knowing nature. This is the promise of environmental humanities, for example.

Scientists in the Ecological Society of America [ESA], and in many other such groups, realize we need the humanities component. We can’t afford to separate sciences and humanities. We have to honor this diversity of knowledge. Just as we value biodiversity so should we appreciate cultural diversity, which is essential to our shared future.

Q: Let’s talk about the award you received at the conference. Did you know you about this recognition ahead of time?

TUCKER: No. They had already given this same high-level government award to Achim Steiner, the UNEP director, the day before, and they also gave it to an Iranian scholar of Islam and ecology. And then I heard my name being called from the stage. I was really stunned.
Flabbergasted. But I think, again, it’s this reaching out of Ebtekar and her colleagues to say, “You and John have created a body of work on world religions and ecology that we value, too.”

Q: The thing that strikes me about the wording in this award is that it’s so sincere. It’s easy to intellectualize these issues, but this award really speaks directly from the heart, from the human experience.

TUCKER: Yes, that is exactly how I felt. It’s heart to heart. It is saying, “How do we speak about the spiritual impact of nature, without being rhetorically religious, or pietistic, or provincial?” Every culture, every religion, has some recognition of that. And so one of the striking things about this award is that they composed it through the lens of their cultural and religious sensibilities. It strikes a chord that’s not provincial, but has a more universal appeal. It rises above a particular tradition into this realization: we’re part of the Earth - something vast, complex, and truly awe inspiring.

Q: The award describes our shared morality to preserve and protect all life. Not exactly the language one would expect in an award signed by the Iranian president.

TUCKER: Yes, this call for all humans to protect the Earth community is part of the Islamic tradition. Yet we misunderstand Islam. I taught world religions for 15 years at Bucknell University before coming to F&ES. Every time I got to Islam - and these were packed classes - I would say, “Okay, what are your conventional ideas? Your stereotypes?” and we would fill the blackboard.

The misapprehensions about this tradition are massive. I don’t want to minimize the tremendous problems of the distortion of a religion into violence and fundamentalism. But we need to open the doors and see what’s also compelling for Muslims who are drawing on their tradition with genuine concern for the future of the planet.

Q: When you first told me you were going to Iran, I wondered, “Aren’t you scared to go?” which shows how I, too, have bought into this message of fear that all Iranians hate and want to harm Americans.

TUCKER: That’s many people’s reaction - my family, friends, colleagues. It’s very widespread. This is why we have to keep coming back to a dialogue of civilizations, not a clash; getting beyond stereotypes to a deeper understanding; being realistic and pragmatic with awareness of the promise and problems of religion and culture. All of these go together. And that’s the nature of change; we’re living amidst many creative and destructive forces. We need to find the positive forces for change within the world religions. That is what the Papal Encyclical is doing, for example. And that is what I spoke about at the conference – the Pope’s call for an “integral ecology”.
Q: You were there almost a year after the nuclear agreement was signed. What’s your sense of the opportunities that it’s going to bring the Iranian people?

TUCKER: Half the population of Iran is 35 and younger. They’re yearning for a chance to make a living, have a family and provide education for their children – just what most people around the world want. The promise of change and new opportunities is enormous for these young people, even with the naysayers about the nuclear agreement in both the US and Iran.

The question is how can we open doors for their creativity - toward new energy solutions and technologies along with new environmental values and artistic expressions. The release of this creativity will ground these changes in something deeper for the human. All of this is on the horizon in exciting ways. And the Iranian people are eager to make their contribution to a sustainable future. Let’s hope we can partner with them in this goal!

View photos here:


June 28, 2016

Religious scholars recommend ways to combat climate change

Contemporary environmental malpractices are religiously prohibited, say the scholars

By Menan Khater
Daily News Egypt

In the 41st round of the Cairo Climate Talks, religious scholars from different backgrounds tried to connect the dots between Islam, Christianity, and taking care of the environment in Egypt, in light of global climate change movements.

The panel discussion brought together professor of English literature at Azhar University Salah El-Nefeily, pastor of the cavern church in old Cairo Angelos Guirguis, and pastor of the evangelical community in Cairo Stephan El-Karsheh.

The discussion aimed to bring a new perspective to climate change talks by trying to link human environmental behaviour to religious references. However, the panellists mainly highlighted the fact that preaching alone can never be enough to develop more environmentally friendly behaviour and hence, avoid climate change effects. They stated that there needs to be a more integrated strategy which involves legislative efforts, mechanisms to enforce it, in addition to education, and political changes.

According to El-Nefeily, the emerging crime of illegal trade of wildlife, which has been widely criticised especially in Africa, is already prohibited in Islam. “It is not allowed to kill animals just for the fun of it. Only for the need of food,” he said, citing a prophet saying.
In 2015, United Nations member states adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, which include specific targets to end poaching. The General Assembly also unanimously adopted a resolution to tackle illicit trafficking in wildlife.

UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon said on World Wildlife Day in March that human activities pose the main threat to wildlife.

There are several other behaviours towards nature that were recommended by Prophet Muhammad that people need to be reminded of, according to El-Nefeily. These include taking initiative to remove harm from the street, and generally consider the environment in daily activities.

However, he said the government should apply laws and fines, and put them into effect. “If we do not have applicable laws, then it does not mean anything,” he said.

On the other hand, Guirguis identified obstacles that make it harder to incentivise individuals to adopt those environmental measures.

“Individuals only take care of their belongings, cleaning their gardens, and their homes, but they do not care if they have clean streets or not,” he said. This is not an act against religious manners in Christianity, according to Guirguis, but a result of alienation that emerged over the past years from individuals towards society.

“People simply do not feel that the country is theirs anymore. It is not only a religious problem, but also a political one,” he said.

He recommended to outline more solid strategies when it comes to protecting the environment in Egypt. “Our main issue in Egypt is that we always have a broad view of things,” he said.

“We acknowledge the need to clean the streets, for example, but we never mention how exactly and where the waste shall go and how this process shall be monitored. All initiatives in this direction are simply doomed without clear strategies, no matter how much we preach about it,” he concluded.

Meanwhile, El-Karsheh highlighted a connection between the ecological movement and poverty movements. On the local level, he suggested that poverty is a big issue when it comes to taking care of the environment in Egypt. He claims that poor people are more constrained to take certain environmental measures, which was criticised by other panellists who disagreed.

However, Al-Karsheh noted that randomly building houses on agricultural land is an example to his suggestion that some people cannot give up their houses in order to preserve the environment. Other panellists disagreed, saying that this is linked to education, not poverty, referring to people at higher standards who are often seen littering garbage from their cars.
In 2015, Pope Francis published an encyclical on the environment. This was the first Papal encyclical of its kind to tackle this issue. In it, Francis highlighted significant ecological problems in the natural environment, and in the human sphere.

He also recommended that the Church needs to increase its efforts in this regard and to engage people in this cause.

2015 was the warmest year in history, with a global rise in temperature of 1 C, according to a report released by the United Nations World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in March. This change was attributed to human industrial and environmental malpractices.


July 2016

Thomas Berry- Great Work Continuing

Carbon Rangers/Ecozoic Times
Vol. 9 No. 6

http://us1.campaign-archive2.com/?u=5dd06f3cbb86536df56de4a9d&id=d9c9902611&e=d41587f413

July 2016

Green Churches Newsletter

http://us13.campaign-archive2.com/?u=d9e8a3947f2f12635e017888f&id=2749c56cb9&e=f5c5dd627a

July 2016

Voices for Earth Justice Newsletter

In this issue, you can read the following story:

FORE visits VEJ

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, co-directors of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University (fore.yale.edu) visited Hope House in June as their first stop on an environmental tour of Detroit. They were in Detroit to lead a two day workshop at St. Paul of the Cross Passionist Retreat and Conference Center in Detroit, and show their film "Journey of the Universe" at
July 5, 2016

Be kind to the environment for a greener Eid al Fitr

By Mohamed Abdel Raouf
Albawaba Business

Eid Al-Fitr is an important religious holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting, and is celebrated by Muslims all over the world.

On this festive occasion, people usually buy new clothes, cook traditional food, greet and visit their families and neighbors, offer gifts and money to their younger relatives, go on picnics to public parks and beaches, arrange big parties and huge feasts, and so on.

Unfortunately, Eid celebrations these days are often extravagant and cause pollution and harm to the environment. For instance, the community spaces, including parks and other places, are always left with a lot of litter and tons of waste after the celebrations. Many people also buy a lot of new clothes that they really do not need.

A quick look at some of the recent Eid holidays in the region reveals some interesting facts: In Cairo Zoo alone, authorities lifted 50 tons of garbage after Eid Al-Fitr in 2015! In Amman, sanitation workers collected over 15,000 tons of household waste during the Eid Al-Fitr holiday in 2014, according to the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM).

So, Eid al-Fitr, in many ways, is becoming an occasion of over-consumption that creates pollution and waste problems. Now is the occasion therefore to seize the opportunity and adopt exemplary behavior in relation to the environment and hope that this responsible pro-environmental lifestyle will be observed during Eid and continue all year Islam advises balance and moderation in all matters.

Extravagance is the opposite of moderation and results in crossing the proper limits of consumption of resources. The Qur'an warns believers against extravagance in eating and drinking. Allah the Exalted says: "O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: Eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters." (Qur'an, 7:31)

Thus, a true Muslim should do his best to celebrate and at the same time reduce his environmental footprint by consuming less, recycling, and avoiding overconsumption.
A Muslim must not be extravagant in consumption, whether of food, cloth or natural resources. As cited in the Quran: "Eat and drink of that which Allah has provided and do not act corruptly, making mischief on the earth." (Qur'an, 2:60)

The idea of “footprint” is already rooted in Islamic culture and values, and there are many examples and verses in the Qur’an and Sunnah that urge Muslims to reduce their footprint and ask them to live lightly on earth. The Qur’an describes believers of Allah as those who “walk on the Earth in humility.” (Qur'an, 25:63)

Governments and local authorities also can play a key role in encouraging people toward environment-friendly behavior during Eid.

Among the ideas that can be implemented is to encourage the use of public transportation to reduce traffic pollution. The Dubai Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) introduced a plan to reduce traffic congestion and reduce pollution during the Eid Al-Fitr holiday in 2015 by offering 10 buses forfree transit from the Dubai Mall to the Dubai World Trade Center.

In 2014, the Abu Dhabi Police warned the public against using or buying fireworks. According to Col. Humaid Saeed Al-Afreet, head of firearms and explosives, “Fireworks can potentially cause physical damage as well as environment pollution.”

Islam emphasizes a peaceful equal society. Extravagance goes against this principle of equality. If a Muslim wastes some resources by extravagance, he is directly wasting the right of others, of those who could have been satisfied by the wasted things, besides those of the future generation as well.

While planning for the upcoming Eid Al-Fitri celebrations, it is imperative that we think twice before buying food, clothing and other items in excess keeping in mind the need to protect the environment. As people go to community parks and other holiday destinations during Eid, we must strictly avoid throwing trash around. Let us strive to celebrate Eid in an eco-friendly way by shifting towards a greener lifestyle and striving to incorporate sustainable practices.

Wish you all an eco-friendly Eid Al-Fitr!

*The writer is the Sustainability Research Program Manager at the Gulf Research Center.*


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**July 6, 2016**

Church to faithful: Take Pope’s encyclical seriously

By William B. Depasupil
Manila Times
The leader of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Antonio Tagle, has called on the faithful to take an encyclical of Pope Francis on the environment “seriously,” especially the call to “integral ecological conversion.”

“Let us take the bold step of reviewing and changing our lifestyles, our patterns of consumption, of spending,” said Tagle, president of Caritas Internationalis, adding that the Earth would only be a beautiful home if everybody takes responsibility for it.

The Pope came out with the Laudato Si last year, his second encyclical since assuming the papacy.

In it, he lamented environmental degradation and global warming because of irresponsible development.

Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Regina Lopez vowed to follow the Laudato Si, particularly the issues of climate change adaptation and global warming.

Also on top of her priority, she said, are protection and enhancement of marine and forest biodiversity and fight against irresponsible mining.

Meanwhile, advocacy group Save Philippine Seas Movement on Wednesday urged the government to demand payment from owners of a Panamanian-flagged bulk carrier that damaged 483 meters of coral reef after running aground at a world-famous diving site off Cebu last month.

SPS said the owners MV Belle Rose, registered under Alpha Ship Management Corp., should pay for the damage and the cost of rehabilitating the marine resource property even as appropriate charges are being readied against the ship owners.

The incident was similar to the 2013 Tubbataha Reef incident where the US government paid P87 million in fine for damage caused by grounding of the US Navy mine sweeper USS Guardian on 2,345,67 square meters of corals in Tubbataha Reef National Park, a Unesco-declared world heritage site.

In a statement, SPS co-founder and executive director Anna Oposa said an inter-agency task force formed by the Cebu provincial government is preparing the case, particularly assessment of the damage to the Monad shoal, widely known as a popular tourist destination and scuba diving haven.

The MV Belle Rose ran aground in Monad Shoal about 4 nautical miles southeast off Malapascua Island at 3 a.m. on June 13 en route to San Fernando port in Naga, Cebu, from Japan.

It was reportedly loaded with some 48,000 tons of clinker, reportedly for use in cement production of Taiheiyo Cement in Naga City.
Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) chief Baltazar Tribunalo Jr. said marine biologists from the University of San Carlos and non-government organizations were also helping in the investigation to determine the extent of damage to the corals and other marine life in the area.

Tribunalo pointed out that before the vessel can be salvaged, there has to be a risk assessment.

He said they will thoroughly go over the province’s environmental laws to determine the sanctions that will be imposed.

Monad Shoal, a protected marine area, is regarded as the number one diving spot in Malapascua Island.

It is popular among tourists because thresher sharks use the site as a feeding ground and cleaning station.

http://www.manilatimes.net/church-to-faithful-take-popes-encyclical-seriously/272127/

July 7, 2016

Illegal gold mining causing mercury contamination in indigenous groups

By Carolina Torres
Mongabay

Research finds high, unsafe levels of mercury contamination in Brazil’s Yanomami and Ye’kuana peoples, almost certainly due to illegal gold mining on indigenous lands in the Amazon.

- Conflict between gold miners and indigenous people in Brazil is common, with 134 Indians killed in 2015 in mining-related disputes. Mercury contamination of Amazon rivers is a less visible, but no less serious threat to the lives of Brazilian Indians.
- A recent study looked at mercury contamination in the Yanomami and Ye’kuana peoples in northern Roraima — Brazil’s least populated state and part of the Amazon. The researchers found dangerous levels of mercury in the bodies of those living closest to illegal gold mining operations.
- More than 92 percent of Yanomami Indians tested in Aracaçá (the closest community to illegal mining sites) had unsafe rates of mercury in their bodies, while in the Papiú region (located fartherest from illegal mining sites), just 6 percent were mercury contaminated. Researchers conclude that the variation in rates is due to the amount of exposure the various indigenous groups have had to illegal mining.

The Brazilian Amazon has a long history of conflict between illegal gold miners and indigenous people, which has often resulted in extreme violence against remote tribes. 2015 saw a dramatic
uptick in such attacks, with 134 indigenous people killed, according to CIMI an agency that has been gathering data on Brazilian indigenous groups for fifty years.

But illegal gold mining has another less visible, no less dangerous impact on indigenous people: mercury poisoning — resulting when the toxic substance is used to process the precious metal. Mercury released into the environment then travels up the food chain.

A recent study conducted by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in partnership with the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) and the Getulio Vargas Foundation, looked at mercury contamination in the Yanomami people in northern Roraima — Brazil’s least populated state and part of the Amazon.

The researchers found that mercury contamination has hit the Yanomami and Ye’kuana peoples hard, with high percentages of those studied living near illegal mining operations possessing unsafe levels of mercury in their bodies. Mercury contamination can cause neurological and motor problems, vision loss, and other serious health conditions, along with permanent fetal harm.

Researchers analyzed hair samples that were provided voluntarily by 239 Indians living in the Papiú region, and in the communities of Waikás and Aracaçá, two areas where illegal gold miners are reportedly active. Among those examined were the most vulnerable: children, women of childbearing age, and people who had come into direct contact with illegal gold mining operations.

The Yanomami community of Aracaçá, which is the closest to illegal mining sites, had the most alarming rates. Researchers studied 13 people there, of whom 92 percent were contaminated with unsafe levels of mercury.

In the Ye’kuana community of Waikás, scientists found that of 47 samples taken, 27 percent showed unsafe levels of mercury. The Papiú region, where gold miners are rare, had the lowest rates: out of 179 indigenous people surveyed, just 6 percent were contaminated with mercury.

“We conclude that the difference [in rates] is caused by the level of exposure and interactions with the regions of mining,” said Claudia Vega, an ISA researcher. Indigenous people “ingest mercury, in most cases [by] eating contaminated fish, and the substance passes into the body. The contamination affects the entire nervous system — especially the central [nervous system].”

Mercury, a highly toxic metal, is widely used in the illegal exploration for gold. The toxic liquid metal is mixed with gravel, soil and sediment dredged from river bottoms and steep streamside hills, where it then binds to the gold, forming an alloy which is easy to identify and separate from the waste material. The alloy is then heated and the mercury evaporates, leaving gold nuggets. The vaporized mercury then condenses back into its solid form, falling to earth and washing into streams.
Unfortunately for the environment and for indigenous people, the mercury then enters the food chain, traveling from the mine, to fish and to fish-eating animals, including humans — especially impacting indigenous people for whom fish are an important staple.

The research on mercury contamination in the Amazon began in November 2014 after talks between indigenous leaders and ISA coordinator Marcos Wesley de Oliveira concerning the presence of gold explorers on indigenous lands.

“The presence of miners near the communities raised concerns about the health of indigenous people. We made collections of hair strands and fish, so that the analysis could be done. [T]he results were presented to the Indians and [were] sent to the relevant [government] bodies”, said Oliveira, in a G1 news service interview. The research done in the communities was requested by, and had the support of the Hutukara Yanomami Association and Yanomami People’s Association in Brazil (APyB). All hair samples tested were respectfully returned to the people involved in the research.

Indigenous leader Reinaldo Rocha Ye’kuana also offered a comment in the G1 interview: “We were concerned about the research result. [Mercury] contamination affects plants, animals and can also affect our future generation[s]”. He announced plans for a mercury awareness campaign in the communities.

In March 2016, a committee of Yanomami and Ye’kwana leaders presented the scientific findings to Funai, Brazil’s indigenous authority, and to Ibama, the federal environmental agency; as well as to the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Special Rapporteur on UN Indigenous Rights.

The invasion of Yanomami lands by gold miners has long been a serious problem. But that threat has worsened lately. An estimated 5,000 illegal miners are currently working in the Yanomami territories. The Yanomami and Ye’kwana have called for the immediate removal of miners from their lands, along with emergency and long term care for the people impacted by mercury poisoning.

An estimated 200 tons of mercury are released into the environment due to gold mining in Latin America annually according to studies released by The World Bank, leading not only to serious human health consequences, but to land and stream contamination, and to the poisoning of plants and animals.

In one case at the start of 2016, an indigenous child died in the Peruvian Amazon after showing symptoms associated with mercury poisoning. Illegal miners there are having a major impact on human populations and ecosystems. A recent study revealed that around 80 percent of the Nahua tribe in Peru is currently suffering from mercury poisoning.

Of course, mercury contamination isn’t the only serious environmental problem associated with mining. The recent failure of a Samarco company iron mine tailings dam in Minas Gerais state resulted in what is likely Brazil’s biggest environmental disaster ever — pouring 50 million tons
of iron ore and toxic waste into the Rio Doce, killing 19 people and poisoning the river along its entire 853 kilometer (530 mile) length, and impacting more than a million people.

Diamond mines are the problem on the Roosevelt Indigenous Lands — Sierra Morena, Aripuanã Park and Aripuanã — located between the Brazilian states of Rondônia and Mato Grosso. Illegal miners began being attracted there between 1999 and 2000. The region is now known to contain one of the five largest diamond deposits in the world.

According to a local prosecutor, Reginaldo Trindade, conflicts between the tribes and diamond miners over recent years have led to violence, corruption and a true “cultural and social genocide. It’s an [indigenous] community on the brink of extinction, if not physically, at least ethnically and culturally”.


July 10, 2016

Buddhist monks buy 600lbs of lobster to release them back into the ocean

The monks, who live on the Canadian fishing island, said the purpose of the mission was to 'cultivate compassion' for all human beings

By Rachael Pells
Independent

More than 600 pounds (272kg) of lobsters have been spared the pot thanks to a liberation project arranged by a group of Buddhist monks in Canada.

The monks, from the Great Enlightenment Buddhist Institute Society, bought the lobsters from various sources around Prince Edward Island in Eastern Canada, before taking them out to sea.

Taking the lobsters on board a fishing boat, the monks released them back into the ocean off the coast of Wood Islands, a small fishing community on the south of Prince Edward Island.

Venerable Dan, a spokesman for the monks involved, said the purpose of the mission was to “cultivate compassion”, not just for the lobsters, but for all human beings.

Speaking to CBA news before the crustaceans were released, he said he hoped the group would “find a spot where there are no cages waiting for them”.

“We respect everyone's dietary choice, so we're not doing this to convert everybody to be vegetarians or vegans,” he said.
“This whole purpose for us is to cultivate this compassion toward others. It doesn't have to be lobsters, it can be worms, flies, any animals, drive slower so we don't run over little critters on the street.”

The Great Enlightenment Buddhist Institute Society has lived on Prince Edward Island for the past eight years. Hundreds of monks travel to the island from Asia each year to study Buddhism in their monastery all year round.

Before releasing the lobsters, the monks held a 20-minute ceremony with a prayer and chant to the Buddha of compassion.

According to the group, islanders — including fishermen — have supported the cause, even helping to find the monks a better place to release the animals so they wouldn’t be captured again.

“If your loved ones were in this situation, what would they like you to do?” said Venerable Dan. “To give them a helping hand and put them back to where they feel comfortable and we believe if everybody's able to do that, it will become a better place, a more harmonic place.”


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**July 11, 2016**

**Here’s A Look At How Catholic Churches Are Taking Pope Francis’ Climate Encyclical To Heart**

By Sydney Pereira

Think Progress

It’s been over a year since Pope Francis released his climate encyclical, *Laudato Si*, which recognized the dangers of human-caused climate change and the moral imperative to address it. Since then, Catholic leaders have been adapting their churches to speak out and take action on climate change. The Catholic Church has a history of recognizing environmental problems, but the encyclical last year has sparked more efforts to make changes.

In January 2015, before the Pope’s climate encyclical, Catholics were already mobilizing for action on climate change when the Global Catholic Climate Movement was founded. The Movement announced the certainty that “anthropogenic [human-made] climate change endangers God’s creation and us all, particularly the poor, whose voices have already spoken of the impacts of an altered climate.”

Late last year, researchers from Yale University and George Mason University found that 19 percent of American Catholics were “much more concerned about global warming” because of
the Pope’s position on the subject. Another 34 percent were moderately more concerned. Researchers called this “The Francis Effect.”

Here are some of the actions Catholics are taking against climate change in their churches around the world.

**Australian Catholic Organizations Divest, Catholic Schools Go Solar**

Four organizations publicly divested from coal, oil, and gas extraction industries on the June anniversary of *Laudato Si*. The organizations that divested are Presentation Congregation Queensland; Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga; Marist Sisters Australia, and The Passionists—Holy Spirit Province. The announcement was facilitated by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, which also released an open letter from several religious leaders urging those in public office to act on climate change in the wake of the Great Barrier Reef’s coral bleaching.

“The decisions are made after much careful consideration and in the knowledge that our decision won’t change things overnight—which is a long-term investment in the earth’s future,” said Sister Anne Lane, leader of the Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga, in a statement.

The organizations are joining a growing divestment movement. Twenty-seven percent of groups that are divesting are religious in nature.

**Solar Installations Across the U.S.**

The Diocese of Camden, located in New Jersey, is seeking solar installations in schools, parishes, and cemeteries. The initiative has been in the works for three years, but has faced delays through the process of obtaining contractors, utility approvals, and local permits.

Across the country north of San Diego, St. Michael’s Parish has already invested $1.3 million in a solar panel system. A year after the installations, the church is reaping the benefits of going solar. Electricity costs fell to $5,000 a month from around $20,000.

The Pope’s message helped inspire Bishop Robert W. McElroy’s recommendation last December that every parish in the Diocese of San Diego adopt solar-power systems.

“It strikes me this is one area where we can really help the environment, and at the same time it is sound practice economically,” McElroy said to the San Diego Union-Tribune.

He did not issue an order, but around 20 parishes at the time had already switched to solar power.

**Catholic Schools Go Solar**

In Queensland, Australia, 31 Catholic schools have switched to solar power. The pilot project has resulted in 250,000 dollars of electricity savings per year. The Vatican has responded, asking for Catholic schools around the world to make the switch to solar.
According to Martin Oldfield, company director for Eco Community, which designed the project, the savings Catholic schools could see from lowering their electricity bills in the long term would “mean that money now spent on power bills can be put back into teaching,” reported Catholic Leader.

In San Diego, a Catholic high school plans to finish installing a 1.1 megawatt solar carport system by this fall. The company that the school partnered with, Baker Electric Solar, says the school will save 80,000 to 100,000 dollars per year on its electricity costs.

Another California Catholic school installed 105 solar panels donated by SilRay, a company providing commercial solar solutions to small and midsize businesses. Electricity costs are expected to decrease by 6,600 dollars. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony in May, over 200 students attended.

**Virginia Catholics Support Legislation On Coastal Protection**

Last August, the Virginia Catholic Conference recognized the local threat of climate change in Norfolk, where the rising sea levels are having a direct effect in parts of the city prone to flooding. Richmond Bishop Francis DiLorenzo addressed over 200 people saying “the Church is not in conflict with science,” at the event in Norfolk.

Local Catholic leaders advocated soon afterward for the Coastal Protection and Resiliency Act to fund coastal resiliency and flooding mitigation projects. The bill did not pass, but the policy efforts recognizing climate change made by Catholic leaders is partly inspired from the Pope’s encyclical last year.

**Thailand Parish Plants 800 Trees For Anniversary**

On June 5, a parish in Thailand planted hundreds of trees for a reforestation program in honor of the anniversary of the Pope’s climate encyclical. The parish’s priest told Catholic News Agency that the Pope had “opened a new dimension on the issues and brought a broader perspective, engaging the question with the eyes of spirituality and faith.”

This year’s Earth Day theme was ‘Trees for the Earth.’ Catholics highlighted the importance of tree planting and joined the goal to plant 7.8 billion trees in the next five years. Forests can act as carbon sinks by absorbing carbon dioxide and aid in mitigating climate change.

**Archdiocese of Atlanta Launches Action Plan**

Atlanta’s climate plan was launched last November in response to the encyclical. Created in coordination with University of Georgia, it highlights what local churches can change to be more environmentally friendly. A church’s options are ranked easy, moderate, or advanced—such as bringing in speakers from environmental fields, upgrading plumbing systems, buying local food, planting trees, composting, providing electric cars to pastors, or installing electric car charging stations.
While there is still much work to be done to mitigate and adapt to climate change, local churches like these are recognizing human-caused climate change and local churches are developing plans to answer the Pope’s call to action.

**Restoration of St. Patrick’s Cathedral Includes Geothermal Energy System**

New York City’s [St. Patrick’s Cathedral](https://www.stpatricks-cathedral.org) has been in the restoration process since 2012, and the restoration included a geothermal energy system.

Spain’s Cathedral of Palma de Mallorca completed its switch to 100 percent renewable energy through an energy management system certified by the company AENOR. The cathedral dates back to the 13th century, but its energy technology is in line with the future. Its management said “the Consolidated Energy Management Policy is in line with the concern for environmental problems and consequences of climate change recently expressed by Pope Francis I in his encyclical,” reported Energy News.

**Philippines Archdiocese Led 10,000 People In A March Against Fossil Fuels**

In a two week long global initiative called ‘Break Free from Fossil Fuels’ this May, Catholics teamed up with other environmental groups around the world for demonstrations aiming to disrupt operations at power plants, pipelines, and coal mines.

In the Philippines, Archbishop Ramon Arguelles of the Lipa led 10,000 people in a march to a local sporting complex, reported [National Catholic Reporter](https://www.nationalcatholicreporter.com). Mass was held at the end of the march where Arguelles and other religious leaders called for an end to the reliance on coal. The march was directly aimed at halting a 600-megawatt coal plant proposed to be built in Batangas City.

**Catholics Petition For Climate Action Ahead Of Paris Talks**

Before the Pope’s climate encyclical was released, Catholic groups called on global leaders to take climate action. The Global Catholic Climate Movement launched a [petition](https://www.globalcatholicclimate.org) which stated the following:

“Climate change affects everyone, but especially the poor and most vulnerable people among us. Inspired by Pope Francis and the Laudato Si’ encyclical, we call on you to drastically cut carbon emissions to keep the global temperature rise below the dangerous 1.5°C threshold, and to aid the world’s poorest in coping with climate change impacts.”

The Pope [endorsed](https://www.vatican.va/content/francis/en/pontificalmessages/april-2015.html) the petition and 900,000 signatures were delivered to President Hollande at the climate talks in Paris late last year.

In April, faith leaders of several different religious groups signed the [Interfaith Statement on Climate Change](https://www.earthjustice.org/oceans/interfaith-climate-change), which demanded that nations ratify the Paris Agreement.
Biblical animal prophecy reveals ecology is all about peace

By Donna Schaper
National Catholic Reporter

The prophet Isaiah spoke about the promise of universal peace in this way:

“Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall graze, together their young shall lie down; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the viper’s den, and the child lay his hand on the adder’s lair. They shall not harm or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea.” (Isaiah: 11:6-9)

Wolves and lambs, cows and bears, lions and kids and vipers, oh my!

A human child plays near a snake and offers a paw into the adder’s den? You’d think the Bible’s peaceful forecasts were written after showing up at a contemporary environmental conference. Those conferences today often start in a heavy-duty theological quarrel about Lynn White’s prophetic 1967 essay, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” that often ends with a dismissal of his point of view.

To refresh: White argued that we thought we were superior to nature and better than animals. He accurately read the dominion texts in Genesis 1. Anthropocentric reigned as his critique of Western theology. Sallie McFague and other theologians argue that White failed to let the Yahwist dominion account of creation quarrel with the priestly version. In Genesis 2:15, God took “man” and put him in the Garden of Eden to fill and keep it, not to dominate it.

Now, you may want to scoff at these quarrels between biblical hermeneutics and long-dead essayists – but don’t. Dominion is what animals give up on their way to peace. This wild and crazy biblical text about animals getting along, rather than fighting, is paired nicely with the Genesis quarrels. Like a good wine with a good dinner, they go together.

Many think that ecology is all about nature when it is rather about peace. The metaphorical wolves and lambs of society have long fought over the water and the oil. The animals choose another way in the prophecy of just how different things are going to be. When tend and befriend replace dominion, wild and crazy things result.

“Revelation comes to those who are radically hospitable to what they don’t know,” said Rebecca Parker, a Unitarian Universalist theologian, in a 2008 sermon.
Parker is right. Earthlings will be saved by our animal curiosity about each other. Whenever we imagine we are better than animals, we are choosing against them and their miracle ways. We are refusing to imagine peace.

Peace comes when we move beyond one of our natures, that of fight and flight, into another of our natures, that of tend and befriend. Peace comes when we move out of one of the stories we tell ourselves -- that we are here to have dominion -- and move into another story: that we are here to fill and keep, tend and befriend the earth. Lions and lambs are meant for each other. We actually belong one animal to another.

Environmentalists have long been on the road to becoming ecologists. Environmentalists often stop too long at the station of dominion, where we must save the earth in order to save ourselves. We are actually anthropocentric in this way, imagining ourselves the center of our world. Ecologists, on the other hand, take the argument beyond anthropomorphism. We go to further stops along the way: We save the earth in order to save the earth and not just to save ourselves, but also the porcupines.

Another important idea can use a little dusting off, too. Jewish philosopher Martin Buber’s view of “I/Thou” is rightfully famous. We are to treat each other as subjects. We are not to treat each other as objects. We are to treat each other as holy, not as ordinary.

H. Paul Santmire, an eco-theologian in the Evangelical Lutheran church, has developed an important quarrel with Buber. Like the theme animals of our prophecy, quarrels need not be antagonistic. Lions and lambs can lie together. One argument can safely sit alongside another without biting it. We can admire Buber’s I/Thou and keep it in our core. And we can also add to it.

Santimire recommends an ecological approach, one that gets us out of that place where we don’t belong, that place of domination. There we act as though animals and plants exist to feed us. We imagine human relationships as way too important. His alternative calls for an I-Ens or I-it relationship, in which we place ourselves as part of the whole.

From domination, it is a small step to get to rich people and poor people. In that view, rich people deserve more than poor people. Rich people are not only better than animals, they are better than other people. Humans are alphas, never betas. Animals are rarely considered our neighbors and more often understood as property, food and labor, or generally, as less than or “useful” to humans. They do not have a room of their own.

It is a quick step away to have the hideous hierarchy of rich and poor, the ins and the outs, those who matter and those who don’t matter. Hierarchies live comfortably in the house of dominion and domination. Wholeness lives happily in the house of tending and befriending.

[Donna Schaper is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City.]

Colonization has not ended, said speakers at the July 7-10 Sisters of Earth convention: Governments and industries are still taking land from indigenous people, largely destroying ecosystems for profit.

For example, while Spain no longer controls South America, "the way of thinking and feeling about the land did not change," said Medical Mission Sr. Birgit Weiler, who teaches at the Jesuit Antonio Ruiz de Montoya University in Lima, Peru, and works with the Awajún and Wampi tribes of the Amazon, who are fighting oil extraction on their lands. The concepts that individuals can own land and that good use of land is to extract resources from it "are colonial mindsets very present still today."

Sisters of Earth, an informal network of women, including sisters, concerned about the environment, held their biennial convention July 7-10 at Presentation Center, a retreat and convention spot nestled in the redwood trees of the Santa Cruz Mountains, about a 90-minute drive south of San Francisco.

The 75 attendees heard stories from Native American women and environmental activists, met in groups to discuss ecological issues within the Catholic church and without, and dined in a building insulated with scraps of blue jeans and constructed in a way that it stays cool without air conditioning.

The convention was a chance to gather with like-minded women, attendees said.

"Many of us are involved in nontraditional ministries, so it's great to get together with other sisters — not just women religious, other women — who are involved in the same thing," said Franciscan Sr. Marya Grathwohl from Billings, Montana. "To connect with other women who are committed to healthy food-growing or sustainable energy is very inspiring for me."

Speaker Beata Tsosie-Peña of Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico described how European colonization of the Americas has affected the psychology of her tribe.

"It wasn't just a physical genocide, but a cultural genocide," she said, adding that tribe members still internalize colonization.

"We act out among each other" with violence, substance abuse and suicide, said Tsosie-Peña, a program coordinator for Tewa Women United, an intertribal organization.
Her community also still feels the impact of nuclear testing in New Mexico, she said, with high rates of cancer. The bombing occurred in a sacred land, she noted: "There's a lot of feeling of powerlessness."

Melina Laboucan-Massimo, a climate and energy campaigner for Greenpeace Canada, described the devastation that has occurred from tar sands extraction in her native northern Alberta. A member of the Lubicon Cree tribe, Laboucan-Massimo said when she was young, in the 1980s, "I remember how pristine the land was."

Members of her tribe could still live off the forest by hunting, fishing and gathering. Now, that's impossible.

"It's changed so much just within my lifetime," she said.

The tar sands extraction requires clearing the forest and heating Earth, rendering the land lifeless, she said. It also creates toxic tailing ponds that poison the water and emit fumes that cause headaches and nausea among the residents. In Laboucan-Massimo's hometown of Little Buffalo, residents used to drink from the river, but now they develop rashes just from showering in the water.

Extracting oil from tar sands is a huge contributor to global warming, she added, not only because of the forest clearing, but also because of the gases released in the process.

"It's heartbreaking because of the massive destruction in my community," said Laboucan-Massimo, who writes, produces documentaries, and speaks about environmental degradation for Greenpeace Canada.

"Colonization is still happening," she added. "It's taken the form of resource extraction."

After learning about the cultural and environmental devastation that colonization wrought, conference attendees turned their attention to tactics they can use to fight for native cultures and the environment.

"We need to get out of the very patriarchal and colonial view of development," Weiler said, adding that education is critical. The children of the Peruvian Amazon tribes now learn about their cultural traditions and preserving the ecosystem in school, she said.

"When big companies want to come in and buy land for monoculture, [the students] will know why that's a bad idea," she said.

Laboucan-Massimo said one of the most effective ways to stop the tar sands extraction is convincing companies to divest from the industry.

"We're going after the financing," she said.
Religious orders can also divest from industries that harm the environment: Halifax Charity Sr. Maureen Wild said it would be good for those in religious communities "to start inquiring about our investments."

Tsosie-Peña described Tewa Women United’s efforts to re-establish traditional farming methods: maintaining a library of heirloom seeds, creating community gardens, and inviting a group of amaranth growers from Guatemala to teach tribe members how to grow the nutritious plant they cultivated before the Europeans arrived.

"We're reconnecting these ancient trade routes," she said.

Conference speakers said the church also needs to make changes to preserve ecosystems and protect indigenous lands. That includes rescinding a papal bull, issued by Pope Alexander in 1493, decreeing that "barbarous nations" be overthrown and granting much of the Americas to Spain. The papal bull was part of the Doctrine of Discovery, which the U.S. Supreme Court justices used in a 2005 court case to argue that the Oneida Indian Nation land was not sovereign.

Margaret Swedish, an environmental activist and author, said coalitions can be very effective. "We heal [environmental degradation] by creating incredibly powerful partnerships" between activist organizations, native tribes and residents of towns facing polluting developments, she said.

She described a Midwest community threatened with an oil pipeline that built wind farms on the proposed pipeline route, giving the residents legal leverage.

"Not only are they stopping a pipeline, but they're creating a community around it," she said.

Swedish noted that environmental degradation affects not just forests and the animals that live off of them: People also need healthy ecosystems to thrive.

"Humans are one of the species we need to think about when we talk about the environment," she said. "It's not just about destroying the ecology of the planet, but about human lives."

[Mandy Erickson is a freelance writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area.]


July 13, 2016

AME Church Adopts Climate Resolution: Call for Urgent Action on Climate Change Passed at 50th General Conference

Blessed Tomorrow
PHILADELPHIA — The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church), the oldest independent Protestant denomination founded by Black people in the world, passed an historic climate resolution at their 50th General Conference today committing to support climate policies that will protect families, create healthy and safe communities, and build a clean energy future. This is the first resolution wholly dedicated to addressing climate change in the AME Church’s 200 years of existence.

More than 30,000 clergy, leaders and members were on hand to vote on the resolution, which urges the AME Church leaders and members to build support for national, state, and local climate policies that will help make the groundbreaking 2015 Paris Climate Agreement to reduce global carbon emissions a reality.

“Damage to our climate puts the health of children, elderly, and those with chronic illnesses at greater risk and disproportionately impacts African Americans. We believe it is our duty to commit to taking action and promoting solutions that will help make our families and communities healthier and stronger,” stated Bishop John White, President, Council of Bishops of the AME Church. His colleague Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, Chair – Social Action Commission, further explained, “The AME Church has a deep history of ministering to the social, spiritual, and physical development of all people.”

To further support their efforts, the AME Church has become a founding partner of Blessed Tomorrow, a climate leadership program for faith organizations. Bob Perkowitz, president and founder of ecoAmerica, the organization that helped create the Blessed Tomorrow program, stated, “As we just experienced the warmest year on record, the AME Church’s support of climate solutions adds to the growing demand among faith leaders and people of goodwill worldwide for climate policies that will protect us and the world on which we all depend.”

“Climate is not just our issue; it’s everybody’s issue,” Bishop Vashti McKenzie, Presiding Prelate of the Thirteenth Episcopal District of the AME Church and Blessed Tomorrow Leadership Circle Member, explains on why the AME Church has partnered with Blessed Tomorrow. “It’s very important for the AME Church to reach out and work with other faith traditions on climate solutions so that we ensure a legacy of a healthier, safer world for future generations.”

The AME Church launched their resolution with a guide and resources to help their 7,000 congregations and 2.5 million members reduce damage to the climate and inspire others to lead on climate solutions in their homes, congregations, and communities. The AME Church will continue to collaborate with Blessed Tomorrow on additional resources for engagement and action. The full resolution can be read here.

About the AME Church
The African Methodist Episcopal Church AME Church) is a predominantly African-American Methodist denomination founded in 1816, and is the oldest independent
Protestant denomination founded by Black people in the world. The AME Church’s mission is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ’s liberating gospel through word and deed. Today, the AME Church is located throughout the world with 7,000 congregations and 2.5 million members. Learn more at amechurch.com.

About Blessed Tomorrow and ecoAmerica
ecoAmerica is a 501(c)3 research-based communications organization that builds public support for climate solutions in America by inspiring and supporting national leaders and agencies to lead by example and engage their stakeholders. ecoAmerica helped create Blessed Tomorrow, a comprehensive climate program for faith institutions offering support, guidance, and resources to inspire and empower faith climate change leadership. It is guided and built by a coalition of diverse faith leaders committed to creating a more just and healthy world for our families, communities and neighbors. Learn more and join at www.blessedtomorrow.org.

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http://blessedtomorrow.org/ame-resolution-press-release

July 13, 2016

Defending lands, indigenous group fights dams in Brazil's Amazon

The Munduruku indigenous people are resisting hydroelectric dams on the Tapajós River, a major Amazon tributary. The hydropower, touted as green, would destroy forests - and could even increase greenhouse gas emissions.

DW

Indigenous leader Geraldo Krixi Munduruku has problems sleeping at night. At 58, he feels again the fear he knew in 1989, when he had heard about the construction of a hydropower dam on the Tapajós River in the Brazilian state of Para for the first time.

Nearly 25 years later, the days of calm for the Munduruku community living on the Tapajós, surrounded by the Amazon forest, are gone. The Brazilian government plans to begin building the hydropower facility São Luiz do Tapajós in 2016.

Since Krixi has learned about this, his community has organized resistance to stop the project.

"The river, as well as the forest, is like our mother. If the Tapajós is dammed, how are we going to survive? Where would we go?" asks Krixi.
Not only the Munduruku would suffer if the dam were to be built - an area the size of New York City would be inundated, including the plant and animal species living there. Effects would reverberate throughout the ecosystem.

Meanwhile, open questions remain over climate impacts around the dam complex.

**Still no land title**

The Munduruku people, spread in villages along the Tapajós, have for centuries struggled for official demarcation of the Sawrê Muybu Indigenous Territory, which encompasses an area of 178,000 hectares.

The Brazilian constitution guarantees permanent ownership of the lands traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples - as well as the exclusive use of soil resources, rivers and lakes within the area.

But the territory inhabited by the Munduruku at this part of Brazil's Pará state has not yet been recognized by the federal government.

With the threat of being flooded by the planned dam, indigenous leaders started to demarcate the land themselves. The Daje Kapap Eipi village has just erected a demarcation sign, very similar to the official one. "Whoever comes here and sees this sign will know this piece of land belongs to us, the Mundurukus," says Krixi.

**Ecosystem impacts**

The Tapajós River still flows freely along 800 kilometers (500 miles) in Brazil's Mato Grosso, Amazonas and Para states. According to the latest plan presented by the Brazilian Energy Research Company (EPE), seven dams are planned to be built on the Tapajós basin by 2024.

The Munduruku people were never consulted about the construction of dams. Groups like Greenpeace have sought to support their resistance - also due to the ecological value of the site.

"It is an unnecessary and incredible destructive project," said Bunny McDiarmid, co-executive director of Greenpeace International, during a visit to the region.

The dam would inundate thriving ecosystems, including critical habitat for animals such as the ocelot, howler monkey and pink river dolphin, along with numerous bird, lizard and amphibian species. More than 300 species of fish in the region could be impacted.

Infrastructure around dam construction also contributes to deforestation, as it allows access for logging, livestock ranching and agri-business.

Paulo Adário, a consultant and one of the founders of Greenpeace Brazil, says there is no room for projects, which "bring environmental impacts like deforestation or those which go against the right of traditional people."
Climate concerns

Greenpeace also points out that although hydroelectricity is climate-friendly in the sense that it doesn't involve the burning of fossil fuels, studies have shown that dams - especially in the tropics - release a large amount of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. This is due to rotting vegetation in flooded areas.

In addition, Greenpeace points out that the crippling droughts affecting some regions of Brazil recently could make the dams ineffective.

Adário points to a scientific Greenpeace study showing that the country's energy demand could be supplied by a combination of renewable and less destructive energy sources such as wind, solar and biomass.

Energy for development

Brazil's Ministry of Mines and Energy argues that the hydropower is important for the country's development. The ministry says that "modern hydroelectric projects are characterized by the respect for the environment and local populations."

"They also define plans for environmental and social compensation, improvements to the local communities, and commitment to international protocols," the statement continues.

The power plant would make another plan of Brazil's transportation and agriculture ministries possible: to develop a waterway to transport grain production from Mato Grosso state to Asia through the Panama Canal. Mato Grosso is the largest soybean producer in Brazil, and its main buyer is China.

But for now, the construction of São Luiz do Tapajós - which would have around 8,000 megawatts of installed electricity generation capacity - may not begin. The Brazilian Institute of Environment and Natural Resources (Ibama) has suspended the environmental license, saying that it will wait for a final assessment by the National Indigenous Foundation (Funai).

So the fate of the Tapajós - and therefore of the Munduruku - will depend on decisions from the capital Brasilia.

'Modern-day war'

Jeremy Campbell, a professor at the Roger Williams University in Rhode Island, is impressed with the strength of the Munduruku people. Once known as warriors who used to decapitate their enemies, they were seen by Europeans for the first time in mid-1700s.

Campbell has been doing research in the Tapajós region since 1999, when he witnessed violence and intimidation during a time of explosive land-grabbing. He called the Munduruku "an incredible united people."
"They are a warrior people, and they say they are at war because their entire way of life is threatened," Campbell told DW.

"If the dam is built, they will not longer be able to live in a traditional way," says Campbell - which is something they will never accept, he believes.

Antonio Dace Munduruku, 28 years old, is one of the villagers who has traveled to Brasilia to fight in what he called a "modern-day war."

"People who live in the capitals and rich countries look at the Amazon as an empty place, as green area only. And everyone wants a piece of it," he says.

The father of two children, Dace says he wants his family to continue to live in their indigenous way. "Many people talk about climate and the role of forests - but we are the people who really preserve the forest," Dace concluded.


July 14, 2016

Canada plans to lean on Indigenous knowledge to combat climate change

By Delaney Windigo
Aboriginal Peoples Television Network National News

NIAGARA FALLS – For far too long governments ignored the warnings from elders.

Elders who could see shift in climate.

Ice beneath their feet thinner, more forest fires and temperatures rising.

The elders saw it but no one was listening according to Environment and Climate Change Minister Catherine McKenna who addressed chiefs at the Assembly of First Nations’ 37th annual general assembly in Niagara Falls Wednesday.

“There is clearly something unique and special in the relationship that First Nations have with the land and I believe that knowledge that supports those relationships is extremely important to our efforts to protect the environment and preserve these magnificent spaces,” said McKenna.

McKenna didn’t take questions from chiefs after her speech but is going to meet with them Thursday morning where she may hear from people like Chief Leo Friday of Kashechewan First Nation.
His community in northern Ontario along the Albany River is evacuated every spring. Friday is convinced climate change is the reason for the flooding.

He is asking for chiefs to support him in an AFN resolution to push the federal government to relocate the community to hire ground on their territory.

Since 2014, Ottawa has spent more than $13 million evacuating residents and Friday estimates since 2005 that number could reach nearly $100 million.

Friday has said he’s asked for the community to be moved in the past but it didn’t happen.

“I think this time I want to do something different, if the chiefs can back me up moving forward with the relocation process, I think this thing will push a little harder than last time,” he said.

McKenna may also hear from Jonathan Solomon of the Mushkegowuk Council.

“Climate change is not going to happen tomorrow. It’s happening right now, it was since yesterday and I think we’re at a stage now where we’re beginning to see the impacts of climate change and we’re beginning to notice it,” said Solomon.

McKenna told chiefs the government plans to consult First Nations because Canada needs Indigenous knowledge and ideas to fight climate change.

“We need to be part of the process because our elders- we know the land, we grew up on the land, we know what we have seen- the changes that has happened over time. So we can be part of the process using our traditional knowledge,” said Solomon.


July 14, 2016

AME Church: Climate change disproportionately hurts blacks

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

African Methodist Episcopal Church members have joined the call of other religious leaders for action on climate change, citing its disproportionate effect on the health of black people.

“We can move away from the dirty fuels that make us sick and shift toward safe, clean energy like wind and solar that help make every breath our neighbors and families take a healthy one,” reads a resolution passed on Wednesday (July 13), at the end of the church’s quadrennial General Conference in Philadelphia.
The resolution, echoing Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, pointed to research that shows climate change has a negative impact on African-Americans: 39 percent of Americans living near coal plants are people of color, and black children are four times as likely as their white counterparts to die from asthma.

“We believe it is our duty to commit to taking action and promoting solutions that will help make our families and communities healthier and stronger,” said Bishop John F. White, president of the AME Church’s Council of Bishops.

The statement calls for leaders and members of the 2.5 million-member denomination to advocate for support of the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement for reduction of carbon emissions and encourages congregations to have more energy-efficient buildings.

The resolution passed at their 50th General Conference, a gathering of some 30,000 people that marked the denomination’s bicentennial.

In other action during the meeting, AME Church members:

- Maintained their stance opposing same-sex marriage. “The African Methodist Episcopal Church reaffirms our belief that marriage is between a man and a woman, and forbids our ministers from uniting in, performing or participating in same sex marriage ceremonies, or the use of our facilities for such events,” concludes a position paper that passed during the meeting. A motion to remove that topic from the paper failed. Jackie Dupont-Walker, director of the church’s Social Action Commission, said she expects discussion will continue “at every level of the church” before its next meeting in four years. “With the fastest-growing segment of our church being on the continent of Africa, it must be a very strong discussion,” she said. “Because there’s less willingness there than here to embrace it.”
- Posthumously ordained a woman permitted to preach by founder Richard Allen, Jarena Lee, a member of Bethel AME Church, which Allen started in 1791 in Philadelphia, was allowed to serve as a traveling preacher. “While the ordination did not take place, he affirmed her calling by the way he allowed her to use her talents and skills,” said Dupont-Walker. Two centuries later, Lee was declared ordained by the denomination’s senior bishop.
- Elected six bishops, two of whom made history. Bishop Frank M. Reid III, a longtime Baltimore pastor, follows both his father and grandfather, who were also bishops. In another first, Bishop Anne Henning Byfield, a presiding elder from the North District of the Indiana Annual Conference, is the sister of retired Bishop C. Garnett Henning Sr.
The first anniversary of Pope Francis’s encyclical “Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home,” was celebrated globally with an international week of prayer, education, reflection and action. It was far from the usual treatment for a papal social encyclical. It is a tribute to Francis’ activist spirit and broad appeal -- and to the fact that ordinary people around the planet are painfully aware of the urgency of the issues he raises so accessibly, so forcefully, so well.

Francis also shows his pastoral experience and wisdom in insisting that the major social and cultural changes that must take place in a short period of time will require education and spiritual development, both personal and communal.

The liturgical resources for developing and expressing that kind of mature spiritual consciousness and growth, however, are difficult to find. Jesus’ contemplative reflections on God’s care for the birds of the air or the beauty of the wild flowers in the field are standard texts for ecologically-focused prayer times. And there are some beautiful psalms. But generally, the Catholic church lacks liturgical resources for nurturing the ecological transformation that Francis is calling for and that the human family so desperately needs.

Some liturgical theologians in different Christian denominations are beginning to call for new materials, develop them and urge their quick approval for broad use. Catherine Vincie, a liturgical and sacramental theologian at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, is one notable and welcome voice in the Catholic community. But we cannot afford a glacial approval process if we hope to develop a healthy, broad-based ecological spirituality in time to reverse current destructive approaches to nature and prevent devastating global suffering.

Until these materials can be developed and made widely available, the challenge given by Pope Francis to nurture this spirituality must be taken up by liturgical planners and celebrants locally. That can happen if they bring to their liturgical preparations a deliberately broad consciousness of the global ecological context of life and liturgy as Francis describes it. The weekly liturgical texts must be consciously read as addressing the social and ecological context of our lives in the midst of the whole human family and at the heart of the complex and interrelated systems of Earth, our common home.

Nurturing ‘Laudato Si’ in Sunday readings
An example of this approach can be found in the texts for the Sunday liturgy on June 12, which opened weeklong anniversary celebrations for *Laudato Si’*. At first glance, the texts seemed to have nothing to do with the themes Francis laid out in the encyclical.

In the first reading (2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13), the prophet Nathan berates King David for having Uriah the Hittite killed so he can take Uriah’s wife Bathsheba. But when David admits he sinned, Nathan tells him God has forgiven him. In the gospel (Luke 7:36-8:3), Jesus is dining at the home of a Pharisee when “a sinful woman” enters, bathes his feet with her tears, dries them with her hair and anoints them with ointment, giving Jesus an occasion to teach the Pharisee and to assure the woman that her sins are forgiven.

Texts for nurturing a spirituality of care for the human family and our common home? Not obviously, for sure -- until, that is, they are heard in the context of what is happening to our planet and to the human community today. In that context, we are David, we are the sinful woman, we are the Pharisee.

*We are David*

Through Nathan, God reminds David, “I anointed you king of Israel. I rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave you Saul’s house and wives for your own. I gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were not enough, I could count up for you still more ….” God gave lavishly, but David could not look around without wanting more and taking it for himself.

So how are we are David? Isn’t God saying to us, too, “I gave you … I gave you … I gave you … and instead of gratitude you always want more, taking it from those around the world who have so little”? We can each fill in those blanks. We are the wealthiest nation in the history of humanity -- yet what we have is never enough; we insist we can’t afford to share with those who have so little. Millions of voters even want walls built to keep desperate, needy people out and protect what we have for ourselves.

Our economic system itself is built on and driven by consumption, accumulation, competition and growth. We’re assured that if it doesn’t keep growing through more production, more consumption and more accumulation, the global economy will collapse, with suffering for everyone. And we can count on hearing endless promises of economic growth and increased wealth from our politicians and candidates as we head into the height of this year’s campaign season.

Still, our economic system and our culture of consumption are the very forces that have brought us to the ecological and social crises the planet now faces. They promise rapidly worsening destruction and suffering in the decades ahead.

We are David, the king with dominating power in the world, too. We are the superpower with the ability and commitment to steer the global economy along the paths we have created. In far too many global meetings, U.S. lobbyists and government negotiators shape global policies and institutions to serve corporate economic interests without concern for what those policies will do to the poor of the world and to Earth itself.
We are David.

Ultimately, David’s sin was forgiven (2 Samuel 12:13), though there were consequences to pay. Pope Francis is insistent that God’s forgiving mercy is available to us, as well. But the consequences remain, and we must address them.

We are the sinful woman

Whoever pays any attention to the ecological issues of our time comes to liturgy knowing that our own day-to-day decisions, actions and lifestyles have gotten us to where we are. Our choices, day in and day out, have already driven countless species into extinction and are destroying habitats, including our own.

We are torn by the reality of it. Many of us want it to be otherwise, and we even weep at the destruction and suffering we’re starting to see in bleaching coral reefs, thousands of miles of dead ocean, more severe storms, floods and wildfires, and rising sea levels. But we feel trapped in the institutions, systems and patterns of our lives, not knowing how to change, afraid of what the costs might be, but also longing for freedom, courage and better ways.

We are the sinful woman.

We are the Pharisee

I have to admit -- and I’m sure I’m not alone -- that I take personal refuge in the assurance that at least I’m not a climate change denier. I do what I can on a small scale. I shop at the farmers market, buying local and organic. I don’t travel as much anymore. I shut off lights that aren’t being used and cut back on my water use. I recycle and compost. I preach and write about the issues and urge the places where I live and work to consider going solar.

I don’t do anything like the damage done by corporate leaders who refuse to take responsibility for the environmental costs they are shifting onto communities, governments or future generations. And I look in judgment at the politicians who are shirking their moral and political responsibilities for the common good of their people because of their dependence on campaign contributions from people and corporations who put economic profit before community health and planetary wellbeing. Those are the people and the situations where conversion would make a real difference.

Yes, we are the Pharisee, too.

What is happening to Earth and to the vulnerable and excluded peoples among us is sin. When species are pushed into extinction by our lifestyle choices, this is sin against God in creation. We use and abuse God’s self-expression in nature and human society, failing in reverence and gratitude.

We are invited to be Jesus
In the context of what is happening to Earth seen through these scriptures, we are David. We are the sinful woman. We are the Pharisee. But we are also invited to be Jesus.

Jesus enters the story with an open heart. He was open to Simon the Pharisee, who invited him and then did not show him any of the normal courtesies like water for his dusty feet or a warm greeting. Jesus was open to the other guests. He was open to the sinful woman who came in weeping, made a huge scene, dared to touch him, bathed his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair and anointed them with ointment. It was only when he sensed Simon’s judgmental response that Jesus spoke up gently: “Simon, I have something to say to you.”

He then tells the parable of the creditor who forgives the debt of two people who can’t repay him. One is a small debt, the other a major debt. When Jesus asks which debtor would love the creditor more, Simon reluctantly gives the answer Jesus is obviously looking for: the one who was forgiven the larger debt.

Jesus then suggests a different way of contemplating what has just gone on. The so-judged “sinful woman” has acted with great, deep-hearted love. So in Jesus’s eyes, she is already forgiven for her many sins because “the one to whom little is forgiven loves little” (Luke 7:47), and she obviously loves deeply and much.

Aren’t we hearing Jesus the teacher explain here the heart of his good news to the world? If you want to see as God sees, don’t look through the eyes of the law; look through the eyes of love.

Through the eyes of the law, she is a sinner. Through the eyes of love, she is forgiven, holy.

Then Jesus turns to her and says, “Your sins are forgiven.” I am convinced that the other guests are wrong when they interpret this as Jesus forgiving sins. I don’t hear his words as what we today would call “absolution.” I hear them as his reassurance to her that she can trust: “Your sins are forgiven” because you are so loving. Loving is the divine life present and active in her. She is alive with the Spirit of God.

New discovery and contemplation

It is that contemplative vision through the eyes of love that Jesus invites us to embrace in our presence and response to life. It is the contemplative, loving vision that Pope Francis invites us into in Laudato Si’. He wants us to contemplate the beauty and complexity of creation, to see how everything is interconnected, to see ourselves as in it and of it.

Francis wants us to discover new possibilities, to see and reverence its value and even its sacredness. He invites us into a classic contemplation from his Jesuit/Ignatian spirituality background: He invites us to open our eyes and our hearts to discover in creation the loving presence and self-gift of God. He is convinced, as was Jesuit founder St. Ignatius of Loyola, that we will then find our hearts stirred with grateful love.

We are David. We are the sinful woman. We are the Pharisee.
But when we contemplate creation and human society with love, we too are forgiven. Looking through those eyes, we will recognize the results of that sin, the suffering and destruction globally. We will be, Francis is convinced, moved to compassion, transformation and healing action.

*Laudato Si’* is a call to conversion and urgent action, action rising naturally and forcefully from contemplative, loving, prayerful spirits.

Yes, we are David. We are the sinful woman. We are the Pharisee. And we are being called to be Jesus, speaking out with courage his way of approaching each other and the world with an open heart and eyes of love. We are being called to be Jesus, discovering in and through our loving contemplation and care for our common home, that we too are forgiven many sins because we love much. And we are being offered the opportunity to take part in the birthing of the new creation.

**Opening minds and hearts**

As in this example, the context within which we reflect and pray with biblical texts has a profound impact on the meaning we discover for our lives in the world today. Too often that context is limited to the personal, or at best, interpersonal dimensions of our lives. Consciously opening our minds and hearts to the full global and cosmic context in which we live will allow the vision and values of the Word of God to resonate more powerfully. It will open to us a more adequate sense of the guiding revelation of God for the human family here and now.

More adequate liturgical texts will eventually be able to help us grow in that consciousness. May they come soon. And may they be in accessible language that will open the eyes and touch the hearts of ordinary people everywhere.

In the meantime, we can and must read the Word and celebrate Eucharist conscious of our common home, our cosmic context and our integral ecological mission.

[Jesuit Fr. James Hug is the former president of the D.C.-based, social justice-focused Center for Concern.]


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**July 19, 2016**

Tibetan monk who went beyond religion

**By Balan Moses**
Malay Mail Online
KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 — A Tibetan Buddhist leader in exile is changing the face of the ancient religion with a power-packed agenda that aims to improve the lives, and environment, of the people he constantly prays for.

Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang, who established the Drikung Kagyu seat in exile in Dehra Dun, India, after fleeing his native Tibet in 1975, has put his hand to the plow in an effort to fast-forward Buddhism to meet the needs of the 21st century.

He has started a growing movement known internationally as Go Green & Go Organic in Ladakh, Kashmir (dubbed Little Tibet), through which he hopes to stop global warming and its terribly effects in its tracks by embarking on a programme to green the earth.

“You have to pray but you have to also go out into the world to change lives through practical methods so that the people benefit in practical ways,” the United Nations Global Mountain Partnership ambassador says in an illuminating 45-minute interview yesterday where the softspoken monk reveals a bond with the people that goes beyond the monastery.

The 71-year-old-to-be has become a “religious revolutionary” with a new dynamic that seeks to make Buddhism more relevant to its adherents — and people of other faiths.

“My entry into all this started when I realised many years ago that a river that was brimming with water had over the years trickled down to a stream that we could jump over,” he says with incredulity.

For Chetsang, it was a far cry from the gushing rivers of his youth.

In its wake, came “cloud bursts” in another part of the year that rained terror on villagers unused to floods that washed away their homes.

The extremes in weather made him realise that urgent action was needed to forestall a worsening of the phenomenon.

It was at this point that he assumed the additional role of environmental guardian at home and abroad, leaving active soul-saving to younger monks while he travelled the world on an environmental mission with religious fervour.

“I do some environmental and peace work. Everybody has to do this too, regardless of religion, territorial boundaries or anything else,” the red and yellow-robed head of a religious order that goes back to 1179 says in understatement as I interview him in the 10th floor hotel room in Kuala Lumpur.

The air unfortunately is too warm for a man used to near freezing temperatures.

The septuagenarian, who has just returned from an exhausting trip to Penang and Alor Star besides attending to commitments in Kuala Lumpur, surprisingly does not look fatigued.
The hands-on man walks over to examine the air-conditioning LED apparatus on the wall revealing the simplicity at his core.

Chetsang has only good things to say about the Indian government that has given subsidies to locals to green the environment.

He is now actively involved in encouraging the planting of a species called the Sea Buck Thorn which will encourage the local economy by yielding valuable ingredients for cosmetics and medicines.

Chetsang, who grew up near the Himalayas that tower over the rest of the world, is worried about the reduction in snowfall in the mountain range (15 per cent less now compared to 30 years ago).

“Global warming has definitely affected the Himalayas. I understand that huge chunks of ice have travelled to the Yangtze river in China,” he says.

Speaking excitedly in English that he picked up while working in fast food outlets in the United States in his younger days, the man who is also fluent in Mandarin, talks of the ‘ice stupa’ (artificial mini glaciers) that he and his fellow environmentalists came up with during winter to supply much-needed water for crops in spring.

“We developed a system where water was brought down from the upper reaches of a river to become ice structures lower down that yielded water for irrigation when the weather turned warm,” he says.

The Swiss want him to reprise the system in the cold confines of the land-locked country that also needs additional water supplies part of the year.

“Our engineering team is going over to Switzerland later this year to teach them the art of creating ice stupas,” he says.

Has his green vision caught on with locals and the monks under his charge?

The footballer as a youth, who tries to swim as much as he can on his travels to keep fit besides doing freehand exercises, held a series of meetings with the community three years ago to get them on board.

“I met up with monks at monasteries, schools and government officials among others, to get them involved in the greening project,’ he says content that organic farming that he introduced has caught on with farmers.

The senior cleric is also a crusader for interfaith dialogue as ‘all religions have to work for peace.’
“There are no more borders and no more gates between people of different faiths. All of us — Christians, Muslims, Buddhists have to learn about other religions. How will we work with each other if we don't know one another?”

What next for the intrepid monk-cum-environmentalist who barely has time to meet commitments in Ladakh before flying off to meet other responsibilities the world over?

Chetsang has a 10-year plan “if I am alive that long” that involves training the next generation to take over.

The monk with a difference is all set to continue making his mark on the world of Buddhism and society at large with his huge heart for mankind.


July 20, 2016

Rising temperatures drying up history, one lake at a time

By Daksha Rangan
The Weather Network

For urban dwellers and suburbanites, the changing pace of global weather patterns might only be cause for concern when minor anomalies take place -- a snowless winter, dry spring, or cooler summer, for example.

But for rural residents -- namely, some of the world's indigenous communities -- earth's rising temperatures have a stark impact. This is the case for locals in the Andes of Bolivia, who once thrived off the country's second-largest lake.

After decades of annual El Niño droughts and water diversion through the Andes, Bolivia's Lake Poopó completely dried up in December 2015. For Uru-Muratos, an indigenous population native to the lake's surrounding area of Llapallapani, the loss has had a damaging effect.

Besides being a source of livelihood for fishing families, Lake Poopó was a symbol of identity for the Uru-Murato people, the New York Times (NYT) reports. Uru-Muratos are the region’s oldest indigenous community, having shifted through the centuries of political and social upheaval. A changing climate, however, leaves the community with no choice but to flee.

“The lake was our mother and our father,” Adrián Quispe, a fisherman from Llapallapani, told the NYT. Along with his five brothers, Quispe is one of hundreds of Llapallapani's hundreds of fishermen raising a family. "Without this lake, where do we go?”
The United Nations has highlighted the heightened effects of climate change on indigenous populations, noting that at-risk populations span all corners of the globe -- from the Himalayas to the Arctic, the Amazon to Scandinavia.

"Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, owing to their dependence upon, and close relationship with the environment and its resources," a UN backgrounder from the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues reads.

Weather Network meteorologist and science writer Scott Sutherland adds that dependency on agriculture poses the most significant threat to those living in rural environments, including indigenous peoples.

"Specifically for indigenous peoples, their traditional methods of growing crops, hunting, trapping and fishing are becoming more difficult as climates shift, especially in the Arctic," Sutherland says. "In the Arctic, where temperatures are rising at roughly twice the rate as the global average, dwindling sea ice is impacting on local wildlife, which is affecting the local indigenous people who rely on this wildlife for food and other resources."

**Strongest impact on the poor**

Recent research also supports that the world's poorest nations are most likely to bear the brunt of rising temperatures, despite having the lowest CO2 emissions.

These findings also apply to those within a low-income bracket in wealthy nations, Sutherland says.

"Although urban dwellers are surrounded by more development and infrastructure, the poor living in these environments will still be affected the most by climate change. Of all those living in cities, the poor are most likely to be without luxuries such as air conditioning, and they are most likely to have jobs where they must spend the majority of the day outdoors."

Cities tend to feel the extremes of heat waves due to the *urban heat island*, Sutherland adds. "[T]his means more exposure for the city’s poor during the more frequent and more extreme heat waves that are expected due to climate change.


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**July 20, 2016**

The Unfolding Story of the Universe

A Conversation with Mary Evelyn Tucker and Julianne Warren

By Sam Mowe

Garrison Institute
In their Journey of the Universe project—which includes a film, book, and website—philosopher Brian Thomas Swimme and historian of religions Mary Evelyn Tucker attempt to tell the biggest story ever told: the history of the universe. Through a compelling blend of scientific facts and humanistic inquiry, they move from exploring the formation of the galaxies, stars, planets, and evolution of life on Earth to reflecting on the role of humanity during our current moment of social and ecological challenges.

One person whose work has been deeply influenced by the Journey of the Universe project is writer and ecological thinker Julianne Warren. In her different projects exploring the Anthropocene, Warren has used Journey of the Universe as a touchstone while she asks questions about hope and human responsibility.

I recently spoke with Tucker and Warren by phone to discuss some of the big ideas explored in Journey of the Universe, such as the transformative power of story, the relationship between science and the humanities, and how we can create meaning in the space between knowledge and mystery.

Sam Mowe: Mary Evelyn, you’ve written that “the universe is not simply a place, it’s a story.” What do you mean by that?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: I’m suggesting that an unfolding narrative is one way of looking at the evolution of this 14 billion year old universe. Maybe the universe is best understood not as discrete incidents of evolution, but as a whole unfolding dynamic and developmental process, which is like a story. If you look at the universe as a place, it can feel a little bit static. Alternatively, we can begin to see ourselves as part of a dramatic story that’s still unfolding and in which we have a part to play.

It’s important to note that the understanding of evolution is only about 150 years old in human consciousness since Darwin’s Origin of Species. Developmental time is something human consciousness is just beginning to grasp. And, in a certain sense, this understanding allows us to be co-creators with this process.

Sam Mowe: How does understanding the universe as a story change our relationship with it?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: This epic story of evolution has an amazing potential to activate wonder, awe, and beauty that can sink into our bones and muscles. It’s a story that can physically activate the energy of love for the beauty of ongoing life and the continuity of what’s right in front of us. This possibility of activating a zest for life can give us the energy for doing the transformative work required to honor that beauty—whether it’s conservation, education, political work, protest work, or whatever the realm is.

The deepest sources of human energy come from story. Recently, Peter Crane, the dean at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, gave a talk on his life work on the history of angiosperms, namely flowering plants. He explained that these plants—of which there are over 250,000 species—have a history of some 145 million years. What paleobotanists are able to do now is actually unpack the fossil record and recreate—through the help of technology—the
flowers, the pistil, the stems, and the rest. So he showed us this 100 million year old flower bud, which was opening in this wonderful kinetic way, and it kept opening and opening and opening. It was completely riveting for the audience. It was one of the most spectacular things I’ve ever seen.

So now we’re able to visualize the extraordinary power of deep time. There’s an invitation here to think about how these species have emerged and changed over deep time.

**Julianne Warren:** I think that the way we integrate technology and creativity with our stories makes all the difference. The 20th century American literary ecologist, Aldo Leopold, observed a cultural cleavage in his best-selling book, *A Sand County Almanac*. In some peoples’ stories, he explained, science is the sharpener of their swords. For others, science is a searchlight on their universe. In other words, science can help us invent tools for conquering land and each other. It can also stimulate humans’ curiosity and wonder—as at the opening of an ancient flower bud—deepening our understandings and our skillful affection for all, as well as for appreciating mystery and our own ignorance.

**Sam Mowe:** There have been different cosmological stories told about the universe in various cultures around the world throughout history. One thing that makes the *Journey of the Universe* story different is that there is scientific evidence to back up the narrative. What do scientific facts add to the story?

**Mary Evelyn Tucker:** Scientific facts ground the story so that humans can enter into the creative processes of evolution. For example, the self-organizing dynamics of the universe that give rise to galaxies and stars stagger the mind and light up the imagination. And the imagination is what can connect us to understanding and interpreting these processes. So I think our challenge is to take the scientific knowledge and make it into wisdom, make it into something we can reflect on. When we look at pictures from the Hubble telescope, that’s contemplation. You get the feeling of, *Wow, was I birthed out of these systems?* The stars really are our ancestors—literally and metaphorically.

**Julianne Warren:** I would add that the rising understanding that humans have a large influence on the planet—its climate, soils, biodiversity, and so on—also presents a great irony. This is one irony of the Anthropocene: We can’t control Earth the way that some of us thought that we could. The very science and technology applied to control the planet has revealed people’s inability to do so. And, everyone is, in a sense, trapped in the unintended, unwanted consequences of past human actions.

Another Anthropocene irony—one that unfetters us—is that while members of the dominating culture have considered themselves superior to the rest of nature and have tried to apply science and technology to set ourselves safely apart, what we are discovering is that we are inalienable. Though human influence is felt everywhere, human beings are embedded in a still-wild Earth. This means that we need to understand our mutual interdependencies better so that we can participate more generatively within the ecosphere.
**Sam Mowe:** This is interesting because initially I was thinking that you might be using scientific facts in *Journey of the Universe* as a strategic way to reach people, because many people take science more seriously than other modes of knowledge. Listening to you now it sounds like you’re saying the scientific dimensions of the story, if told in a compelling way, have a special kind of power.

**Mary Evelyn Tucker:** Yes, that’s right. It’s worth pointing out that Brian Swimme and I took the science very seriously. This project was ten years in the making because we wanted to get the science right. We worked in the summers for a number of years with a group of scientists and we would go over different parts of the story. A number of scientists read the manuscript. The book was published in the science division of Yale University Press, and that’s not easy. So the science is very tight in terms of its factual accuracy.

In each chapter there’s a scientific fact. There’s also a metaphor—such as the similarities between a whirlpool and our breath—that points towards meaning or how human beings fit in. So the scientific fact looked at metaphorically can capture the human imagination. From there we explored ideas such as connectivity, relationality, and complex interdependence.

**Julianne Warren:** This approach invites people to look at how science actually works and then reflect on how it can be part of a story that has meaning. It’s not static because we’re always discovering new things with science. And each time we discover something new, if we want to live generatively, we have to reorient ourselves to be more in tune with the new knowledge. Since we don’t know everything, and the story is so big, a lot of different points of view can take place within it, space opens up for imagination regarding ways to do that, including fueling new questions for science to explore.

**Sam Mowe:** It sounds like science offers the foundation of the story, giving us factual knowledge, and that the humanities are employed to build on top of it with creativity and meaning.

**Mary Evelyn Tucker:** What we are really trying to do with *Journey of the Universe* is create a new genre of a fusion of science and humanities. We’re not looking at science as just facts or numbers or equations or graphs, but science in relation to the humanities—literature, history, art, music, philosophy, and religion and so on. These are the disciplines that have tried to understand how humans have lived in the past and how might we live more integrally in the future. So *Journey* is a conscious fusion of fact, metaphor, and meaning. This can confuse people because they might think it’s just about science. Other people might think it’s only a spiritual vision. Actually it’s a more subtle and complex coming together of various disciplines.

I would also like to point out that we’re not trying to say that the *Journey of the Universe* perspective overrides longstanding cultural and religious systems that have given humans a sense of meaning, purpose, connection, and community. It is not a triumphal hegemonic science story. It’s one that respects traditional stories but sees the unifying potential of this great epic of evolution.
**Julianne Warren:** I have taught classes where, in between chapters of *Journey of the Universe*, we’d jump over and read some of Charles Darwin’s work from the Galapagos. This pairing has helped students see how a scientist might be filled with a sense of wonder and how he was giving meaning to some of the things he was learning. Darwin himself was taking bits of evidence about the relationships between different beings and putting the flesh of meaning on it by saying, *We’re kin with all of life and, as kin, we can have empathy for one another.*

At the same time, though, some of this thinking was applied to eugenics with this idea of the survival of the fittest. Science by itself doesn’t tell you what you should do with knowledge. You have to have other ways of knowing to blend with those observations in order for there to be meaning. We have been misusing science in order to misuse the earth. Now we have to pull ourselves back to contemplate new and fresh understandings combined with the desire to promote life.

**Sam Mowe:** This example highlights how, even though science does help provide a foundation of knowledge for us to interpret, there is still always so much we don’t know. I wonder if you might speak about the relationship between mystery and meaning. What is your process for creating meaning out of facts that can be interpreted in various different ways?

**Julianne Warren:** Let’s start from the stars as an example. The ways that gravity and fusion, supernovas and atomic dust combine to bring forth Earth. I just can’t stop thinking about it. There’s a paradox of wanting more knowledge, but at the same time enjoying how much I don’t know about it. In between the knowing and not knowing there is all this space for my imagination. The desire for simple answers is a way to try to control things. It doesn’t work. Instead we can try to embrace and dwell in ambiguity.

**Mary Evelyn Tucker:** I love this notion of ambiguity along with a search for meaning. I think that’s actually what creativity is. We don’t know from where a poem arises or the composition of music. Beethoven was deaf and he was still composing music. There is an idea that creativity arises from sources beyond ourselves. If we’re in tune with certain aspects of this living Earth system, we may pick up on something and then release a piece of art or music or whatever. But it’s all very staggering. Some scientists at Princeton recently told us that we don’t really understand how galaxies emerge, even though there’s been a lot of science on it.

Dwelling in mystery and being open to uncertainty is one of the great tasks of a human being. Eventually we can “live the questions,” as Rainer Maria Rilke said. *Meaning* is such a laden term, I hesitate even to use the word, but I do think that fundamentally we are meaning-making animals. We know that many other animals have communication and language and all kinds of creativity within their worlds, but the meaning dimension might distinguish us. And this kind of large-scale story opens us up to depths of meaning that we hadn’t really thought about before.

This speaks to our capacity for symbolic consciousness, which is a dynamic change engine because we are all moved by symbols. You can see this is why the advertising and media worlds are so powerful. But if we can create the connectivity to these interrelated processes and then begin to reflect on them symbolically and reconfigure our own social, political, and economic
patterning in relation to the patterning of nature, then we’re releasing new kinds of energy for creativity.

Julianne Warren: I agree. At least around me, people who are dealing with confronting the realities that we’re faced with now sometimes don’t want to talk about what’s good about human beings. But we can rediscover that there are different ways to be human; there always have been. We don’t have to be dominators; we don’t have to have just simple answers. Even with climate change and the Anthropocene, there is still space to play together. Perhaps it’s never been more important to do so.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Yes, there is the simultaneous awareness in our time of the beauty of evolution and deep time and, at the same time, an awareness of extinction and this destruction we’re causing on the planet. The whole process of evolution is threaded through with similar dynamics of loss and creativity. I think part of the joy that we’re trying to evoke in Journey is that loss and creativity go closely together. They’re intermingled and we can’t avoid that. The suggestion is that in between these forces we may find our way forward as a species.

July 24, 2016

‘World can’t afford to silence us’: black church leaders address climate change

One of the largest and oldest black churches in the US warns that black people are disproportionately harmed by global warming and fossil fuel pollution

By Oliver Milman
The Guardian

African American religious leaders have added their weight to calls for action on climate change, with one of the largest and oldest black churches in the US warning that black people are disproportionately harmed by global warming and fossil fuel pollution.

The African Methodist Episcopal church has passed its first resolution in its 200-year history devoted to climate change, calling for a swift transition to renewable energy.

“We can move away from the dirty fuels that make us sick and shift toward safe, clean energy like wind and solar that help make every breath our neighbors and families take a healthy one,” states the resolution, which also points to research showing that black children are four times as likely as white children to die from asthma.

The resolution was passed at the church’s general conference in Philadelphia, where more than 30,000 members gathered. The AME church, the oldest independent Protestant denomination founded by black people in the world, has about 7,000 congregations and 2.5m members.
“Damage to our climate puts the health of children, elderly, and those with chronic illnesses at greater risk and disproportionately impacts African Americans. We believe it is our duty to commit to taking action and promoting solutions that will help make our families and communities healthier and stronger,” stated Bishop John White, president of the council of bishops of the AME church.

The resolution follows an open letter sent by African American clergy last year that called for political leaders to take “bold action to address climate change”.

The letter states: “The voices of communities whose inhabitants look like us often are dismissed or disregarded. But the world cannot afford to silence us, and we cannot afford to be – and will not be – silent. Climate change most directly impacts the poor and marginalized, but ultimately, everyone is in jeopardy.”

Jacquelyn Dupont-Walker, director of AME church’s social action commission, said that will “hold elected officials accountable” over climate change.

“In communities of color, the church has been the voice on these kind of issues and we need to continue to be that voice,” she told the Guardian. “Many people may have heard that climate change is some sort of political trick – but when we speak, people will listen to us. We have an obligation to make this a focal point.”

Dupont-Walker said that the church’s voter mobilization campaign will work throughout the 2016 election cycle to question candidates on climate change. Local officials and landlords will also be put under pressure over inadequate housing and infrastructure that helps spread pollution to black communities.

According to the NAACP, African Americans emit far less carbon dioxide per person compared with white people and yet will bear the brunt of heat-related deaths, due to the concentration of black people in cities.

Faith leaders across the world have expressed alarm over climate change, with Pope Francis warning last year that “we may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth”. Some churches have backed the campaign to divest from fossil fuels.

June was the warmest on record in both the US and globally, marking the 14th consecutive month of record-breaking heat worldwide.


July 25, 2016

Recycling center in Brooklyn creates community while serving those in need
By Gail DeGeorge
Global Sisters Report

Her gloved hands deep in buckets of fruit pieces, vegetable peels and other food dreck, Sr. Ana Martinez de Luco flashes a smile as she mixes what will become Sure We Can's own brand of compost.

She then tosses clear plastic bags bulging with cans into piles that tower above her head. She hops on a forklift to move wooden pallets, clearing a new spot for the vegetable garden sprouting in an industrial site in Brooklyn. And as she weaves her way around bins, bags and crates, she greets each of the more than a dozen people — often known as "canners" — who are there to count, sort and redeem what they've collected from the endless stream of cans and bottles that New Yorkers discard.

As the only nonprofit redemption center in New York City, Sure We Can is an economic lifeline for more than 400 canners. They can cash in what they've gathered — in small amounts or bulk — for the state-mandated 5 cents per piece, or they can earn a bit more by counting and sorting, which helps Sure We Can reduce its costs.

The organization, co-founded in 2007 by Martinez de Luco and Eugene Gadsden, has become a community. Canners serve on its board of directors, and intertwined with Sure We Can's mission of promoting environmental sustainability is helping its clients feel supported and respected.

With contagious enthusiasm, Martinez de Luco describes big plans for Sure We Can.

"Here is where the garden will go," she said, pointing to a concrete slab. A classroom will take shape where the garden is now for field trips, classes and theater groups in which students learn about environmental responsibility and sustainability. A rainwater collection system provides water for the squash, tomatoes and other plants. The composting system, used on Sure We Can's own garden the last four years, will soon package fertilizer for sale.

Martinez de Luco is on a mission — and on a deadline. On July 31, Sure We Can kicks off a campaign to raise $3 million in 18 months to buy its current location in Brooklyn, the organization's fifth home in 10 years, which it has been renting since 2010.

July 31 will also be the day Sure We Can says farewell to Martinez de Luco as she turns the organization over to Agustina Besada, who earlier this month became executive director after serving as a volunteer and board president. Martinez de Luco plans to take a few months off then return as a volunteer.

Martinez de Luco credits the start of Sure We Can to her partnership with co-founder Gadsden, the "king of canners" who taught her the fine points of can-collecting more than a decade ago.

Needing to get her feet on the ground
In 2004, she was working in New York at UNANIMA, a nongovernmental coalition of 20 congregations of Catholic sisters that aims to educate United Nations policymakers on issues concerning women and children living in poverty; immigrants and refugees; and the environment. She felt a call to serve the poor more directly.

"I found meaning in doing [U.N. work], but my personality — my gift is just to work with people and to share life with people, especially people who are in need," she said. "To go in the streets at the same time I was going to the U.N. helped me keep my feet on the ground."

She had grown up in a small village in the Basque area of Spain, entered religious life at age 19 as a Carmelite Sister of Charity and had spent much of her life working in social services in the Philippines. (She became part of the Sisters for Christian Community in 2014.)

"I felt strongly the invitation to share my life with the people in the street but didn't really implement it" in the Philippines, she said. "When I came to the U.S., that pull was very much alive. This was the place. It was a faith issue, to share my life with them."

She volunteered with an organization serving the homeless and began canning as a way to earn a bit of money and, more importantly, the trust of those she wanted to help.

"The fact that I started picking up cans helped me to enter faster the community of people in the street," she said. "I was no longer a strange figure but showed them that I was doing what they were doing, so they thought I must be in great need."

A mutual friend introduced her to Gadsden, who had taught dozens to can efficiently. He worked with Martinez de Luco for months before learning she was a sister.

"I've believed in God all my life, and maybe it's a good thing that I ran into a sister — a good thing and a God-thing," Gadsden said.

In 2005, a cash-in center closed, leaving canners in Manhattan without an easy way to redeem what they collected. Retailers would take some cans and bottles, but it wasn't practical for canners to visit multiple sites.

Martinez de Luco and Gadsden talked of the need for a new large-scale redemption center. They approached various companies and organizations with no success. After one particularly disappointing meeting, she said Gadsden reassured her, "When one door is closed, another door is opened."

Her work at the U.N. for UNIMA and another nongovernmental organization, Partnership for Global Justice, helped open the door to assist those on the street. After Martinez de Luco told the sisters there about the issue with the redemption center, one arranged a meeting with a friend who was a Wall Street financier. He put Martinez de Luco in contact with an attorney to draw up incorporation papers in 2007.
They recruited board members. At first, Martinez de Luco was reluctant to join the board, worrying that it would separate her from the canning community. But when she and Gadsden realized they needed to have canners on the board so that their needs and views were represented, they joined also. Sure We Can's board now has canner representatives as part of its structure, one from each of the primary language-speaking communities — Spanish, Chinese and English — of people who form its clientele.

Sure We Can first opened in a public storage area in Manhattan in 2008. But the site was close to the upscale shops and wealthy residences of Fifth Avenue, and neighbors blamed Sure We Can for attracting homeless people to the area. Then began a series of moves until 2009, when it found its current spot in Brooklyn, nestled near a school and alongside other industrial operations.

"This space works," Martinez de Luco said.

"Our roots are deep. It would be hard to move," she added, looking around at the site, with its system of sorting bins and bags, a trailer that serves as an office, and a bicycle that provides the pedal-power to sift the compost.

Brightly colored murals decorate wagons and walls. The site owners are a family that has experienced hardship and has worked with Sure We Can but now want to sell the site, Martinez de Luco said. Sure We Can's lease expires at the end of December 2017.

"Sometimes I am dreaming of all that has to be done," Martinez de Luco said.

**Aiming for self-sufficiency**

The grassroots #60MillionCans fundraising drive that kicks off July 31 is to convince individuals, buildings, schools and businesses to collect and contribute empty cans and bottles — or donate the equivalent in money — along with foundation and corporate donations to help Sure We Can buy the site.

This year, Sure We Can will handle more than 10 million pieces. The nonprofit works on a margin basis: Collectors get a minimum fee for unsorted cans and bottles and more per tray of sorted material. The companies that pick up the bottles and cans pay a few cents more for sorted and bagged cans and bottles. The nonprofit employs 10 workers on a full-time or part-time basis.

Martinez de Luco credits Sure We Can's team — staffers such as Rene del Carmen, "who can fix anything," and volunteers like Noel Colaneri, who serves on the board and had the initial idea for the fundraising drive — for the organization's success and community spirit.

It was that welcoming atmosphere that struck Pierre Simmons when the musician first visited Sure We Can more than two years ago to redeem cans and bottles he collected to supplement his income.
"There was an air about it that was very personal," he said. "People were willing to help me, to show me the ropes and how to sort stuff out right."

He became a regular client, then presented a speech for an Earth Day celebration that Sure We Can was involved with and joined the board as a canner representative. He said he didn't know of Martínez de Luco's background as a sister initially, but after meeting her, he said he realized the organization's "giving and spiritual side came from her."

The spirit of Sure We Can will remain as Besada takes over leadership, Simmons said.

"She's been getting a lot of mentoring from Ana," he said. "And we will still see Ana around — she's the heart of this thing."

Besada knows that she is filling big shoes. "I'm taking her job," she said. "Ana can't be replaced."

**Transition plan, new leadership**

A native of Argentina, Besada knew of similar cooperatives, organizations of *cartoneros* or cardboard collectors there. She began volunteering with Sure We Can in 2013 with a friend, making wallets out of plastic bags while earning a master's degree in sustainable development at Columbia University.

Initially, she planned to focus her career on corporate sustainability but began to recognize Sure We Can's potential.

"I realized I was spending more time talking with Ana about the issues here," she said. She prepared a vision plan for the organization and began helping with other projects as a volunteer. She joined the board, presented an updated proposal for fundraising and redesigned the website. She then became president of the board and took on more responsibility. When Martínez de Luco expressed a desire to step down, the board appointed Besada to take over as executive director.

Besada sees opportunities to expand Sure We Can's operations once it succeeds in the #60MillionCan drive to secure its site. Like supermarkets and other redemption centers, Sure We Can gets 8.5 cents per can or bottle from distributors, which will only pick up their brands of containers. Hence, the need — and incentive — to have canners sort material. The additional 3.5 cents and additional grants cover operating costs.

"I can bring in more of the business side to make it work on its own, to make it economically sustainable and formalize the compost and other programs so they don't have to rely on grants," Besada said.

The transition has been purposefully slow, Besada said. "Everybody knows me. I've been doing all the different jobs to get to know the people. That is very important. This is a community, and it takes time."
Martinez de Luco is looking forward to her break but more so to coming back to Sure We Can to spend more time with people. Her heart goes out particularly to the elderly who sustain themselves by redeeming bottles and cans — the average age of canners at Sure We Can is 65. She knows the canners’ families, whose husbands are sick, how their children are doing in school.

"In coming back, I would just return to what I like most and is the easiest thing for me to do: being Ana, which is the vision that brought me to this, just to accompany people on the streets, at the stations, in the parks," she said. "People who feel sick in many ways, sometimes they need someone to encourage them to go to the hospital and accompany them. Sometimes it is just to listen."


July 25, 2016

What It Takes to Clean the Ganges

More than a billion gallons of waste enter the river every day. Can India’s controversial Prime Minister save it?

By George Black
The New Yorker

More than a billion gallons of raw sewage and industrial effluent enter the river every day. The Hindu-nationalist government’s restoration initiative plays directly into India’s charged religious and caste politics.

The Ganges River begins in the Himalayas, roughly three hundred miles north of Delhi and five miles south of India’s border with Tibet, where it emerges from an ice cave called Gaumukh (the Cow’s Mouth) and is known as the Bhagirathi. Eleven miles downstream, gray-blue with glacial silt, it reaches the small temple town of Gangotri. Pilgrims cluster on the rocky riverbank. Some swallow mouthfuls of the icy water, which they call amrit—nectar. Women in bright saris wade out into the water, filling small plastic flasks to take home. Indians living abroad can buy a bottle of it on Amazon or on eBay for $9.99.

To hundreds of millions of Hindus, in India and around the world, the Ganges is not just a river but also a goddess, Ganga, who was brought down to Earth from her home in the Milky Way by Lord Shiva, flowing through his dreadlocks to break the force of her fall. The sixteenth-century Mogul emperor Akbar called it “the water of immortality,” and insisted on serving it at court. In 1615, Nicholas Withington, one of the earliest English travellers in India, wrote that water from the Ganges “will never stinke, though kepte never so longe, neyther will anye wormes or vermine breede therein.” The myth persists that the river has a self-purifying quality—sometimes
ascribed to sulfur springs, or to high levels of natural radioactivity in the Himalayan headwaters, or to the presence of bacteriophages, viruses that can destroy bacteria.

Below Gangotri, the river’s path is one of increasing degradation. Its banks are disfigured by small hydropower stations, some half built, and by diversion tunnels, blasted out of solid rock, that leave miles of the riverbed dry. The towering hydroelectric dam at Tehri, which began operating in 2006, releases a flood or a dribble or nothing at all, depending on the vagaries of the season and the fluctuating demands of the power grid. The first significant human pollution begins at Uttarkashi, seventy miles or so from the source of the river. Like most Indian municipalities, Uttarkashi—a grimy cement-and-cinder-block town of eighteen thousand—has no proper means of disposing of garbage. Instead, the waste is taken to an open dump site, where, after a heavy rain, it washes into the river.

A hundred and twenty miles to the south, at the ancient pilgrimage city of Haridwar, the Ganges enters the plains. This is the starting point for hundreds of miles of irrigation canals built by the British, beginning in the eighteen-forties, after a major famine. What’s left of the river is ill-equipped to cope with the pollution and inefficient use of water for irrigation farther downstream. Below its confluence with the Yamuna River, which is nearly devoid of life after passing through Delhi, the Ganges picks up the effluent from sugar refineries, distilleries, pulp and paper mills, and tanneries, as well as the contaminated agricultural runoff from the great Gangetic Plain, the rice bowl of North India, on which half a billion people depend for their survival.

By the time the river reaches the Bay of Bengal, more than fifteen hundred miles from its source, it has passed through Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna, Kolkata, a hundred smaller towns and cities, and thousands of riverside villages—all lacking sanitation. The Ganges absorbs more than a billion gallons of waste each day, three-quarters of it raw sewage and domestic waste and the rest industrial effluent, and is one of the ten most polluted rivers in the world.

Indian governments have been trying to clean up the Ganges for thirty years. Official estimates of the amount spent on this effort vary widely, from six hundred million dollars to as much as three billion dollars; every attempt has been undone by corruption and apathy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, elected in May of 2014, is the latest to try. Modi and his Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, or B.J.P., campaigned on promises of transforming India into a prosperous, vibrant modern society, a nation of bullet trains, solar farms, “smart cities,” and transparent government. Central to Modi’s vision is the Clean India Mission—Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. He insists that rapid economic development and raising millions of people out of poverty need not come at the cost of dead rivers and polluted air. So far, however, the most striking feature of his energy policy has been the rapid acceleration of coal mining and of coal-fired power plants. In many cities, the air quality is hazardous, causing half a million premature deaths each year.

Two months after Modi was elected, he announced his most ambitious cleanup initiative: Namami Gange, or Obeisance to the Ganges. As evidence of his capability, Modi points to the western state of Gujarat, where he served as Chief Minister from 2001 to 2014, presiding over impressive economic growth. The Sabarmati River, which flows through Ahmedabad, the largest
city in Gujarat, was given an elegant tree-shaded esplanade, where residents now walk their dogs and take the evening air; still, it remains one of the most polluted rivers in India.

Modi is better known for his long association with the radical fringe of Hindu nationalism than for good-government initiatives. Born into a low-caste family (his father sold tea at a railway station), he was just eight years old when he began attending meetings of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the mass organization that is the most aggressive face of Hindu-nationalist ideology. In his twenties, he became a leader of the R.S.S.’s student affiliate, and soon after he befriended another leading activist, Amit Shah, who became his most trusted aide in Gujarat.

In 1990, Modi, already recognized as a future leader of the B.J.P., was one of the main organizers of a protest pilgrimage from Gujarat to the town of Ayodhya, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. According to legend, Ayodhya was the home of the god Rama, and the protesters demanded that a Hindu temple be erected on a site occupied by a sixteenth-century mosque. In 1992, Hindu mobs converged on Ayodhya. They tore down the mosque, prompting nationwide riots, in which two thousand people died. Ten years later, when Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat, Hindu pilgrims made another visit to Ayodhya. As they were returning, Muslim mobs set their train on fire and fifty-nine people were burned alive. In reprisal, more than a thousand Muslims were killed, while the police stood by. Modi was widely accused of indifference, even of complicity, and, although he was later exonerated by the Supreme Court, he was denied a U.S. visa for a decade.

In 2014, Modi won a landslide election victory. Voters were tired of corruption, and Modi, a charismatic orator and an astute user of social media, promised to eradicate it. The business community clamored for deregulation. Young Indians were desperate for jobs. The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty had exhausted its political appeal, and its choice for prime minister, Rahul Gandhi, the grandson of Indira, was a feeble campaigner, no match for Modi’s dynamism.

For the most part, Modi did not need to appeal to Hindu-nationalist passions. But his promise to clean up the Ganges plays directly into India’s charged religious and caste politics. Two problems are paramount. One is pollution from the tannery industry, which is centered in Kanpur, roughly midway along the river, and is almost entirely Muslim-owned. The other is sewage from Varanasi, two hundred miles downstream—an ancient city, considered the spiritual center of Hinduism, where the river is effectively an open sewer. Both cities are in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which has a population of two hundred and fifteen million and is central to Indian electoral politics. It is also notorious for extreme poverty, rampant corruption, rigid caste divisions, and communal violence, in which most of the victims are Muslims. At least half the mass killings recorded in India in the past quarter century have occurred in Uttar Pradesh.

In 2014, when Modi’s ministers began to discuss the Namami Gange project, the details were vague and contradictory. Naturally, the sewers of Varanasi and the tanneries of Kanpur would receive special attention. The Ganges would become a “hub of spiritual tourism,” but there was also talk of building dams every sixty miles along the busiest stretch of the river, to facilitate the transport of heavy goods. Four battalions of soldiers would be organized into the Ganga Eco-Task Force. Local communities would join the effort.
Modi has spoken of being inspired by the transformations of the Chicago River and of the Thames, but they are barely a tenth the length of the Ganges. Restoring the Rhine, which is half the length, took almost three decades and cost forty-five billion dollars. The budget for Namami Gange is about three billion dollars over five years.

Modi announced the effort in Varanasi. Like the Ganges, Varanasi (formerly Benares) is said to be immune to degradation, although this is hard to reconcile with the physical reality of the place. The city’s labyrinthine alleys are crowded with beggars, widows, and ragged ascetics, corpse bearers and the terminally ill, cows, dogs, monkeys, and motorbikes. A mixture of ornate temples and smoke-shrouded cremation grounds, Varanasi swarms with foreigners drawn by the promise of seeing India at its most exotic—dreadlocked hippies, Israeli kids just released from military service, Japanese tour groups in white surgical masks, stolid American retirees. When I visited, last October, the garbage and the post-monsoon silt lay thick on the ghats, the four-mile stretch of steps and platforms where thousands of pilgrims come each day to take their “holy dip.” The low water at the river’s edge was a clotted soup of dead flowers, plastic bags, feces, and human ashes.

Cylindrical towers, one emblazoned with an image of Shiva, stood at intervals along the riverfront—sewage-pumping stations that are designed to protect the most sensitive expanse of the bathing ghats, from Assi Ghat, in the south, to Raj Ghat, in the north. R. K. Dwivedi, a stout, sixty-four-year-old man who was in charge of the treatment plants, told me that the pumping stations, which were built in the nineteen-seventies, had recently been upgraded. But less than a third of the sewage that is generated by the 1.5 million people of Varanasi is treated; the rest goes directly into the river.

“From Assi Ghat to Raj Ghat, you will find almost nil flow coming to Ganga,” Dwivedi said. I pointed out that the Assi River, a thirty-foot-wide drainage channel that flows into the Ganges just upstream of Assi Ghat, bypasses the pumping stations and pours raw sewage into the river. Dwivedi said that there was a comprehensive plan to install a sewerage system in the newer, northern half of Varanasi. But the engineers were still struggling with the challenge of laying sewer lines under the tortuous lanes of the old city—a problem that defied the efforts of Dwivedi’s predecessors all the way back to the days of the Raj.

The first concerted attempt to clean the Ganges began in 1986, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi launched the initial phase of what he called the Ganga Action Plan. He made the announcement on the ghats of Varanasi and focussed on the city’s sewers and the tanneries of Kanpur. The effort was haphazard. Thirty-five sewage-treatment plants were built in the three most populous states along the river—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal—but their capacity was based on the population at the time, and they quickly became obsolete. Moreover, although the central government paid for the plants, municipalities were left to operate them, and often failed to pay the wages or the electricity bills to keep them running.

In 1993, under Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, new treatment plants and other pollution-abatement projects were added on several of the river’s larger tributaries. This phase was followed by the creation, in 2009, of the National Ganga River Basin Authority, by the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. For the next two years, the cleanup was
directed by Jairam Ramesh, the environment minister. Ramesh, who is now an opposition member of Parliament, is in his early sixties, with a head of thick gray hair. In many respects, he epitomizes the old Congress Party élite that Modi detests: cosmopolitan, fluent in English, Western-educated, with graduate studies at Carnegie Mellon and M.I.T.

Ramesh told me that he had taken a more comprehensive view of the problem than his predecessors. The unfinished hydropower projects I’d seen in the Himalayas were the result of a Supreme Court decision, which he had strongly supported, to halt construction in the ecologically sensitive headwaters of the river. Ramesh also ordered that the next generation of sewage-treatment plants be based on population estimates for 2025. The central government, in addition to funding plant construction, would bear seventy per cent of the operating and management costs for five years. Several new treatment plants will become operative during Modi’s term, and he will likely take credit for them. Ramesh added that the Prime Minister’s vow to “build more toilets than temples” was his own slogan in 2011. “And Modi attacked me for it,” Ramesh said. “He is shameless.”

I asked Ramesh if he saw anything in the Namami Gange plan that was new. Only one thing, he said: the addition of Hindutva, the ideology of “Hindu-ness,” which had cursed India with a poisonous history of communal strife.

As his parliamentary constituency, Modi chose Varanasi. “I feel Ma Ganga”—Mother Ganges—“has called me to Varanasi,” he said in 2014. The idea came from Amit Shah, Modi’s campaign manager in Uttar Pradesh and former aide in Gujarat. Uttar Pradesh epitomizes the impoverished heartland of Hindu nationalism, and Shah was given the job of delivering the state to the B.J.P. He is a brilliant and ruthless strategist, and it was an ugly campaign. Modi attacked Arvind Kejriwal, his opponent in Varanasi, as “an agent of Pakistan”—an incendiary charge.

Shah, who in 2013 had reiterated the call for a Rama temple to be built on the site of the demolished mosque in Ayodhya, made no effort to court Muslim voters. Instead, he concentrated on maximizing turnout among lower-caste Hindus, deploying thousands of young R.S.S. volunteers in an unprecedented door-to-door campaign. In the end, Modi took seventy-one of Uttar Pradesh’s eighty parliamentary seats, enough to give him an absolute majority in the lower house of Parliament. Shah was appointed president of the B.J.P.

After this divisive campaign, it was noteworthy that Modi chose Uma Bharti to head a newly created Ministry of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation. Bharti is often referred to as a sadhvi, the female equivalent of a sadhu, or holy man, and has been a controversial figure throughout her career. A fiery Hindu nationalist, she was a prominent leader of the militants who tore down the mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 and still faces six criminal charges in the Uttar Pradesh courts, including for rioting, unlawful assembly, and “statements intended to cause public mischief.” In a separate case, now before the Supreme Court, she is charged with criminal conspiracy. (Such prosecutions of powerful politicians almost never result in a conviction.)

In 2004, Bharti told reporters that the demolition of what she called “the disputed structure” in Ayodhya was “a victory for the Hindu society.” Later, when an official commission of inquiry
accused her of inciting the mob violence, she denied calling for the demolition of the mosque but said, “I am not apologetic at all. I am willing to be hanged for my role.” (Neither Modi nor Bharti agreed to requests for an interview.)

The Hindu nationalists I spoke with in Varanasi—public officials, businessmen, priests, veteran R.S.S. activists—dismissed any criticism of Bharti or Modi. One evening, I climbed a steep flight of steps from the ghats to the tiny Atma Veereshwar Temple, where I met Ravindra Sand, a Saraswat Brahmin priest who is deeply engaged in the religious traditions of Varanasi and the river. He told me, “You can call Modi a rightist, a fundamentalist, an extremist, whatever you want.” What really mattered, he said, was the passion and faith Modi was bringing to the monumental challenges facing India. “He is honest like anything. He sleeps three hours a night. I pray to God for Modi to be the P.M. of India for the next decade, at least.”

When I mentioned the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya and the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, Sand looked at me as if I were missing the point. “Should I be honest?” he said. “I do not like Muslims at all.” Modi felt the same way, he added. Ayodhya was the home of Lord Rama, and the Muslims had been the initial aggressors in the Gujarat incident. “If a person can slap you once, and I reply to him with four slaps, you are going to blame me for the fighting? It is not correct. I am sorry to say, these Muslims are not at all comfortable anywhere.”

Such views are expressed openly by mainstream B.J.P. supporters in Uttar Pradesh. “Modi is a devotee—he is determined,” Ramgopal Mohley, the mayor of Varanasi, told me. Namami Gange would leave the ghats spotless; garbage would be trucked to a new waste-to-energy plant; discarded flowers from the cremation grounds would be turned into incense. Like Modi, Mohley had travelled to Japan to scout out ideas in Kyoto, which is home to seventeen UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Like Varanasi, he said, “Kyoto is also a city of narrow lanes and temples. Under their lanes, there are subway lines. Over the lanes, there are flyovers.” He conceded that Varanasi had more lanes and more temples—and, of course, India is not Japan.

I asked Mohley what he thought of Uma Bharti’s appointment. “Everyone loves Uma Bharti,” he said. He declined to say whether Muslims might feel differently, steering the conversation back toward Bharti’s plans for the river. “By October of 2016, you will start seeing the cleanliness, up to twenty per cent. In another year, by 2017, you will start seeing the real cleaning.”

“Umaji,” he added, using the Hindi honorific, “has said that if Ganga is not cleaned in three years’ time she might undertake samadhi.” Samadhi is commonly defined as a state of deep, spiritual concentration, leading to a sense of oneness with the universe. For some ascetics, my translator added, it involved climbing into a ditch and burying oneself alive.

The next state-government elections in Uttar Pradesh will take place in mid-2017. Modi’s national victory gave him control of the lower house of Parliament, but he does not control the upper house, which is largely elected by state legislatures. Uttar Pradesh is currently ruled by the Samajwadi Party, which has heavy Muslim support.

Modi and Amit Shah launched the campaign on June 13th in Allahabad, at the sacred confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna. The preceding weeks had seen a series of violent skirmishes in
the town of Kairana, in western Uttar Pradesh, which evoked unsettling memories of India’s last serious outbreak of communal violence, in 2013. Sixty-five people died on that occasion, and thousands of Muslims sought refuge in Kairana. Now the B.J.P.’s member of Parliament for Kairana claimed that hundreds of Hindus had fled, fearing for their lives. The charge was subsequently discredited, but Shah seized on it in his speech in Allahabad, warning of a mass exodus of Hindus if the Samajwadi Party retained power.

Three weeks later, on July 5th, Modi appointed three new ministers from Uttar Pradesh to his cabinet, a move generally interpreted as an appeal to caste-based voting blocs in next year’s elections. One is a Brahmin, one a member of the “other backward castes,” and the third a dalit (the term that has replaced “untouchable”).

Kanpur, with a population of more than three million, is the largest city in Uttar Pradesh and a microcosm of everything that ails urban India. The British once called it “the Manchester of the East,” for its booming textile mills, but these have gone into steady decline, replaced by tanneries, one of the most polluting industries in the world. As in Varanasi, about a fifth of Kanpur’s population is Muslim, but Muslims wield greater political influence here, because the city’s tanneries, nearly all Muslim-owned, bring in more than a billion dollars a year in export earnings.

One muggy afternoon in Kanpur, I went down to the Massacre Ghat, which is named for three hundred British women and children who were killed there in 1857, during a rebellion against the reign of the British East India Company, referred to locally as the First War of Independence. The river was a hundred yards from the steps, across a bleak expanse of silt. Raw sewage leaked onto the beach from a drainage channel. Cut off from the river, it had collected in a stagnant, bubbling pool. Groups of children were playing in the shallows of the river, and women clustered in circles at the water’s edge, preparing offerings of coconuts, fruit, and marigold garlands.

Kanpur has four hundred and two registered tanneries, which discharge more than two-thirds of their waste into the river. Most are immediately downstream from the Massacre Ghat, in a Muslim neighborhood called Jajmau. In deference to Hindu sensitivities, the slaughter of cows is illegal in Uttar Pradesh. Most of the hides that reach Kanpur’s tanneries are from water buffalo; the small number of cowhides are either imported or the result of natural death or roadkill.

Tannery owners in both the poorest and the most lucrative parts of the industry complained bitterly to me that they had been singled out for persecution because they were Muslim. “From the government side, there is nothing but trouble,” Hafizurrahman, the owner of the small Hafizurrahman Tannery, in Jajmau, told me. Hafizurrahman, who goes by only one name, has been the president of the Small Tanners Association since 1987; his tannery works with offcuts that are rejected by larger enterprises. A soft-spoken elderly man with a white beard and a suède porkpie hat, he works out of a windowless shed with rough plaster walls. When I met him, flop-eared goats and quarrelsome geese were rooting around on the floor, and the yard was strewn with pieces of dried rawhide that would be turned into chew toys for dogs. A skinny teen-age boy, bare to the waist and glistening with sweat, squelched around in a brick-lined pit, sorting
pieces of “wet blue,” tinged that color from processing with highly toxic chromium salts, which leaves the leather more supple than the older, vegetable-processing method.

Hafizurrahman conceded that the tanneries do foul the Ganges, but said that the real culprits are corrupt state and city authorities. In 1994, when the city government opened a central plant to treat the tannery waste, tannery owners had to contribute part of the cost. Then the construction budget tripled and, with it, their contribution. “There were only a hundred and seventy-five tanneries at that time,” he said. “But then another two hundred and twenty-seven came up—and the government asked them to pay again. But it never upgraded the plant. They just took the money.”

In 2014, the Council on Foreign Relations named India’s judiciary, police, and political parties the three most corrupt institutions in the country. Local officials commonly skim off a substantial percentage of the fee paid to private contractors working on public-service projects, such as water supply, electricity, and sewage treatment. “It’s almost legal,” Rakesh Jaiswal, the head of EcoFriends, a small environmental group in Kanpur, said. “If it’s thirty or forty per cent, it’s not corruption—it’s more like a right. Sometimes all the money is pocketed by the authorities, a hundred per cent, and the work takes place only on paper.” I asked if things had improved under Modi, and he shook his head. “Not even one per cent has changed,” he said.

Taj Alam, the president of the Uttar Pradesh Leather Industry Association, had another complaint. Alam’s tannery, Kings International, makes high-end saddlery for export; situated in Unnao, a small town a dozen miles from Kanpur, it is surrounded by manicured gardens and walls draped with bougainvillea. In his ornate, air-conditioned office, Alam noted that the government shuts down the tanneries each year, sometimes for several weeks, to avoid polluting the river during India’s greatest religious celebration, the Hindu bathing festival at Allahabad, a hundred and thirty miles downstream. This costs the industry tens of millions of dollars, Alam said. “But you have ten million people shitting in the river, urinating there, throwing stuff on the ghats. The tanning sector is maybe 99.99 per cent Muslim. Tell me, has the government imposed any treatment-plant order on any other industry?”

Alam told me that he was worried about next year’s state elections. “If there’s a B.J.P. state government, they can do whatever they want,” he said. “When someone has an absolute majority, it can be misused. And it is being misused.”

Cleaning up the tanneries of Kanpur has proved just as intractable a problem as cleaning up the sewers of Varanasi. I spent a day in the tannery district with Rakesh Jaiswal, the head of EcoFriends, touring the evidence. Jaiswal, who founded the organization in 1993, is in his late fifties, and has silvery hair and a courtly manner. We stopped at a cleared plot of land about a quarter of a mile from the river, where the detritus of the leather industry was heaped in large piles. Some were offcuts of wet blue. Others were made up of scraps of hide with hair and bits of flesh still attached, surrounded by clouds of buzzing flies. A laborer was hacking at the muck with a three-tined pitchfork. When he was done, it would be sold to make chicken feed and glue. Nearby, an open drain carried a stream of tannery waste down a gentle slope to the Ganges. The odor suggested a mixture of decomposing animal matter, battery acid, and burned hair.
In 1998, Jaiswal brought a lawsuit against the central government and a number of polluting industries, and a hundred and twenty-seven tanneries were closed. Many were allowed to reopen after installing a primary-treatment plant, but Jaiswal told me that the levels of chromium pollution in tannery wastewater were still as much as eighty times above the legal limit, suggesting that the plant owners were not spending the money to operate them, and that the new regulations were only spottily enforced. From the tanneries, the wastewater is pumped to a central treatment facility, which was built in 1994. At the plant, sewage and tannery waste are combined in a ratio of three to one. After treatment, the mixture is used for irrigation. The plant handles nine million litres of tannery waste a day, barely a third of what the industry generates. When I asked the project engineer why the plant had never been upgraded, he shrugged.

Later, I drove with Jaiswal to the outskirts of Kanpur, to see the irrigation canal. It ran along an elevated berm where workers had spread out hides to dry in the sun. The treated mixture of sewage and tannery waste came gushing out of two rusted outflow pipes and made its way down the canal at a fair clip. In 1999, Jaiswal conducted a study of contamination in the villages that were using this water for irrigation; his samples revealed dangerous levels of chromium in agricultural produce and in milk. I asked Jaiswal if the situation had improved since then. “The quality of the water is the same,” he said.

The success of Modi’s cleanup effort will ultimately depend not on Uma Bharti, or even on Modi, but on less visible bureaucrats such as Shashi Shekhar, the water-resources secretary in Bharti’s ministry, who is charged with carrying out Namami Gange. Shekhar, who is in his late fifties, was trained as an earth scientist. Before assuming his current post, last year, he was the head of the Central Pollution Control Board, a national agency that is respected for its professionalism but is frequently unable to enforce the standards that it sets, because the state-level agencies responsible for meeting them are typically corrupt or incompetent.

When I went to see Shekhar in his office in New Delhi last fall, he walked me through a PowerPoint presentation that he was about to deliver to the cabinet. It served as a reminder that Modi is not only an ideologue but a demanding chief executive. In 2015, India recorded a growth rate of 7.5 per cent, overtaking China. In September, during a weekend visit to Silicon Valley, Modi won commitments from the C.E.O.s of Google and Microsoft—Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella, respectively, both Indian-born—to help bring Internet access to villages and to install high-speed Wi-Fi in the country’s railway stations. (India has the world’s second-largest Internet market but the slowest average connection speeds in Asia.) He has also introduced programs designed to make the government more accountable to the public, such as PRAGATI, a videoconference platform where Modi grills government officials on citizens’ complaints about bureaucracy, corruption, delays in executing public-works projects, and other issues.

“The P.M. is very particular about making the system efficient, accountable, and sustainable,” Shekhar said. He acknowledged that the cleanup campaign had got off to a slow start, but said that his ministry was setting a series of deadlines that would soon begin to show tangible results. He had been in Kanpur just after I left, and he said there was now a more coherent plan for cleaning up the city’s tanning industry. This included an order that each tannery install sensors to measure its discharge. Several lawsuits are also under way, including one before the Supreme
Court, that could close down tanneries that exceed official pollution limits—although, as Rakesh Jaiswal noted, this has been done before, to little lasting effect.

Shekhar had also proposed a “paradigm shift” in the approach to sewage treatment. Despite the efforts of the previous government, sixty per cent of the treatment plants along the river were still either shut down or not operating to capacity, and ninety per cent failed to meet prescribed standards. Too much responsibility remained in the hands of corrupt local officials and contractors. Now the contractors would be paid only after they’d done the work. Otherwise, Shekhar said, “we found that the fellow does not put his skin into it.”

Major corporations had agreed to clean the surface of the river with trash-skimming machines and booms. The Tata Group, India’s largest conglomerate, would take on the stretch of river in Varanasi. Shekhar also planned to build communal toilets in some of the poorest riverside villages. Women were especially keen on this idea, he said, since, for privacy, they customarily go out into the fields in the pre-dawn dark or after the evening meal, when they are vulnerable to snakebite and sexual assault.

Some elements of the cleanup shouldn’t be difficult to execute. Sewage-treatment plants that are already under construction will be completed. Recently, Shekhar e-mailed me to say that work on cleaning the ghats in Varanasi, Kanpur, and Allahabad had begun on schedule; for a company with Tata’s resources, this is not a particularly challenging assignment. Shekhar also said that the government had spelled out the terms of what it called a “hybrid annuity” plan for payments to contractors working on the new sewage-treatment plants and other public-works projects. But will tinkering with financial incentives truly reduce bureaucracy and corruption, especially in parts of the country where state authorities aren’t under the control of Modi’s political party?

Modi’s greatest asset may be his conviction that he can inspire change through sheer dynamism. But this may also be his biggest liability. “The expectation is so huge,” Shekhar said. “Even bureaucrats have the perception of him as Superman.”

Shekhar acknowledged that Namami Gange would not fully restore the river. The hydropower dam at Tehri would remain, as would the nineteenth-century diversion canals. In lower stretches of the river, where the flow is already severely depleted, it will take decades to address the inefficient use of water for irrigation. Even so, he said, “never in the past has a government initiated a project of this magnitude. I am putting myself under great pressure as far as targets are concerned. But if you do not see high, you do not reach midway.”

Early one morning in Varanasi, I went down to Assi Ghat to meet Navneet Raman, the chairman of the Benares Cultural Foundation and the scion of a family that traces its ancestry back to the finance minister of a sixteenth-century Afghan king. Raman is an environmentalist on a modest scale, planting trees and offering to compost the flowers left by worshippers at the Golden Temple, the most important temple in the city—an offer that the priests had declined.

We hailed a boatman to row us across to the east bank of the Ganges. It is considered to be an inauspicious place; anyone unlucky enough to die there will be reincarnated as an ass. As we pulled away from the steps, the rising sun flooded the curving waterfront of ghats, temples, and
palaces. When we arrived at the other side, Raman reached into a bag and scooped out a handful of shiny purple seeds the size of pistachios. They were seeds of the tropical almond, *Terminalia catappa*, and would grow into what is known locally as “the sewage tree,” because it can filter heavy metals and other pollutants out of standing water. We walked along a narrow strip of scrubland, above the flood line, scattering the seeds left and right.

“Most people come to Benares to pay last respects to the memory of their near and dear ones who have passed away,” Raman said. “So I thought that on this bank of the river we could make a forest of remembrance. This is my guerilla warfare. I am not doing it for Mr. Modi.” Raman imagined leafy gardens and walkways, and benches where families could sit and look across the river at the beauty of the temples and the ghats. But he acknowledged that this vision lay far in the future.

I asked him if he ever grew discouraged by the slow pace of change. He shrugged and said that all he could do was place his trust in Shiva. “India is a land of discouragement,” he said. “If you’re not discouraged by the harsh summers, then you are discouraged by the cow eating your plant, or the motorbike or tractor or car that is running over your plant, or the neighbor who is plucking the leaves from it just for fun as he is going by. If you can’t deal with discouragement, India has no place for you.”

*Reporting for this piece was facilitated by a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.*

George Black is writing a book on the history and the culture of the Ganges.

*This article appears in other versions of the July 25, 2016, issue, with the headline “Purifying the Goddess.”*


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**July 28, 2016**

**Living Green**

By Kathryn McKenzie, Living Green
Santa Cruz Sentinel

*Monterey Bishop Richard J. Garcia in June wrote a letter to priests and deacons within the Diocese of Monterey, calling on the 34 churches within the diocese to live the words set down by Pope Francis, above, whose 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*, urges humankind to act now to save the earth.*

The latest group to rally for green living may be surprising to you but makes perfect sense when you look at the big picture.
Catholic churches throughout Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties are now rallying against climate change, and have joined hands with an environmental nonprofit to reduce their parishes’ carbon footprints.

This past June, Bishop Richard J. Garcia wrote a letter to priests and deacons within the Diocese of Monterey, calling on the 34 churches within the diocese to live the words set down by Pope Francis, whose 2015 encyclical, Laudato Si, urges humankind to act now to save the earth.

Pope Francis’s revolutionary encyclical acknowledged that global warming and climate change are real, and that humans are the cause. He also asserted that the poor are already suffering the most from the impacts of climate change, making this not just an environmental issue, but “an issue of justice,” writes Garcia.

The diocese launched its church-based environmental program two weeks ago with a gathering of church leaders, who were introduced to the Romero Institute, a faith-based nonprofit law and policy center that is the diocese’s partner in this venture. The Santa Cruz-based Romero Institute is on the steering committee of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the group that was instrumental in getting 1.8 million signatures, including the pope’s, to the Paris climate change talks last year.

Green Power, a subsidiary of the Romero Institute, is working with local Catholic churches to train and advise parish Green Teams on steps they can take to reduce their parish’s carbon footprint.

Deacon Warren Hoy, director of family life and social justice ministries for the Monterey Diocese, says the recent gathering gave church leaders the tools they need to fight climate change.

“We’re very excited about partnering with the Romero Institute’s Green Power team to help ‘green’ our church,” said Hoy. “The July 17 gathering at Resurrection Church in Aptos is a direct response to Pope Francis’ call to love and care for our planetary home.”

Parishioners and the parishes alike will be aided in lowering their electricity consumption, living more simply and sustainably, and moving toward the use of renewable energy, Garcia writes: “Lowering carbon levels is now imperative to protect the earth.”

After a parish has reduced its power usage, Green Power will help guide the parish toward use of renewable energy sources like solar power. Parishioners will be able to learn about Community Choice Energy, a locally controlled alternative to the monopoly utility model for counties and cities to provide electricity to their citizens.

Monterey Bay Community Power is the consortium of county and city officials spearheading the creation of a Monterey region community choice program, which could begin serving up to 21 municipalities by summer 2017. An outreach partner of MBCP, Green Power is working with the diocese to educate Catholics about Community Choice.
Given that nearly 32 percent of citizens living in the tri-county region are Catholic, Daniel Sheehan, president of Green Power and the Romero Institute, is hopeful that the collaboration with the diocese will substantially lower greenhouse gas emissions.

“The Diocese of Monterey is taking a major step forward by engaging both the lifestyle and policy fronts of the climate problem,” says Sheehan. “Parishes going green and educating Catholics about Community Choice Energy is a sophisticated, bold way to mitigate global warming.”

http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/environment-and-nature/20160728/living-green

July 30, 2016

Vatican Gardens’ gruesome past grows into green haven

By Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

Vatican City -- Today's lush and immaculately manicured Vatican Gardens were once just a sprawl of mosquito-infested swamps, clay hillsides and hardy grape vines.

The wild, unpopulated landscape on the fringes of early Rome slowly shifted as it changed to accommodate historical events over the course of 2,000 years: the martyrdom and burial of St. Peter; the blossoming of Christianity; the growth of papal power; and the eventual establishment of the world's smallest sovereign nation.

The gardens make up almost half of Vatican City State's 109 acres and their colorful evolution is documented in a newly updated volume: A Guide to the Vatican Gardens: History, Art, Nature, curated by historians and experts from the Vatican Library and Vatican Museums. Illustrated with full-color photographs and historic black and white engravings, the book has been translated into English.

In the first century AD, the Roman Emperor Caligula set up a circus for chariot racing near a villa his mother, Agrippina, had built in the area, which was still far on the outskirts of ancient Rome. Shipping over a red granite obelisk from Egypt, he decorated the circus with the monument, which now stands in the center of St. Peter's Square.

Emperor Nero expanded the circus, using it to showcase his cruelty against Christians like burning them alive to light his evening parties on the hill's gardens and crucifying others, like St. Peter, who was then buried in a roadside cemetery nearby.

As the apostle's tomb became a place of worship, the "circus fell into disrepair, Agrippina's villa decayed and the uninhabited hill returned to wild scrub," wrote the book's co-author, Ambrogio Piazzoni, vice prefect of the Vatican Library.
After Emperor Constantine converted and granted Christians the freedom to practice their faith, he ordered the construction of the first basilica dedicated to St. Peter, which meant razing part of the hill and covering over part of the cemetery.

A few small buildings were constructed nearby over the next four centuries including a monastery, but the popes -- the successors of Peter -- didn't start living in this "rustic and unprotected location" by the basilica until the fifth century, Piazzoni wrote.

With the Saracen Raid in 846, Pope Leo IV constructed a fortressed wall to defend the Vatican area from marauders. Inside the walls, there were meadows, vegetable gardens, orchards and vineyards while outside -- which is part of today's gardens -- were more pastures and woods.

Once popes started residing permanently at the Vatican, they added their own personal touches to the vast expanse of greenery surrounding them.

Pope Nicholas IV had his doctor, Simon of Genoa, cultivate medicinal plants and aromatic herbs in the tradition of the Benedictine monks, who were known for creating treatments for illnesses and distilled liqueurs and tinctures.

This 13th-century papal initiative was to become the oldest botanical garden in Italy and marked the beginning of the formal scientific study of botany as a branch of medicine, "predating by centuries the teaching of botany" in academies and universities, Piazzoni wrote.

Pope Pius V made sure the medicinal plant studies continued in the 16th-century by hiring a Tuscan botanist and geologist to take care of the gardens. The pope gave him the title of "medicinal plant expert of Our Lord" and furnished him with a "safe conduct pass" allowing him to travel anywhere in search of rare plants.

The Vatican medicinal garden gradually lost importance -- becoming a humble lawn -- after Pope Alexander VII built a newer and larger botanical garden, which is still one of the largest in Italy, along the Janiculum hill in 1660. The Vatican lost that and many other properties after the loss of the Papal States in 1870.

Given the variety of habitat and papal proclivities at the time, the Vatican Gardens were also home to a menagerie of wild animals including the brief upkeep of a leopard during the pontificate of Boniface VIII in the 13th century and Hanno, the elephant, which was a gift to Pope Leo X from Portugal's king in 1514.

Pope Pius XII found an injured finch in the Vatican Gardens and nursed her back to health. "Gretchen," the finch, would keep the pope company and sit on his shoulder at mealtime while hopping down to peck at crumbs.

Today, green parrots nesting in palm trees and a small sampling of cats are the only free-range fauna easily sighted in the Vatican Gardens.
The gardens went largely unchanged from its Renaissance heyday at the end of the 1500s to the end of the 1900s, primarily, Piazzoni wrote, because the popes had moved their main residence to the Quirinale Palace -- judging it to be "more comfortable, functional and situated in a sunny and healthy place."

Despite the disuse, the gardens were still cared for and embellished with additional fountains, shrines, statues and exotic or rare plant life.

With the end of the Papal States, the pope moved back to the papal residence at the Vatican.

Being largely confined to the small property, Pope Leo XIII spent a lot of time caring for the gardens and pursuing his love for hunting and viniculture. He reportedly tended his small vineyard himself, hoeing out the weeds, and visiting often for moments of prayer and writing poetry. He had a papal guard on duty with orders to shoot to scare off birds threatening his grape harvest.

Modern-day popes still use the gardens for exercise, restful relaxation and meditation. Retired Pope Benedict XVI takes his daily walk there, praying the rosary along the wooded paths.

Not just for popes anymore, the gardens were opened to the public several years ago as part of an organized tour either on foot or on an environmentally friendly open bus.

The tours highlight the gardens' blend of art, nature and faith, but also help visitors sense what the book describes as the harmonious co-existence of so many species of flora and fauna, which "reinforce the ideals that constitute the universal mission of this extraordinary place" -- the love and care for God's creation.


July 30, 2016

John Ahni Schertow shines a spotlight on indigenous resistance

By Stephyn Quirke
Street Roots News

Indigenous peoples’ struggles go unseen by much of the world. IC Magazine's editor is working to change that.

On June 30, Carol Linnitt of the online news magazine DeSmog Canada reported that a controversial crude oil pipeline had just been defeated in British Columbia, writing “Enbridge Northern Gateway: ‘First Nations Save Us Again.’”
Linnitt’s observations on First Nations apply with equal force south of the border:

“That these unique traditional cultures and ways of life have survived the onslaught of Western, industrial, imperial and racist governments and policies in this province is extraordinary.

“That these communities, these individuals, have preserved a cherished, land-based way of life that seems in part the antidote to the poisonous, destructive and extractive impulse of modernity — all while fighting precedent-setting court cases to maintain their right to that life — is extraordinary.”

And the victories of these land-based communities do not end with the Northern Gateway pipeline.

A proposal for the largest coal export terminal in the U.S. was soundly defeated by the Lummi Nation in May. The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission stopped another proposed coal export terminal in Boardman, Ore., in 2014. In 2013, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla stopped massive tar sands “megaload” trucks from crossing their territory en route to mine the Alberta tar sands – the most destructive industrial project on Earth. And since June, the Yakama Nation has led a local response to the fiery oil train derailment in Mosier, Ore.; in a June 9 news conference, Chairman JoDe Goudy called for a moratorium on all fossil fuel shipments in the Columbia River Gorge.

Combine all that with their decades-long fight to protect and restore salmon habitat, and it quickly becomes clear that the original peoples of the Northwest have always fought hard to protect it. This same dynamic holds true across the globe: indigenous nations everywhere are on the front lines of struggles to protect the environment, constantly facing down threats to their food and water, even when their lives are being threatened.

Many of these struggles go unseen by urban populations in the First World. But some are working tirelessly to change that.

John Ahni Schertow is a Two-Spirit of Haudenosaunee and European descent. Two Spirit is the term used to describe mix-gender members of indigenous North American communities. Twelve years ago, Schertow founded Intercontinental Cry, or IC, as a website to share information on indigenous struggles across the globe. Today, the independent, investigative news magazine boasts almost 30,000 regular online followers, a print magazine edition, and a sponsorship from the Center for World Indigenous Studies.

In 2012, IC published a piece by Kahnawake-based Mohawk writer Russell Diabo that helped launch the Idle No More movement. Its recent coverage has included logging blockades in southern Oregon’s Klamath territory and indigenous women fighting fracking in Argentina. Altogether, the network covers the frontline struggles of more than 630 indigenous nations worldwide.
Street Roots contacted chief editor Schertow to learn about the future of IC, what stories need to be covered, and how news organizations can better serve indigenous nations – now numbering more than 5,000.

**Stephen Quirke:** Your journalists often seem to cover conflict situations. Is this dangerous work?

**John Schertow:** It’s life and death. When a journalist enters a conflict zone, they instantly become a target, and so they have to be extremely careful on the ground and on the internet. It’s even more risky for our contributors because we don’t have the funds to support them. Earlier this year, one of our writers was raped while out in the field, and we couldn’t do a thing to support her.

**S.Q.:** You’re currently collaborating with the Indigenous Environmental Network on a project called Keep It in the Ground. What’s the goal of this project? How do you approach this kind of collaboration?

**J.S.:** Keep It in the Ground is a pretty decentralized movement that’s open to anyone who supports the idea that when the cost of extraction outweighs the supposed benefits, the resources need to be left alone. Our collaboration with IEN focuses on making sure that the needs, rights and voices of indigenous peoples who are taking a stand against extraction aren’t being completely drowned out by narratives that non-indigenous groups are pushing forward. Neither of us have collaborated on a project like this before, so we’re pretty much making it up as we go along, telling stories that need to be told, filling in holes that other media outlets don’t notice, and making videos so we can ensure that the public gets the full picture.

**S.Q.:** How would you evaluate global efforts to address climate change? Are we making headway?

**J.S.:** It really depends on what you mean by “we.” REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degredation), the carbon market mechanism that the U.N. is pushing forward, is completely useless. In point of fact, it’s a Ponzi scheme that states, corporations, investment banks and U.N.-recognized nonprofits are using to make some serious coin at the expense of indigenous rights and the environment. In Panama, for example, the Honduran company Genisa is being awarded a bunch of “carbon credits” for constructing a new hydro-dam on the Tabasara River, within the traditional territory of the Ngabe-Bugle Peoples. The Ngabe are literally being drowned out of their land; they’re losing everything so that some other company can “spend” those carbon credits. And for what? It’s well known that hydro-dams drive climate change and cause excessive levels of methylmercury to collect in the flood area, which is a huge threat to the entire region. In other words, they’re making climate change worse. There’s a good documentary called “The Carbon Rush” that looks closer at this.

Global civil society is doing what it can to mitigate this abusive exploitation of climate change – and locally, there are a lot of fantastic projects led by eco-villages and by indigenous communities that aim to be carbon neutral and carbon negative. Some states like Germany are also making great strides to get away from the fossil fuel industry, the single greatest climate
change driver, but it’s one step forward, five steps back at this point, especially now that so many big NGOs are compromising themselves to collaborate with states and corporations.

S.Q.: How do you see the role of indigenous nations in stabilizing the climate and winding down resource extraction?

J.S.: Indigenous nations are primary stakeholders in every sense. Even though they contribute the least to climate change, they are being hit the hardest by it. Many coastal communities are already being displaced because of rising ocean levels. More inland rivers and lakes are disappearing, fish populations are dying off, and weather patterns are gradually becoming more extreme. It’s the same thing with resource extraction. Indigenous lands, cultures and economies are being obliterated. And what do they get out of it? A few short-term jobs, a new sportsplex, and 10,000 years of pollution.

Indigenous peoples are the frontline of the environmental movement. It is imperative that we start recognizing this. But beyond these impacts lies the fact that indigenous peoples are a political powerhouse that states and corporations can’t conquer, even at the point of a gun. Former Peruvian President Alan Garcia learned that the hard way in 2009 when he tried to push through legislation that would open up legally protected indigenous lands to industry. More than 2,000 indigenous communities organized a “minga,” a permanent collective mobilization for the greater good. When all was said and done, the offending laws were tossed out and Garcia retired in disgrace. That’s just one among thousands of other environmental wins that were only possible because indigenous peoples were front and center. Indigenous peoples are the frontline of the environmental movement. It is imperative that we start recognizing this.

S.Q.: Have states been willing to take leadership from indigenous nations? Are there any success stories here?

J.S.: Not on the international level. Indigenous nations are being completely ignored, unless, like many NGOs, they’re willing to go along with the interests of states and corporations. But on the state level, there are some positive moves. The U.S. government, for example, worked with the Lower Elwha Klallam Nation to remove hydro-dams on their ancestral territory, and there are a lot of new tribal parks popping up in Canada and Australia. It’s a good start, but we really need more moves like this.

S.Q.: This past June, you published a story from Elizabeth Walsh titled “To Combat Climate Change, Restore Land Ownership to Indigenous Peoples.” Can you briefly summarize her argument for our readers?

J.S.: Elizabeth’s central point was that indigenous peoples are, by and large, better environmental stewards than states and corporations, a point that’s made evident by the fact that indigenous peoples are currently protecting 95 percent of the world’s most threatened biodiversity. She also argued – and rightly so – that indigenous rights are more effective at protecting the environment than any environmental policies and laws that states push forward. On top of that, indigenous peoples are much stronger politically than non-governmental
organizations. They can protect their rights far better than any NGO, even if that nation’s land rights aren’t officially recognized.

**S.Q.:** Walsh also mentions the concept of bio-cultural rights, which IC covered last September. Do you think this framework can help civil society to appreciate and safeguard indigenous rights?

**J.S.:** Without question. And that’s why the concept of bio-cultural rights is finally starting to get some serious attention. Right now we tend to look at indigenous rights as lesser-human rights. They’re individual objects in a controlled political landscape that, like human rights, states can push, pull, erase, ignore, and turn inside out to suit their agendas. However, bio-cultural rights are an ecosystem of rights that ties indigenous cultures, identities, languages and subsistence economies—indigenous rights—to the very lands that all indigenous nations depend on. In this framework, you can’t remove or erase any one right because it would have a cascade effect that could even cause that ecosystem to collapse. This is why so many indigenous nations oppose resource extraction. As the old saying goes, without the land there is no people; when the people suffer, that land also suffers; and when the people thrive, the land thrives with them. Incidentally, this is also why so many mining companies are forced to call off their government-sanctioned resource raids. The ecosystem collapse we’re talking about here is tantamount to genocide.

**S.Q.:** You’ve recently called on media outlets to use “triage” in choosing stories so that our most vulnerable populations are not ignored while editors pursue entertainment stories. Why is this important? How does IC engage in this process?

**J.S.:** Great question. When we get right down to it, a lot of us take journalism for granted. For many journalists, for example, it’s just a job or a weekend hobby. And we don’t really have any guidelines or any regard for priorities when it comes to the stories we choose to take on. We’re driven by passions and paychecks. And for a variety of different reasons, that driving force never seems to include indigenous peoples like the Ngabe, who are struggling for their lives. Editors don’t usually care either. They would rather cover Trump or anything else that’s trending so they can build their readership or generate more ad revenue.

It’s embarrassing and shameful to me. Hobby or no, journalists are public servants who have a direct impact on the places, the events and the people they cover in their stories. For that reason, I believe we have an ethical responsibility to tell the stories that need to be told, regardless of our opinions and preferences. IC operates on this principle. Before we take something on, we consider how many times the story has been covered and what the quality of that coverage is. We investigate whether or not there is a threat—and if there is, we explore the depth of that threat and how we might be able to support the best possible outcome. We break it all down, and if in the end we find a space to contribute something meaningful and authentic, we get to work.

**S.Q.:** Are indigenous peoples harmed by a lack of fair media coverage?

**J.S.:** To be blunt, yes. As the old saying goes, “Silence equals consent.” By failing to cover the abuses that indigenous peoples face, the media is lending support to the perpetrators behind those abuses. They’re also preventing indigenous peoples from developing a capacity to effectively
organize around threats, and they’re obstructing our right to know about those threats. If that’s not bad enough, the media’s negligence perpetuates prevailing stereotypes surrounding indigenous peoples, especially given the amount of racism that editors push out online and in print.

**S.Q.: What can be done to resolve this?**

**J.S.:** There’s no easy solution to this unfortunately. I mean, we could physically occupy the media – including alternative media – until they agree to a set of terms that could include, for example, a “minimum coverage standard,” but beyond that, we really just have to start demanding better of our favorite news outlets. We also need to start leading by example, which is exactly what we’re trying to do through IC Magazine.

**S.Q.:** According to Global Witness, 2015 was the deadliest year on record for environmental defenders. How does IC bring attention to this violence? What is driving it?

**J.S.:** You might say that we’re in the middle of a psychotic fire sale. Everything must go before it’s gone. And, if someone’s getting in the way of that glorious mission to get that gold or that oil or that molybdenum, well, they need to be neutralized. That’s pretty much all there is to it.

Our own resources are extremely limited, so we can’t do as much as we should be doing, but we’re telling every story that we can with the goal of educating the public and providing journalistic support to the frontlines that others ignore. Somebody’s gotta do it.

**S.Q.:** What can people do to help?

Clicking “like” on Facebook or signing an online petition, while admirable, doesn’t accomplish anything on the ground. We need to go to protests, volunteer our time, donate strategically – when we can afford to donate – to those who need it, host film screenings, start our own debate clubs, confront racism when we encounter it, and do anything else that might make a real difference in the world. **J.S.:** Aside from educating ourselves, it would be great if we all became more active in our own communities and in solidarity with all indigenous peoples. Clicking “like” on Facebook or signing an online petition, while admirable, doesn’t accomplish anything on the ground. We need to go to protests, volunteer our time, donate strategically – when we can afford to donate – to those who need it, host film screenings, start our own debate clubs, confront racism when we encounter it, and do anything else that might make a real difference in the world.

**S.Q.:** What are some of the challenges at IC?

**J.S.:** Funding has been a massive challenge for us. Despite the fact that we run circles around many other media outlets in terms of scope, we’ve never been able to secure a single grant or get support from any private foundation in Canada or the U.S. We’ve also had a big problem finding trustworthy volunteers to help share the burden, so to speak. Plus, journalists aren’t usually willing to work for free, so we’re forced to skip a lot of important stories.
S.Q.: Are you currently recruiting more writers? Where do you need them the most?

J.S.: We’re always looking for more writers, no matter where they are in the world. They just have to be cool with the fact that we are not your average media outlet. We are ethical to the core, we deeply respect those we work with, we don’t abuse words and we don’t compromise.

S.Q.: What’s next for IC?

J.S.: We’ve got tons of great stuff going on. We’re working with the Indigenous Governance Program (IGOV) at the University of Victoria to publish a magazine called “Everyday Acts of Resurgence.” We’re developing an online cultural exchange to support indigenous youth on reserve. We’re designing an online “indigenous journalism” course and an “ethical journalist” checklist. We’re also searching frantically for operational funds so that we can carry this work forward, start paying our staff, expand our coverage and fairly compensate our contributors. We got a lot of work ahead of us.


August 2016

A successful provocation for a pluralistic global society

The encyclical Laudato Si’ – A Magna Carta of integral ecology as a reaction to humanity’s self-destructive course

By Christoph Bals
Germanwatch


August 2016

Liberation Ecology: Interview with Leonardo Boff

Great Transition Initiative

Theology can play a central role in defining the moral fiber of a society, including its commitment to poverty alleviation and stewardship of Earth. Allen White, Senior Fellow at Tellus Institute, talks with Leonardo Boff, a founder of liberation theology, about the origins of the movement and the vital connections between ecology and social justice.

Half a century ago, you were among a small group of theologians who were instrumental in conceptualizing liberation theology. What spurred this synthesis of thought and action that challenged the orthodoxy of both Church and State?
Liberation theology is not a discipline. It is a different way of practicing theology. It does not start from existing theological traditions and then focus on the poor and excluded populations of society. Its core is the struggle of the poor to free themselves from the conditions of poverty. Liberation theology does not seek to act for the poor via welfarism or paternalism. Instead, it seeks to act with the poor to tap their wisdom in changing their life and livelihood.

How, then, do we act with them? By seeing the poor and oppressed through their own eyes, not with those of an outsider. We must discover and understand their values, such as solidarity and the joy of living, which to some extent have been lost by society’s privileged. Some of those who subscribe to liberation theology choose to live like the poor, sharing life in the slums and participating in residents’ organizations and projects. This method can be described as “see, judge, act, and celebrate.” Seeing the reality of the poor firsthand awakens an outsider to the inadequacy of his perceptions and doctrines for judging it and how to change it. This occurs in two ways: first, through understanding the mechanisms that generate poverty and, second, by awakening to the fact that poverty and oppression contradict God’s plan and that actions must thus be taken to eliminate them.

**How does this understanding and awakening manifest itself?**

Following understanding and awakening is action: How can we work with the poor to end oppression and achieve social justice? The opposite of poverty is not wealth but justice. This commitment to action spurred the birth of thousands of ecclesiastical communities, Bible circles, and centers for the defense of human rights, all focused on the rights of the poor, the landless, and the homeless, and the advancement of people of African descent, the indigenous, women, and other marginalized groups. These expressions of liberation theology are not rooted in rituals, but rather in the celebration of life and its victories in light of the Gospel. This approach is visible in the words and actions of Pope Francis, particularly in his encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*. This style of theology has created a type of priest and religious life that unites faith and social commitment to the poor and welcomes all who wish to participate. This method of living and thinking faith has helped the Church to better understand the reality of the poor and to shift away from doctrines and rituals. The Church of Liberation helped found political parties such as the Workers’ Party of former president Lula in Brazil that embody the commitment to social change that Jesus viewed as essential to a more just and fraternal society. This kind of thinking encouraged Latin American countries to introduce social policies that embraced millions of people who previously lived on the margins and in misery.

**What led you to such social activism?**

What drove my commitment to social change was my work in the slums of Brazil. The poor were our teachers and doctors. They challenged us to answer the question, how can our Christian faith inspire us to look for a different, more just world where brotherhood and sisterhood are deeper and richer and love is made easier? It was not the politics and works of Karl Marx, Johann Baptist Metz, or Jürgen Moltmann that inspired us to get close to the poor. Marx was neither father nor godfather of liberation theology, though he has helped us in fundamental ways. He showed how poverty results from the way society is organized to exploit and oppress the weakest among us, and he called attention to the fact that the ruling classes, in conjunction with
certain segments of the Church, manipulated the Christian faith to be a source of passivity rather than a force for indignation, resistance, and liberation.

**In the 1950s and 1960s, liberation theology took root most deeply in Latin America, especially in Brazil. Why this region, and why this country?**

The Church in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s was unique in Latin America and, I would say, even the world. We had many prophetic bishops who opposed the military dictatorships, denounced torture, and publicly defended human rights. Thanks to the great Bishop Hélder Câmara, a coordinated pastoral meeting was organized for the first time. It involved more than 300 bishops and led to the creation of the National Conference of Bishops, which, in turn, developed strategies for social change that became widely adopted. For a long time, the Conference advocated for basic social justice and agrarian reform.

This initiative led to a shift away from the concept of “development of underdevelopment,” which draws attention to the historic and structural roots of underdevelopment, to a focus on the process of liberation. The educator Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, helped to shape the minds of bishops, theologians, and pastors. It marked the beginning in Brazil, and soon Peru, of liberation theology as a foundational concept in the Catholic Church.

**In 2009, you wrote that “everyone must be freed from this system that has continued for three centuries and has been imposed across the planet.” What is the “system,” and what makes escape so urgent?**

Every modern society is indebted to the founding fathers of the Enlightenment worldview beginning in the seventeenth century with Descartes, Newton, Bacon, and others. Together, their work gave rise to the idea of conquest of people and the Earth. The Earth was no longer viewed as the great Mother, alive and purposeful. Instead, it was reduced to something to be exploited by humans for wealth accumulation. In the capitalist system that emerged out of this, value is ascribed to accumulated capital rather than to work, now simply a vehicle for such accumulation. This system creates vast economic inequalities as well as political, social, and ethnic injustices. Its political manifestation is liberal democracy, in which freedom is equated with the freedom to exploit nature and accumulate wealth. This system has been imposed worldwide and has created a culture of limitless private accumulation and consumption. Today, we realize that a finite Earth cannot support endless growth that overshoots the Earth’s biophysical limits and threatens long-term human survival and Mother Earth’s bounty.

**Your recent writings suggest that ecology should be an additional pillar of the movement. What is the connection between ecology and social justice?**

The core of liberation theology is the empowerment of the poor to end poverty and achieve the freedom to live a good life. In the 1980s, we realized that the logic supporting exploitation of workers was the same as that supporting the exploitation of the earth. Out of this insight, a vigorous liberation eco-theology was born. To make this movement effective, it is important to create a new paradigm rooted in cosmology, biology, and complexity theory. A global vision of
reality must always be open to creating new forms of order within which human life can evolve. The vision of James Lovelock and V. I. Vernadsky helped us see not only that life exists on Earth, but also that Earth itself is a living organism. The human being is the highest expression of Earth’s creation by virtue of our capacity to feel, think, love, and worship.

After publication of your 1984 book *Church: Charisma and Power*, the Vatican prohibited your writing and teaching, a turning point in the strained relationship between liberation theology and the Church. How did you respond to this?

The imposition of “silentium obsequiosum” in 1985 by the Vatican forbade me from speaking and writing. That is when I began to study ecology, Earth science, and their relation to human activity. This coincided with an invitation to participate in a small, international group convened by Mikhail Gorbachev and Steven Rockefeller to explore universal values and principles essential for saving Earth from the multiple threats she faces. I had the opportunity to meet leading scientists while actively participating in drafting a text that significantly inspired Pope Francis’s recent encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. I was determined to ensure that the views of the Earth Charter would be based on a new paradigm incorporating the interdependency of all creatures—indeed the whole living fabric—and the need for mutual care. This paradigm must extend beyond a purely environmental ecology to an “integral ecology” that includes society, human consciousness, education, daily life, and spirituality.

This must start with the new paradigm for physical reality that has emerged from the thinking of Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Stephen Hawking, Brian Swimme, Ilya Prigogine, Humberto Maturana, Christian de Duve, and many others who see the universe as a process of cosmogenesis—expanding, self-regenerating orders of increasing complexity. The basic law governing this cosmological vision is that everything has to do with everything else at all times and in all circumstances. Nothing is outside this integrated vision. Knowledge and science are interlinked to form a greater whole. Contrary to the earlier atomized paradigm, this helps us develop a holistic view of a world in continuous motion. Mutation, not stability, is the natural state of the universe and Earth. And we humans are intrinsic to this process. So I believe there are four major trends in ecological thinking: environmental, social, mental, and integral. Together, these form a reality in which the component parts are dynamically in tune with each other.

Do you see elements of liberation theology in Pope Francis’s recent encyclical *Laudato Si’*?

The encyclical *Laudato Si’* is the fruit of the theological ecology that developed in recent years in Latin America. The Pope adopted the method of “see, judge, act, and celebrate” and used it to organize the encyclical. He makes use of the basic categories that we used in Latin America, such as the “relatedness of all with all,” the focus on the poor and the vulnerable, the intrinsic value of every being, the ethics of care and collective responsibility, and—especially—the condemnation of the system that produces the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, a system that is anti-life, perhaps even suicidal. The document is full of the resonances of liberation theology and encourages liberation theologians as well as like-minded churches and theology everywhere.
Many view religion in the contemporary world as a source of strife and exclusion rather than the harmony and inclusiveness needed to foster global solidarity. Do such critics of religion have a valid point?

Almost all religions show signs of the sickness of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is not a doctrine but a way of understanding doctrine. Fundamentalists think that their doctrine and their truth is the only one. Others are wrong and deserve no rights. From these conflicts is born the bloodshed we know too well, conflicts pursued in God’s name. But this is a pathology that does not eliminate the true nature of religion. Everything healthy can get sick. That is what is happening today. On the other hand, compare the conflicts driven by fundamentalism with the hopefulness of leaders like the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Pope Francis, who are clamoring for cooperation among religions and spiritual paths to help overcome the current ecological crisis.

What is your view on the prospects for a progressive transformation of religious institutions and for the overall shift in of planetary civilization we call the Great Transition? And what role would religious institutions play in this transformation?

I think the legacy of the financial crisis is the insight that the global capitalist system met its limit in 2007–2008. More than an economic crisis, it was a crisis of Earth’s limited resources. Shortly after the onset of the financial crisis, scientists announced the infamous Earth Overshoot Day, calling attention to the fact that the pressure we put on Earth exceeds its biocapacity. But this moment, which should have provoked reflection on our profound lack of environmental consciousness, passed with little public reaction.

Because of the inseparability of the ecological and the social, the looming depletion of resources could lead to social unrest of great proportions. Today, at least forty armed conflicts afflict the world. Our system does not have the tools to solve the problems it has created. As Albert Einstein eloquently stated, “We cannot solve the problems using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

We have to think and act differently. The Earth Charter explicitly states, and Pope Francis has repeated, “Common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. This requires a change in the mind and in the heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility to reach a sustainable way of life locally, regionally, nationally and globally.” This is the foundation for a different way of inhabiting the Common Home in which material resources are finite. In contrast, human and spiritual capital are inexhaustible because they are intangible and include limitless values such as love, solidarity, compassion, reverence, and care. This places life at the center: the life of Mother Earth, the life of nature, and human life.

http://www.greattransition.org/publication/liberation-ecology

August 1, 2016

Youth Urge Pope to Push Harder for Divestment
By Ruth McCambridge
Nonprofit Quarterly

On World Youth Day, celebrated this year in Krakow, Poland, an open letter signed by over 120 youth groups was delivered to Pope Francis, asking that he urge Catholic organizations of all kinds to divest from fossil fuels while continuing his own efforts to divest the Vatican.

In Laudato Si’, as readers may remember, Pope Francis powerfully acknowledged: “We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels needs to be progressively replaced without delay” and this acknowledgement has seemed to be taken to heart by American Catholics, as has recently been recorded by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

Since the pope’s encyclical, Thea Ormerod, the president of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, has found her role in encouraging Catholic religious organizations to divest publicly has become much easier. “[The pope] saying our need to move away from fossil fuels is urgent—that’s quite powerful. Sometimes parishioners have been told by the parish priest, ‘No, that’s too political—it’s not aligned with Catholic values.’ No priest can say that now.”

Four orders of Australian Catholics declared their intentions to divest back in June. The four orders are: Marist Sisters Australia; Presentation Congregation Queensland; Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga; and the Passionists—Holy Spirit Province Australia, NZ, PNG and Vietnam. Father Thomas McDonough from the Passionists said his congregation had long understood their need to be “ecologically responsible.”

Pope Francis, in his Laudato Si’, crystallised for us the level of responsibility we need to take as a congregation—the urgency for action ever more apparent. So we trustees of the Passionists took the decision to begin diverting our investments from fossil fuel extractive industries and into renewable energy. We believe the Gospel asks no less of us.

It’s true that some very large Catholic organizations around the globe have millions of dollars invested in fossil fuel companies. However, institutions like Georgetown University, the University of Dayton, Trócaire, and the Franciscan Sisters of Mary have already committed to divest, joining approximately 530 institutions with a collective $3.4 trillion in funds under management. They include the World Council of Churches, the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Stanford and Oxford Universities.

https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2016/08/01/youth-urge-pope-push-harder-divestment/

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August 4, 2016

Prayer for a planet: Pope Francis and the politics of climate change

By Bill Blaikie
iPolitics
Last week, about 2 million young people — including nearly 4,000 Canadians — gathered in Poland to hear Pope Francis speak at Catholic World Youth Day. Even if, like me, you’re neither young nor Catholic, this was still an event with interesting ramifications for Canada and our politics.

World Youth Day happens every few years; this was the first edition since the Pope released his encyclical *Laudato Si* in 2015, which focused on environmental and ecological issues. It is a bold document: Pope Francis was unambiguous about the role humans play in driving climate change, and also about the need for changes in energy policy, in modes of production and consumption, and in the established structures of power.

For the youth who gathered in the height of summer, climate change is hard to ignore. This year will be the hottest one they — or any person alive — has ever seen, with each of the first six months of 2016 breaking temperature records. Here in Canada, the Fort McMurray wildfires have become the costliest natural disaster in Canadian history, and scientists tell us that we can expect a warming world to produce more and more extreme weather events.

Pope Francis hasn’t been timid in speaking about these issues. In September, after publishing the aforementioned encyclical, he became the first pontiff to address both houses of the U.S. Congress. His remarks challenged Republicans and Democrats alike to question whether their politics — their most powerful tool to change the world for the better — truly reflected their faiths where the environment is concerned.

Many young Catholics are paying attention to his example. Last week, two associations representing 10 million Catholic students worldwide called on their governments to invest in their futures by creating more of the clean energy jobs that they want to work in. Youth also made their voices heard at a conference about the encyclical, which was attended by high-ranking church officials and Poland’s conservative minister of the environment. And *Laudato Si* may be the first encyclical to inspire a hashtag, as people took to social media to pledge concrete actions they will take to live more sustainably.

A year ago, I publicly pondered whether the Pope’s encyclical would shake up established ways of thinking about climate change. So far, the momentum seems to be on the side of action. In Canada, governments at all levels are putting more energy into climate policy than we’ve seen in many years. And that makes World Youth Day, where we can see both religious and generational dynamics at play, all the more fascinating.

There is a long and rich history of faith communities helping to drive progressive political causes, including in Canada. Pope Francis’ leadership on issues like climate change may revitalize and expand that impulse in the Catholic community — Canada’s largest religious group, with more than 12 million believers.

The result may not be overnight change, but the changes we do see will be reinforced by generational turnover. There is tremendous unity among young people on this issue: Canadians under the age of 35 are the most likely to be concerned about climate change, and to support the development of clean energy solutions.
Politicians are learning that lesson. It’s telling that Preston Manning, my fellow parliamentarian and an elder statesman of Canadian conservatives, has taken a strong interest in environmental issues. We disagree on many things — including the appropriate policy responses to climate change — but we both see that the era of denying or downplaying this issue is over. Dealing with climate change has always been a moral obligation. Increasingly, it’s becoming a political necessity as well.

The young Catholics who gathered in Poland to celebrate their faith, and the gift of our common world, may be a positive sign of what’s to come. The challenges that climate change poses are common to us all. Let’s hope that soon we’ll be able to say the same about the solutions.


August 4, 2016

Amazon megadam denied licence over environmental, indigenous concerns

By Megan Darby
Climate Home

The 8GW Sao Luiz do Tapajos hydropower project is expected to get the thumbs down from Brazilian regulators, in move cautiously welcomed by activists

A mammoth 8GW dam in the Amazon rainforest is set to be denied a licence, in a sign Brazil could be shifting away from hydropower.

That was the outcome of a meeting of the top government lawyer and agencies for the environment and indigenous people this week, newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo reported.

They cited unanswered concerns about the impact of the Sao Luiz do Tapajos project, one of seven planned along the same river, on the environment and indigenous communities.

“When we heard this news, it made us very happy, because this is our home,” Munduruku leader Cacique Celso Tawe told Climate Home through an interpreter.

“The river for us is our life. We live by hunting and fishing and that is why our people oppose the dams.”

He was in Rio de Janeiro with other indigenous activists ahead of the Olympic games. They were highlighting the gap between the multicultural vibe promoted by organisers and the violence faced by forest-dwellers who protest development on their traditional land — whether hydro, logging or agribusiness.
Global Witness has recorded more than 150 murders of environmental defenders in Brazil since the last Olympics in 2012.

Many communities, including the Munduruku, have been struggling for decades to get land rights. Far from the cities, they get little help from law enforcement.

They fear things will get worse under interim president Michel Temer, who is seeking to make life easier for businesses in the economic slump by scrapping regulations.

Environment minister Jose Sarney Filho, on the other hand, has proved sympathetic to concerns about hydropower, calling for a more diverse energy mix.

Once built, hydropower dams generate renewable electricity on large scale, but that comes at a cost to the forest, wildlife and communities in their path.

Sarney is proposing a push for wind and bioenergy instead. It would be a significant shift for a country that gets three quarters of its power from hydro.

Sonia Guajajara, coordinator of the Brazil’s Association of Indigenous Peoples, welcomed Sarney’s stance but expressed scepticism it would be enough.

The similarly controversial 11GW Belo Monte dam is under construction, she noted, despite temporary wins for opponents along the way.

“The economic interests behind the project are so strong,” said Guajajara through an interpreter. “We need to stay vigilant.”


August 8, 2016

Closed mines haunt two towns in Honduras as threats against activists mount

By J. Malcolm Garcia
Global Sisters Report

Global Sisters Report is focusing a special series on mining and extractive industries and the women religious who work to limit damage and impact on people and the environment, through advocacy, action and policy. Pope Francis last year called for the entire mining sector to undergo "a radical paradigm change." Sisters are on the front lines to help effect that change.

The mines no longer operate.
The large trucks that carried heavy equipment no longer rumble down dirt roads fogging the air with dust.

The workers no longer trudge along those same roads inhaling the dust weighted by the humidity of dawn.

Community opposition succeeded in shutting down mines in Nueva Esperanza in northern Honduras and El Tránsito far to the south near the border of Nicaragua. But to many people in these two small towns the closings serve only as a pyrrhic victory.

For now, the armed guards that circled the mines are gone. But gone, too, are the jobs the mines provided. In their place is a lingering loss of trust among residents in these agricultural communities and a continuing fear that this is just a temporary respite before the mines in both towns reopen.

The privately owned mines began their operations in regions where families had subsisted off the land for centuries. The mines' presence altered both the landscape and the social fabric of these communities.

Now, more than two years after countless protests stopped the mines, the fault lines between those who support mining and those who don't because of concern about the potential for environmental damage and the loss of a way of life continue to divide communities and even some families. More disturbingly, death threats toward opponents of mining have become an increasing concern, especially since the murder of Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres in March of this year.

Honduras now has the highest murder rate for environmental activists in the world, and conflict over land rights is the primary driver. Rampant inequality, a weak judicial system, cozy relationships between political and business elites, and near total impunity for crimes against human rights defenders have contributed to 109 murders of environmental activists between 2010 and 2015, according to Global Witness, a British non-governmental organization which tracks human rights and environmental abuses.

"We were threatened: 'You better not show your face in this town again,' " said Sr. Maria de Rosario Soriano, a member of the Messengers of the Immaculate order, who with other sisters from her community supported anti-mining activists in Nueva Esperanza. "We didn't go to Nueva Esperanza for a few weeks. Even the priests and our mother superior told us it was better to stay away for a while."

Hundreds of miles away, outside El Tránsito, where tree-lined mountains punctuate a seared skyline of hazy heat, Sr. Reyna Corea sat in the shaded terrace of Hermanas of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. She knew of the struggles in Nueva Esperanza but said with evident relief that El Tránsito was not as divided. However, she added, all was not well. Differences between the residents of El Tránsito and implicit threats existed there, too.
"I feel I'm discriminated against by the police and municipality," said Corea, 51, who opposed mining in El Tránsito. "When I need help to bring water to a community, they deny me and the other sisters. They say we are with those activists who protest and riot. They say we are with the instigators. They say, 'You better stop what you are doing.' In Honduras, such a warning makes an impression."

**The mine comes to Nueva Esperanza**

Nueva Esperanza is home to about 1,000 people. Five rivers run through it: Leán, Congo, the Metalias, Santiago and Alao. The town sits at the foot and climbs up the slopes of the mountains that separate the department or county of Atlántida from the neighboring department of Yoro. The mountains hold gold, iron and other mineral deposits. Dirt roads, some not more than paths, line the mountains. The people here farm the rich soil, harvesting corn, beans and other basic staples.

"We are poor," a woman said near the church in Arizona, about a two-hour drive from Nueva Esperanza, "but we are not hungry."

Between 2011 and 2013, when businessman Lenir Perez, owner of the Minerales Victoria mining company, purchased 2471.05 acres, covering all of Nueva Esperanza and 15 other farming communities, the residents of Nueva Esperanza "were victims of militarization and paramilitarization of their territories, persecution and threats, and police and judicial harassment," according to a co-sponsored report by El Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación (ERIC), a Jesuit-sponsored investigation and research organization in Honduras, and the College for Public Health and Social Justice at Saint Louis University of Missouri. The June 2016 report found that families lived under siege. Activists received death threats from the police and anonymous callers by phone and text messaging.

"For more than a year we could not go out after 6 p.m.," said activist Olga Hernandez, 29, a Nueva Esperanza resident. "Private security from the mine patrolled the streets. Nothing ever happened. It was a psychological thing: 'Don't go out, or else.' That 'or else' kept us inside."

Despite the intimidation, Soriano spoke out against the mine.

"The mine first came offering jobs and huge amounts of money for land," she recalled. "So, we started telling the community, 'Don't be naive and believe in everything they offer.'"

Soriano said she and another sister, Presentación Aguilar, organized community meetings in local churches to discuss mining and its impact on health and the environment. They cited the Book of Genesis and how it called on mankind to protect nature, not exploit it.

Perez, the sisters said, never confronted them. But men with guns who did not wear police or military uniforms observed their meetings. They did not attend but peered through windows.
"We had to give talks with armed goons looking in on us," Soriano said. "It came to a point where we were so afraid we called our mother superior and asked her if we should leave or stay. She told us to look into our hearts and we felt we could not leave the community."

The sisters stayed, but the harassment, they said, continued even within the church. At one meeting, Aguilar discussed her opposition to mining when a member of the church jumped up and told her to shut up and stop spreading lies.

"You could feel the anger and the uproar in the entire community," said Aguilar. "Hatred was in the air between those who worked for the mine and those who opposed it. Even in church gatherings."

Although Perez, who did not return repeated phones calls and emails requesting an interview for this story, never confronted the sisters, he did communicate with the vicar of the nearby parish of Arizona. A priest there, Fr. Cesar Espinoza, had been voicing his support for those who opposed mining.

"I spoke out against the mine," Espinoza, 39, recalled. "On local radio, from the pulpit. I asked the bishop to speak out against it. I spoke everywhere and wrote my opinions for publications."

In May 2013, Espinoza's supervisor, the vicar, exchanged emails with Perez. He chastised Perez for not being candid about his operation and for increasing antagonism.

"Do you think being transparent is to sneak in machinery on a Saturday escorted by the police?" Vicar Victor Camara wrote in an email, a copy of which was provided to Global Sisters Report. "Have you chosen force and conflict? I hope that you ponder the consequences and that above all no human lives be put at stake, since no human life is worth all the gold in the world. Please know that with conflict there will be no winners, everybody will lose, including you."

Perez responded that he "only believed in doing things in an honest way." He said it saddened him to see Honduras "taken apart by businessmen, drug dealers, politicians and environmentalists (communists and subversive curas)." Curas is a derogatory term for priests. Perez also accused the church of cowardice for not having stopped Espinoza's advocacy against the mine. He called Espinoza "another sinner behind his robe."

"Believe me, I would like to open that mine hand in hand with the community," Perez wrote, "but I will not allow a Guatemalan [Espinoza] and the activists to destroy this country."

Two months later, on July 25, 2013, Orlane Vidal and Daniel Langmeier, with the Honduras Accompaniment Project, a program of the Friendship Office of the Americas designed to engage in nonviolent protest in Honduras, were held captive for two and a half hours by armed men, who, according to Amnesty International, were from the Nueva Esperanza mining project.

The observers had been staying with a family opposed to the mine. Amnesty International found that the leader of the armed men told Vidal and Langmeier that they would be "disappeared in the woods" if they returned to the area. The observers were held at gunpoint and warned not to
speak publicly about their abduction. They were released at a bus stop in Nueva Florida, a town not far from Nueva Esperanza. They filed complaints with the authorities. The abductors were not charged.

"It was like an amber alert when we heard about the abduction," Espinoza recalled. "Everyone — activists, church members — called the government demanding their release. The vice president issued the order to locate them immediately."

The kidnapping galvanized the community. Honduran law allows mayors the final decision on whether a mine can or cannot operate in their township. In the municipal elections of 2013, anti-mine activists met with mayoral candidates and asked them to sign an anti-mining pledge. On August 20, 2014, upon taking office, the newly elected mayor, Mario Fuentes, closed the Nueva Esperanza mine. But activists say the closing did not end the matter.

"The problem is still ongoing," said Sr. Aguilar. "The mine still owns the land. What will happen if we elect a mayor who supports mining?"

Activist Olga Hernandez said the land remains as scarred as the community.

"Today, you see plants and trees growing back but the personal damage is like the mountains they flattened. You can't make a mountain grow back."

After the mine closed, resentful, unemployed mine workers unleashed their anger toward the activists, said Arizona deputy mayor Cesar Alvarenga, an opponent of the mine. He said his wife left him because of the threats.

"Yes, I still get threats," Alvarenga said. "This fight has ruined my life. It is very difficult to live with fear because we know these people are so powerful. They have money and the support of the government and won't go away easily. They invested a lot of money, and we know they won't lose it like that."

**A town with a 200-year-old mining history**

More than 500 miles south of Nueva Esperanza, the town of El Tránsito stands beneath a wide sky and bright sun that scorches the land with a dry heat far different from the humidity that wraps the mountains of Nueva Esperanza.

The El Tránsito mine dates back to the early 1800s. Hundreds of mining tunnels, residents say, run beneath the town like a maze of prairie dog burrows, destabilizing centuries-old buildings. Decades of mining, residents say, polluted local waters making it unfit for human consumption because of high levels of cyanide and lead, among other heavy minerals. There are no known official reports, but residents say they don't use the water.

"We used to play in the closed mines," recalled activist Jose Lucio Lopez, 43, who grew up in El Tránsito. "It was a beautiful little town. Quiet. Nothing was ever disturbed."
The mine had been closed for decades when it started operations again in 2014 after Honduran businesswoman Maria Gertrudis Valle claimed the land as belonging to her. She did not respond to messages from GSR asking for comment.

"Five years ago this woman came into town," recalled Sr. Reyna Corea. "She said she had documents that showed this land belonged to her. She sent representatives to speak for her. She was like a ghost, rarely seen but known to exist."

At first, Corea said, the residents of El Tránsito supported the mine until its workers began using explosives. The ground trembled and the walls and floors of houses began to crack.

"They dynamited day and night," Lopez said. He said as many as 200 people from outside the town would come to work in the mine.

"The whole town would shake from the dynamite," Lopez said. "As many as 80 explosions a day, every day."

More than 200 activists, he said, organized sit-ins blocking the road to the mine. Twenty people always occupied the road 24 hours a day. If activists saw a stranger in town they suspected of being with the mine or an unfamiliar vehicle, they would ring the church bell, a call to activists to support the people at the sit-in. The protesters would not allow miners who had managed to enter the property to leave. Police were forced to bring them food and water. A year after the sit-ins began, the mine ceased operations in November 2015. Success, however, has not lessened the threats activists here say they face.

"People have tried to bribe us to be quiet," said Lourdes Zelaya, 43, a mother of two children, of herself and her husband. "We have been chased by cars and motorcycles trying to force us off the road. People tell us, 'Watch out. You will be killed.' At the sit-in, a police officer told my husband, 'You will be killed.' We tried to file a complaint, but the police department refused to take it."

Her 18-year-old daughter Marci said she, too, feels in danger.

"I live in fear something will happen to me because of what is happening to my parents," she said. "I'd like to help them but I don't know how. I am vulnerable. I know they can hurt my parents by doing something to me."

The ongoing threats against activists suggest that the mine owner or other business interests hope to reopen the mine, Corea said.

"As in Nueva Esperanza and all over Honduras, the mine owners will keep trying," she said. "They will not fall asleep because the mine is not operating. Of course, the problem always comes down to money. People see cash and they lose sight of things, so if money comes then we can't say what will happen."
Top 10 messages of ‘Laudato Si’”

By Father James Martin, SJ
Catholic San Francisco

Jesuit Father James Martin, editor-at-large for America magazine, distilled the nearly 200 pages of “Laudato Si” into 10 key messages in a four-minute video produced last summer, offering Catholics a visual digest of the document. View it at sfarch.org/green.

1. A spiritual perspective
“The big contribution of ‘Laudato Si’” is its overview of the environmental crisis from a religious point of view. Until now, the dialogue was framed mainly with political, scientific and economic language.”

2. Effects on the poor
“The disproportionate effect of environmental change on the poor is strongly highlighted on almost every page of the document. The pope provides many examples of the effects of climate change whose worse effects are felt by those in developing countries.”

3. Technocratic mindset critiqued
“He critiques an unthinking reliance on market forces in which every technological advancement is embraced before thinking about how it will affect our world. Christian spirituality by contrast offers growth through moderation and the capacity to be happy with little.”

4. Authoritative teaching
“Pope Francis explicitly states that ‘Laudato Si’” is now added to the body of the church’s social teaching, continuing a reflection on modern day problems that began with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical ‘Rerum Novarum,’ on capital and labor in 1891.”

5. Christian/biblical roots
“The pope takes readers through the call to care for creation that extends far back as the book of Genesis, when human kind is called to ‘till and keep the earth.’

6. Everything is connected
“We are included in nature and thus in constant interaction with it. But our decisions have an
inevitable effect on the environment. A blind pursuit of money that sets aside the interests of the marginalized and poor and the ruination of the planet are connected.”

7. Embrace of science
“Pope Francis does not try to prove anything about climate change. ‘Laudato Si’” draws both on church teaching and contemporary modern day scientific findings to help modern day people find answers to contemporary questions.”

8. Selfishness and indifference critiqued
“Frequently, decision makers are removed from the poor, with no real physical connection to their brothers and sisters. Selfishness also leads to the evaporation of the notion of the common good.”

9. Global dialogue and solidarity
”Perhaps more than any encyclical the pope draws from the experiences of people around the world. He calls into dialogue and debate all people about our common home.”

10. He addresses everyone on the planet
“The document is hopeful, reminding us that because God is with us, all of us can strive to change course and work toward an ‘ecological conversion’ where we can hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”


August 9, 2016

Charity Sr. Paula Gonzalez, 'the solar nun,' dies at age 83

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

Environmentalists are mourning the death of Charity Sr. Paula Gonzalez, a Cincinnati nun who spent the last 45 years of her life advocating for renewable energy. Gonzalez, 83, died July 31 at the Charity Sisters’ Ohio motherhouse.

Born on Oct. 25 1932, in Albuquerque, N.M., Gonzalez entered the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati in 1954. She later earned a Ph.D. in cellular physiology from the Catholic University of America and taught biology at Mount St. Joseph University, in Cincinnati, from 1965-1980 before becoming involved full time in environmental ministry.

According to the U.K.-based Catholic Herald, Gonzalez called the Rio conference that gathered nearly 20,000 people “a watershed moment in history,” saying “This many people coming together to choose the future: This is the beginning of the ecological era.”

‘The solar nun’

Widely known as “the solar nun,” it is probably no surprise that “Paula died on a SUN-day,” reflected Canadian Charity Sr. Maureen Wild, spokesperson for Sisters of Earth, an organization of religious and lay women dedicated to healing the planet. In 1996, members of the brand new organization visited Gonzalez's “La Casa del Sol” (“The House of the Sun”) green home during their summer meeting in Grailville, Ohio.

La Casa del Sol was Gonzalez's first major foray into the realm of renewable energy. The 1,500 square-foot passive-solar, super-insulated home cost less than $10 per square foot to build, she told Mother Earth News Magazine in the May-June 1986 issue. Beginning in 1982, every Saturday for three years a group of 30-plus volunteers worked to renovate an old chicken barn into the new structure using used recycled materials, including metal salvage. Gonzalez financed the project through garage sales that collected close to $13,000.

Her experiment was a success. When the weather plummeted to zero in February 1985, La Casa del Sol remained at 50 degrees. She revved up the heat a bit by feeding the wood stove with a few leftover construction scraps. Gonzalez and La Case del Sol were featured in the PBS series Earthkeepers in 1993.

In 1991, using the same garage sale financing formula, she turned an old four-car garage into EarthConnection, a 21st century solar-heated energy efficient building. Now a ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, EarthConnection serves as an educational center offering programs in sustainable agriculture, alternative energies, eco justice and eco-spirituality.

Early roots of ecological passion

Gonzalez told NCR in a 2011 interview that she traced part of her passion for ecology to the first Earth Day in 1970 when she was inspired by the outpouring of enthusiasm across the United States. A few years later when controversy erupted over a new proposed nuclear power plant, she realized that protesting by itself cannot solve energy problems. Creating life-sustaining alternatives needed to be a part of the plan, too.

But the original roots of her passion were lovingly cultivated through childhood experiences. Growing up in Albuquerque, she spent hours of contentment helping her father Hilario in his vegetable garden.

“He would tell me, 'The Earth is sacred,’” she told Eco Catholic in 2011.

At an early age her soul was touched by the God she referred to as “The Great Living One” – a Divinity she grew to recognize as being present throughout all of creation. Topics from some of
her talks and writings reflected this: “Living in a Eucharistic Universe,” “Called to Tend the Sacred” and “The Our Father: Our Environmental Prayer.”

Gonzalez shared her Lord’s Prayer meditation in an October 2007 piece for St. Anthony Messenger. Using Sufi author Dr. Neil Douglas-Klotz’s Aramaic translation, she wrote that in “Our Father, Who Art in Heaven,” Father actually meant birther of the cosmos and that heaven would actually be the universe.

“When we proclaim God's name as ‘hallowed’ (holy), do we recognize the echo of God's name in the wonder all around us? Might God be calling us to be co-creators of a transformed Earth, a heaven of peace and harmony?” she wrote.

Gonzalez was adept at combining the practical with the mystical in the more than 1,800 talks, lectures and retreats that she presented across the world. In the MotherEarth article, she explained that she often invited individuals to consider “what might happen if, instead of fighting (all the way up to nuclear war) to extend the 'good old days' of the petroleum era, we began to tap our boundless creativity and imagination to design the 'better new days’?”

In 2005 the American Solar Energy Society's Ohio chapter, Green Energy Ohio, gave the nun their Lifetime Achievement Award.

Two years later, while attending a solar conference in Cleveland, she and engineer Keith Mills were inspired to address the issue of global warming and agreed to co-found the Ohio affiliate of the Regeneration Project, a ministry sponsored by Interfaith Power and Light. In 2014, the Cincinnati Inquirer honored Gonzalez as one of its “Women of the Year.”

The publication in June 2015 of Pope Francis’ environmental encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home” thrilled Gonzalez, who told NCR she was excited he included “a lot of background stuff,” predicting that “he's going to grab the attention of the global community for sure.”

‘A force of nature’

News of Gonzalez's death prompted reactions of sadness and love, from a few of the individuals she has influenced in her ministry.

One of them is environmental songwriter, Joyce Rouse, aka Earth Mama, who first met Gonzalez in the early 1990s. The Charity sister left her mark on a few of Earth Mama’s songs, among them: "We All Breath the Same Air," "The Perfect House" and "Follow the Sun."

“She became an enthusiastic supporter of my making music for Earth Literacy,” Rouse said. “Every conversation with her was an opportunity to soak up a deeper understanding of the universal connectedness of all things.”
Brian Swimme, a professor of evolutionary cosmology at the California Institute of Integral Studies and the co-author of *The Universe Story* with Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry, considered Gonzalez as being “sent from the future to show us how to live with intelligence and wisdom.

“The fire in her! Paula was 20 years older than me and when I first met her I thought to myself, 'I hope I have her energy at her age,’ … Prophet, inventor, scientist gadfly, leader, Sr. Paula was first and foremost an inspiration for us trying to live an ecological life,” Swimme said.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, said she will remember her friend as “a force of nature that lives on in our midst. She lived in a world of energy of her own creation while drawing on the power of the universe.”

Sara Ward, director of Ohio Interfaith Power and Light, lauded Gonzalez for “helping us understand how weatherization for the poor was also helping to reduce our use of fossil fuels which were polluting our air.”

Ward saw the sister in June when the IPL board met at EarthConnection for its annual retreat. “Even in her limited physical capacity Paula mustered the strength to join us each day for a few hours, lifting us all with her presence, and yes, her still strong voice for caring for God's amazing creation,” she said.

Ward witnessed the nun's green burial and rite of committal on Aug. 2 at the Cincinnati motherhouse cemetery, describing it as “sweet and simple.”

“The sun was shining, there were puffs of clouds, dragonflies, butterflies, birds and all manner of God’s creation came together to honor her. As she was presented for burial in her white shroud we gathered and said prayers and petitions as a community, sprinkled her with water and laid flowers all around her,” Ward recounted.

Ward added she was both full of sorrow and joy all at once “as I could just sense her delight as we gathered around her. So peaceful, beautiful and full of grace.”

The group said their final goodbye to the five-foot-tall ecological giant with this prayer:

“Into the beauty of mother earth, we release you. Into the freedom of wind and sunshine, into the dance of the stars and planets. We release you into the next part of our spiritual journey as you walk hand in hand with your creator God. We release you to go safely, go dancing, go joyfully home.”


August 10, 2016

When Protest Becomes Sacrament: Grady Sisters Heed a Higher Call
By Nicholas Kusnetz
Inside Climate News

These Catholic social justice advocates are exemplars of the force behind We Are Seneca Lake, one of the nation’s longest-running campaigns of civil disobedience.

On a warm May morning, two dozen people wearing blue shirts formed a neat line in front of the gates of a natural gas compressor station in central New York. The facility lay hidden somewhere in the trees behind them, and just beyond was Seneca Lake, a 38-mile azure gash through deep green hills that provides drinking water to 100,000 people. The sun crept over a ridge on the far side of the lake. It was still early enough to intercept the day's first delivery.

Within minutes, a tanker truck neared the gates and pulled onto the shoulder. Word soon came that sheriff's deputies were on their way, and the protesters started singing a verse that became a spiritual anthem of the civil rights movement.

We shall, we shall not be moved

We shall, we shall not be moved

Just like a tree that's standing by the water

We shall not be moved

Leading the song were three sisters, each in their 50s, who had come to protest the expansion of a gas storage facility here. Ellen, Clare and Teresa Grady, together with two other siblings who weren't there that morning, have organized their lives around acts like these. The Gradys were raised in the radical Catholic social justice community of the Vietnam era. Their parents worked with Daniel and Philip Berrigan, brothers and Catholic priests famous for their anti-war raids on draft offices in the 1960s and '70s. As part of Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker movement, they aim to "live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ."

By the time they were in their 20s, Ellen and Clare were sneaking into weapons facilities with the Bible-inspired anti-nuclear Plowshares movement. That's where Ellen met her future husband, Peter De Mott, with whom she built a family devoted to faith and protest. After 25 years of marriage, De Mott died suddenly—he fell out of a tree in an accident—leaving behind Ellen and their four daughters.

Ellen's and Clare's first arrest here came last year in direct response to Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si. The papal letter issued an urgent plea for action on what Francis called "global environmental deterioration," as grave a threat as nuclear war. The sisters' stand at the gates of the Seneca Lake compressor station was not simply an act of protest, but a sacrament, like the Eucharist or marriage.

"We're trying to live the call to not be silent in the face of injustice," Ellen said, "and live the call to love one another and love creation."
The sisters are hardly leaders of this protest movement, which goes by the name We Are Seneca Lake. A steering committee loosely coordinates a diverse collection of grandmothers, parents, students and other community members who have been coming to these gates every couple of weeks for nearly two years to block deliveries and, usually, to get arrested.

With more than 400 people led away in police cars and paddy wagons across 50 blockades so far, the campaign is perhaps the nation's longest-running act of environmental civil disobedience. They see the gas project not simply as a threat to the lake, but also an affront to the state's ban on fracking, enacted two years ago by Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

The expansion of the storage facility here, approved by federal authorities in 2014, would allow more gas from the fracking fields of Pennsylvania and beyond to flow through here, deepening reliance on fossil fuels. The sisters, and this movement, slide into a space left open by the lack of a clear national energy policy. Infrastructure projects such as these are effectively shaping the nation's energy future. Once built, they are hard to close, costing jobs and threatening local economies.

Activists around the country are similarly devoting their efforts to stopping individual fossil fuel projects. In Georgia, landowners fought off a major energy company from building a pipeline for refined oil. In Massachusetts and Washington state, protesters have blocked trains hauling crude. In Colorado, Utah and Louisiana activists have disrupted auctions of oil and gas leases. Running through all these disparate acts of protest is the unifying theme to "keep it in the ground."

A Protest Is Born

In 1893, the Glen Salt Company drilled down 1,902 feet into the Syracuse Formation, layers of rock and salt left behind by an ancient inland sea that now lie beneath the rolling hills of New York's Finger Lakes region. It was the first of many wells through which the company and its successors would pump fresh water to dissolve the salt for evaporation and production on the surface. Over time, the process left behind dozens of caverns, some of which have been used to store natural gas.

While construction has yet to begin, plans to expand the existing storage facility—now owned by a joint venture of Consolidated Edison, Inc., a New York utility, and Crestwood Equity Partners LP, a Texas-based pipeline and storage company—date back at least to 2009. They call for increasing the site's natural gas capacity while adding storage of up to 63 million gallons of liquid petroleum gas, a byproduct of gas drilling. Construction would include new compressor stations, a pond to store brine from the caverns and a flare stack. (Petroleum gas storage is overseen by the state, which has yet to rule whether that part of the project can proceed.)

At the time, many Finger Lakes residents worried that the fracking boom overtaking parts of Pennsylvania could spread to New York. Some formed a group called Gas Free Seneca, which commissioned a study that said the caverns are unstable and prone to leaks. They warned that an accident could cause explosions or allow brine or gas to seep into the lake, polluting the water. Pollution from the compressor stations would detract from the area's bucolic character. Tourism to the nearby wineries would suffer.
Sandra Steingraber, a biologist and scholar-in-residence at Ithaca College, 20 miles east of Seneca Lake, had been active in the campaign to ban fracking. In 2012, she led a march on Albany carrying a declaration signed by more than 3,000 people who pledged to engage in protests "and other non-violent actions" should fracking proceed. So when the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission seemed like it was heading toward approval of the facility, Steingraber and several residents of towns surrounding the lake felt they had no other recourse than to move outside the system.

"I guess I thought, if you won't listen to me as a health biologist, then you'll have to listen to me as a mother," she said. "I'll put my body between the compressor station and the trucks."

When final approval came on September 30, 2014, the protesters were ready. First, it was 10 people—as young as 39 and old as 86—arrested on October 29, 2014. Five days later, 15 others came to block the gates. Another 10 were arrested in the driveway two weeks after that. In December, on the day of their eleventh action, the Cuomo administration banned fracking in the state, handing a huge victory to a grassroots movement that had drawn much of its strength from the Finger Lakes region.

The decision energized the Seneca Lake activists, who began drawing in more supporters. Most came from nearby counties, but others flocked from across the country, viewing the protests as an integral piece of a national fight against fossil fuel projects. The organizers have been careful to keep their offenses to violations, akin to parking tickets, to attract a broader base and hold down legal costs.

"The thing that's been interesting about that is how they chose to strategically make this a long-term process," said Wes Gillingham, program director for Catskill Mountainkeeper, a New York advocacy group that campaigned against fracking. Gillingham was among more than 50 protesters arrested in an action in July. "It wasn't just 10 or 100 people going or this one-time thing. They've been able to sustain this for a long time, and the number of people arrested just keeps climbing, and it's showing the inertia of the political momentum in this process."

The methodical campaign has inspired others, including a group called Resist AIM that has staged a series of blockades to halt construction of a gas pipeline from New Jersey to Massachusetts. In March, Bill McKibben, who founded 350.org and helped lead the fight against the Keystone XL pipeline, traveled to Seneca Lake to join in the arrests, bringing with him national attention. We Are Seneca Lake's real strength, however, may lie not in its ability to attract climate celebrities like McKibben, but to draw in ordinary people who hadn't ever seen themselves as environmental activists.

**Moral Protests of the Nuclear Age**

An hour before the protest at the lake, the Grady sisters packed into Teresa's boxy white Jetta sedan, chirping over each other in an unbroken stream of words. The subject was first arrests. For Ellen, it happened on a White House tour, when she displayed images of victims of the U.S.-backed war in El Salvador.
"We had them under our jackets and we took them out and knelt down and prayed," she said. "It would have been early '80s, like '81, or maybe even '80..."

"'80 was when we did the action at the Pentagon, in August," Teresa interrupted.

"Oh right, okay, so it would have been '81," Ellen said.

Teresa thought her first was at the Seneca Army Depot a few years later. She was 18 years old.

For Clare, the oldest of the three, it might have been when she was 23 at a U.N. Special Session on Disarmament. But she wasn't sure.

"It's strange I don't remember," she said.

Ellen's memory of when she decided to lead a life of protest, however, is crystal clear.

"Picture me. I'm 17 years old. I had a babysitting job, I was just out of high school. I decided not to go to college because I was going to work around this whole issue of nuclear weapons. I didn't know what I was going to do," she said. "The kids are playing and I'm reading the newspaper, and I read about the Plowshares 8 action, and I was like, 'Oh my God!'"

It was September 1980 when the Berrigan brothers and six other pacifists made headlines for their raid on a General Electric nuclear facility in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. After sneaking inside, the protesters proceeded to hammer on two missile nose cones, pour blood over documents, and pray for peace. It was the first of what would become dozens of anti-nuclear Plowshares actions, named after the biblical admonition to beat "swords into plowshares."

Two years later, Ellen was one of seven Catholic activists who raided the General Dynamics Electric Boat shipyard in Groton, Connecticut, where the Trident nuclear submarines were assembled. Like the Berrigans before them, they hammered on the missile hatches of the USS Georgia and poured blood over the boat.

Ellen's older brother John was also among the seven, as was Peter De Mott, whom Ellen would marry the following year. "It's a great way to meet your future partner," she said, laughing. Ellen and the other activists were quickly arrested and found themselves in court.

"The judge was very condescending," Ellen said. "He said to me, 'I hope by the time that you get old, you'll understand that you can't do this.' See how much I've learned?"

She was convicted and sentenced to six months in prison. De Mott got time, too, and the two began courting from behind bars. "He was on the men's side and I was on the women's side, and he started sending notes over," she said. They used a groundskeeper as a courier. "I started writing notes on paper towels and he started writing notes on paper towels and we sent them over to each other. It was kind of fun. But we never put our names on them in case we were caught."

A picture from the day of the action shows Ellen with dark hair, a round face and a cherubic smile. Today, the hair has faded but the smile remains unchanged, framed by a ruddy Irish
complexion. "I had a very young look at the time," Ellen said. "She still does," Teresa said quietly.

**Embracing Life**

Ellen lives in a three-story red log home that her brother built 30 years ago, just outside town. She moved in soon after, and they raised their children together for several years, squeezing in 11 people at one point. John and his family have since left. In their place came Mary Loehr, who met the Gradys in 1980 at a Pentagon protest.

Soon after, Loehr lived with the sisters and their mother for a year, and their outlook changed her life.

"It's just an embracing of life and an embracing of other people and a trust in God in ways that I hadn't been introduced to by my family, and it just spoke to me," Loehr said. "There was that whole worldview side, but the chemistry, the magnetism and the charisma of the sisters, and the fun."

In the 1990s, the Gradys helped establish the Ithaca Catholic Worker house, joining a community founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in the midst of the Great Depression. To pay the bills, Ellen provided elderly care and De Mott worked as a contractor and handyman.

They continued their activism but committed mostly minor offenses so as not to be separated from their children. One exception came in 2003, as American troops prepared to invade Iraq, when Clare, Teresa and De Mott raided a military recruiting center near Ithaca and poured blood on the walls, carrying on the tradition begun by the Berrigans during the Vietnam War. They were eventually convicted on misdemeanor charges and given sentences ranging from four to eight months.

Then, a few years later, De Mott fell from a tree he was trimming.

"It was just a real loss for all of us," Ellen said. She worried in particular about their youngest daughter, Saoirse. "One of my sorrows about the whole thing was that, the other kids knew who he was," she said. "They'll do his sayings and recite his poems and do all that. And Saoirse doesn't have that."

On top of the pain, Ellen said, she feels the loss of the activism they never got to perform together. "I felt like we were coming to a place in our lives where he would be free to do a Plowshares action again. And that didn't happen."

Ellen was left to raise Saoirse, who was six at the time, alone. While she hasn't participated in another Plowshares action, she did continue to risk arrest. And it was jail, once again, that brought Ellen into the Seneca Lake campaign, when Steingraber, the renowned anti-fracking activist in town, landed behind bars just as Ellen completed her own 15-day sentence for protesting against drones at a nearby military base. The two sentences helped reveal a parallel,
Ellen said, between civilians who get caught in war and people who live in the way of drilling or pipeline projects.

**An Inconvenient Protest**

Supporters of the gas project say its opponents have exaggerated the risks. "You've got two major salt plants that have been in existence forever and we've had tourism flourish over the past 30 years," said Dennis A. Fagan, chairman of the Schuyler County Legislature, which in 2014 passed a resolution 5-3 in support of the project. Rejecting the expansion, he said, could lead Crestwood, the owner, to pull out of the county and hurt the local economy. "When they talk about industrialization, I don't think they know what they're talking about," he said. "It's a scare tactic."

Even Fagan acknowledges, however, that the actions may be achieving their goal. So far, 401 people have taken part in 657 arrests. Of those, 414 cases remain open while most of the rest have been dismissed.

"The cases are clearly clogging up the system," District Attorney Joseph Fazzary wrote in an email. His office may have to contest more than 80 trials for the protests, which he said will draw his staff away from criminal cases.

The application with the state to store liquid petroleum gas is now eight years old and has yet to receive a ruling. The matter has been awaiting a decision from an administrative law judge for more than a year. In a letter to the judge on August 8, the company said it would amend its proposal to address public concerns, reducing its size and eliminating planned rail and truck terminals. A spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Conservation declined to comment, citing that proceeding.

Crestwood has made no move to begin construction on the natural gas project, two years after it was approved.

Elsewhere, civil disobedience has helped draw attention to many fossil fuel projects, with the Keystone XL pipeline the most prominent among them. Cuomo's administration recently rejected a permit for the Constitution Pipeline and has urged federal officials to suspend construction on the interstate pipeline opposed by Resist AIM, the protest group. Over the past year, at least two dozen fossil fuel projects have been rejected or canceled across the country.

**Thy Will be Done**

After the protest at the gates in May, the 21 people who had been arrested filtered out of the Schuyler County Sheriff’s Department later that morning, gathering on a strip of grass between the low-slung building and the road. They seemed energized, "uncommonly cheerful in that place of penitence," as Daniel Berrigan wrote about his arrest following the first Plowshares action.
Many activists, given the privileged position of choosing to get arrested, describe an entirely different relationship with prison than that experienced by most Americans who land behind bars. Members of the Plowshares movement have referred to such lawbreaking as "divine obedience." In the words of Dorothy Day, "We are trying to say with action, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"

Teresa Grady recalls her time in prison in similarly spiritual terms.

"You look at life I think in some ways in a lot freer way, than when you're kind of constrained by having to work and pay bills," she said. "It's a freedom, I don't know how else to describe it."

Ellen's and Clare's first arrest at Seneca Lake came after Pope Francis published the environmental encyclical last summer. Ellen was inspired to "enflesh" his message, so she and several other Catholic Workers built a 7-foot replica of the letter and carried it to the gates. Videos from the day show them reading from the document and singing in Latin from the Catholic canon.

*Dona Nobis Pacem*

*Dona Nobis Pacem, Pacem*

They continue singing—grant us peace—as a deputy begins telling them they are under arrest and ordering them to put down the papal letter. They do not stop singing.


August 15, 2016

A World at War

We’re under attack from climate change—and our only hope is to mobilize like we did in WWII.

By Bill McKibben

New Republic

In the North this summer, a devastating offensive is underway. Enemy forces have seized huge swaths of territory; with each passing week, another 22,000 square miles of Arctic ice disappears. Experts dispatched to the battlefield in July saw little cause for hope, especially since this siege is one of the oldest fronts in the war. "In 30 years, the area has shrunk approximately by half,” said a scientist who examined the onslaught. “There doesn’t seem anything able to stop this.”

In the Pacific this spring, the enemy staged a daring breakout across thousands of miles of ocean, waging a full-scale assault on the region’s coral reefs. In a matter of months, long stretches of
formations like the Great Barrier Reef—dating back past the start of human civilization and visible from space—were reduced to white bone-yards.

Day after day, week after week, saboteurs behind our lines are unleashing a series of brilliant and overwhelming attacks. In the past few months alone, our foes have used a firestorm to force the total evacuation of a city of 90,000 in Canada, drought to ravage crops to the point where southern Africans are literally eating their seed corn, and floods to threaten the priceless repository of art in the Louvre. The enemy is even deploying biological weapons to spread psychological terror: The Zika virus, loaded like a bomb into a growing army of mosquitoes, has shrunk the heads of newborn babies across an entire continent; panicked health ministers in seven countries are now urging women not to get pregnant. And as in all conflicts, millions of refugees are fleeing the horrors of war, their numbers swelling daily as they’re forced to abandon their homes to escape famine and desolation and disease.

World War III is well and truly underway. And we are losing.

For years, our leaders chose to ignore the warnings of our best scientists and top military strategists. Global warming, they told us, was beginning a stealth campaign that would lay waste to vast stretches of the planet, uprooting and killing millions of innocent civilians. But instead of paying heed and taking obvious precautions, we chose to strengthen the enemy with our endless combustion; a billion explosions of a billion pistons inside a billion cylinders have fueled a global threat as lethal as the mushroom-shaped nuclear explosions we long feared. Carbon and methane now represent the deadliest enemy of all time, the first force fully capable of harrying, scattering, and impoverishing our entire civilization.

We’re used to war as metaphor: the war on poverty, the war on drugs, the war on cancer. Usually this is just a rhetorical device, a way of saying, “We need to focus our attention and marshal our forces to fix something we don’t like.” But this is no metaphor. By most of the ways we measure wars, climate change is the real deal: Carbon and methane are seizing physical territory, sowing havoc and panic, racking up casualties, and even destabilizing governments. (Over the past few years, record-setting droughts have helped undermine the brutal strongman of Syria and fuel the rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria.) It’s not that global warming is like a world war. It is a world war. Its first victims, ironically, are those who have done the least to cause the crisis. But it’s a world war aimed at us all. And if we lose, we will be as decimated and helpless as the losers in every conflict—except that this time, there will be no winners, and no end to the planetwide occupation that follows.

The question is not, are we in a world war? The question is, will we fight back? And if we do, can we actually defeat an enemy as powerful and inexorable as the laws of physics?

To answer those questions—to assess, honestly and objectively, our odds of victory in this new world war—we must look to the last one.
For four years, the United States was focused on a single, all-consuming goal, to the exclusion of any other concern: defeating the global threat posed by Germany, Italy, and Japan. Unlike Adolf Hitler, the last force to pose a planetwide threat to civilization, our enemy today is neither sentient nor evil. But before the outbreak of World War II, the world’s leaders committed precisely the same mistake we are making today—they tried first to ignore their foe, and then to appease him.

Eager to sidestep the conflict, England initially treated the Nazis as rational actors, assuming that they would play by the existing rules of the game. That’s why Neville Chamberlain came home from Munich to cheering crowds: Constrained by Britain’s military weakness and imperial overreach, he did what he thought necessary to satisfy Hitler. Surely, the thinking went, the dictator would now see reason.

But Hitler was playing by his own set of rules, which meant he had contempt for the political “realism” of other leaders. (Indeed, it meant their realism wasn’t.) Carbon and methane, by contrast, offer not contempt but complete indifference: They couldn’t care less about our insatiable desires as consumers, or the sunk cost of our fossil fuel infrastructure, or the geostrategic location of the petro-states, or any of the host of excuses that have so far constrained our response to global warming. The world came back from signing the climate accord in Paris last December exactly as Chamberlain returned from Munich: hopeful, even exhilarated, that a major threat had finally been tackled. Paul Krugman, summing up the world’s conventional wisdom, post-Paris, concluded that climate change “can be avoided with fairly modest, politically feasible steps. You may want a revolution, but we don’t need one to save the planet.” All it would take, he insisted, is for America to implement Obama’s plan for clean power, and to continue “guiding the world as a whole toward sharp reductions in emissions,” as it had in Paris.

This is, simply put, as wrong as Chamberlain’s “peace in our time.” Even if every nation in the world complies with the Paris Agreement, the world will heat up by as much as 3.5 degrees Celsius by 2100—not the 1.5 to 2 degrees promised in the pact’s preamble. And it may be too late already to meet that stated target: We actually flirted with that 1.5 degree line at the height of the El Niño warming in February, a mere 60 days after the world’s governments solemnly pledged their best efforts to slow global warming. Our leaders have been anticipating what French strategists in World War II called the guerre du longue durée, even as each new edition of Science or Nature makes clear that climate change is mounting an all-out blitzkrieg, setting new record highs for global temperatures in each of the past 14 months.

Not long after Paris, earth scientists announced that the West Antarctic ice sheet is nowhere near as stable as we had hoped; if we keep pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, it will shed ice much faster than previous research had predicted. At an insurance industry conference in April, a federal official described the new data as “an OMG thing.” “The long-term effect,” The New York Times reported, “would likely be to drown the world’s coastlines, including many of its great cities.” If Nazis were the ones threatening destruction on such a global scale today, America and its allies would already be mobilizing for a full-scale war.
The Antarctic research did contain, as the *Times* reported, one morsel of good news. Yes, following the Paris accord would doom much of the Antarctic—but a “far more stringent effort to limit emissions of greenhouse gases would stand a fairly good chance of saving West Antarctica from collapse.”

What would that “far more stringent effort” require? For years now, climate scientists and leading economists have called for treating climate change with the same resolve we brought to bear on Germany and Japan in the last world war. In July, the Democratic Party issued a platform that called for a World War II–type national mobilization to save civilization from the “catastrophic consequences” of a “global climate emergency.” In fact, Hillary Clinton’s negotiators agreed to plans for an urgent summit “in the first hundred days of the next administration” where the president will convene “the world’s best engineers, climate scientists, policy experts, activists, and indigenous communities to chart a course to solve the climate crisis.”

But what would that actually look like? What would it mean to mobilize for World War III on the same scale as we did for the last world war?

As it happens, American scientists have been engaged in a quiet but concentrated effort to figure out how quickly existing technology can be deployed to defeat global warming; a modest start, in effect, for a mighty Manhattan Project. Mark Z. Jacobson, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Stanford University and the director of its Atmosphere and Energy Program, has been working for years with a team of experts to calculate precisely how each of the 50 states could power itself from renewable resources. The numbers are remarkably detailed: In Alabama, for example, residential rooftops offer a total of 59.7 square kilometers that are unshaded by trees and pointed in the right direction for solar panels. Taken together, Jacobson’s work demonstrates conclusively that America could generate 80 to 85 percent of its power from sun, wind, and water by 2030, and 100 percent by 2050. In the past year, the Stanford team has offered similar plans for 139 nations around the world.

The research delves deep into the specifics of converting to clean energy. Would it take too much land? The Stanford numbers show that you would need about four-tenths of one percent of America’s landmass to produce enough renewable energy, mostly from sprawling solar power stations. Do we have enough raw materials? “We looked at that in some detail and we aren’t too worried,” says Jacobson. “For instance, you need neodymium for wind turbines—but there’s seven times more of it than you’d need to power half the world. Electric cars take lithium for batteries—but there’s enough lithium just in the known resources for three billion cars, and at the moment we only have 800 million.”

But would the Stanford plan be enough to slow global warming? Yes, says Jacobson: If we move quickly enough to meet the goal of 80 percent clean power by 2030, then the world’s carbon dioxide levels would fall below the relative safety of 350 parts per million by the end of the century. The planet would stop heating up, or at least the pace of that heating would slow substantially. That’s as close to winning this war as we could plausibly get. We’d endure lots of damage in the meantime, but not the civilization-scale destruction we currently face. (Even if all of the world’s nations meet the pledges they made in the Paris accord, carbon dioxide is
currently on a path to hit 500 or 600 parts per million by century’s end—a path if not to hell, then to someplace with a similar setting on the thermostat.)

To make the Stanford plan work, you would need to build a hell of a lot of factories to turn out thousands of acres of solar panels, and wind turbines the length of football fields, and millions and millions of electric cars and buses. But here again, experts have already begun to crunch the numbers. Tom Solomon, a retired engineer who oversaw the construction of one of the largest factories built in recent years—Intel’s mammoth Rio Rancho semiconductor plant in New Mexico—took Jacobson’s research and calculated how much clean energy America would need to produce by 2050 to completely replace fossil fuels. The answer: 6,448 gigawatts.

“Last year we installed 16 gigawatts of clean power,” Solomon says. “So at that pace, it would take 405 years. Which is kind of too long.”

So Solomon did the math to figure out how many factories it would take to produce 6,448 gigawatts of clean energy in the next 35 years. He started by looking at SolarCity, a clean-energy company that is currently building the nation’s biggest solar panel factory in Buffalo. “They’re calling it the giga-factory,” Solomon says, “because the panels it builds will produce one gigawatt worth of solar power every year.” Using the SolarCity plant as a rough yardstick, Solomon calculates that America needs 295 solar factories of a similar size to defeat climate change—roughly six per state—plus a similar effort for wind turbines.

Building these factories doesn’t require any new technology. In fact, the effort would be much the same as the one that Solomon oversaw at Intel’s semiconductor factory in New Mexico: Pick a site with good roads and a good technical school nearby to supply the workforce; find trained local contractors who can deal with everything from rebar to HVAC; get the local permits; order long-lead-time items like I-beam steel; level the ground and excavate; lay foundations and floors; build walls, columns, and a roof; “facilitate each of the stations for factory machine tooling with plumbing, piping, and electrical wiring”; and train a workforce of 1,500. To match the flow of panels needed to meet the Stanford targets, in the most intense years of construction we need to erect 30 of these solar panel factories a year, plus another 15 for making wind turbines. “It’s at the upper end of what I could possibly imagine,” Solomon says.

Turning out more solar panels and wind turbines may not sound like warfare, but it’s exactly what won World War II: not just massive invasions and pitched tank battles and ferocious aerial bombardments, but the wholesale industrial retooling that was needed to build weapons and supply troops on a previously unprecedented scale. Defeating the Nazis required more than brave soldiers. It required building big factories, and building them really, really fast.

In 1941, the world’s largest industrial plant under a single roof went up in six months near Ypsilanti, Michigan; Charles Lindbergh called it the “Grand Canyon of the mechanized world.” Within months, it was churning out a B-24 Liberator bomber every hour. Bombers! Huge, complicated planes, endlessly more intricate than solar panels or turbine blades—containing 1,225,000 parts, 313,237 rivets. Nearby, in Warren, Michigan, the Army built a tank factory
faster than they could build the power plant to run it—so they simply towed a steam locomotive into one end of the building to provide steam heat and electricity. That one factory produced more tanks than the Germans built in the entire course of the war.

It wasn’t just weapons. In another corner of Michigan, a radiator company landed a contract for more than 20 million steel helmets; not far away, a rubber factory retooled to produce millions of helmet liners. The company that used to supply fabrics for Ford’s seat cushions went into parachute production. Nothing went to waste—when car companies stopped making cars for the duration of the fighting, GM found it had thousands of 1939 model-year ashtrays piled up in inventory. So it shipped them out to Seattle, where Boeing put them in long-range bombers headed for the Pacific. Pontiac made anti-aircraft guns; Oldsmobile churned out cannons; Studebaker built engines for Flying Fortresses; Nash-Kelvinator produced propellers for British de Havillands; Hudson Motors fabricated wings for Helldivers and P-38 fighters; Buick manufactured tank destroyers; Fisher Body built thousands of M4 Sherman tanks; Cadillac turned out more than 10,000 light tanks. And that was just Detroit—the same sort of industrial mobilization took place all across America.

According to the conventional view of World War II, American business made all this happen simply because it rolled up its sleeves and went to war. As is so often the case, however, the conventional view is mostly wrong. Yes, there are endless newsreels from the era of patriotic businessmen unrolling blueprints and switching on assembly lines—but that’s largely because those businessmen paid for the films. Their PR departments also put out their own radio serials with titles like “Victory Is Their Business,” and “War of Enterprise,” and published endless newspaper ads boasting of their own patriotism. In reality, many of America’s captains of industry didn’t want much to do with the war until they were dragooned into it. Henry Ford, who built and managed that Ypsilanti bomber plant, was an America Firster who urged his countrymen to stay out of the war; the Chamber of Commerce (now a leading opponent of climate action) fought to block FDR’s Lend-Lease program to help the imperiled British. “American businessmen oppose American involvement in any foreign war,” the Chamber’s president explained to Congress.

Luckily, Roosevelt had a firm enough grip on Congress to overcome the Chamber, and he took the lead in gearing up America for the battles to come. Mark Wilson, a historian at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, has just finished a decade-long study of the mobilization effort, entitled Destructive Creation. It details how the federal government birthed a welter of new agencies with names like the War Production Board and the Defense Plant Corporation; the latter, between 1940 and 1945, spent $9 billion on 2,300 projects in 46 states, building factories it then leased to private industry. By war’s end, the government had a dominant position in everything from aircraft manufacturing to synthetic rubber production.

“It was public capital that built most of the stuff, not Wall Street,” says Wilson. “And at the top level of logistics and supply-chain management, the military was the boss. They placed the contracts, they moved the stuff around.” The feds acted aggressively—they would cancel contracts as war needs changed, tossing factories full of people abruptly out of work. If firms refused to take direction, FDR ordered many of them seized. Though companies made money, there was little in the way of profiteering—bad memories from World War I, Wilson says, led to
“robust profit controls,” which were mostly accepted by America’s industrial tycoons. In many cases, federal authorities purposely set up competition between public operations and private factories: The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard built submarines, but so did Electric Boat of Groton, Connecticut. “They were both quite impressive and productive,” Wilson says.

“Usually, when people from different worlds are dealing with each other, they get into conflicts and then dig in their heels deeper,” Berk says. “But because the stakes are so high and it’s moving so fast, no one doubts that if you don’t get a handle on this battle in the Atlantic, then the immediate consequences will be really grave. So they’re willing to do this kind of pragmatic trial and error. They start to see that ‘I can’t dig in my heels—I need this other person to learn from.’”

In the face of a common enemy, Americans worked together in a way they never had before.

That attitude quickly reset after the war, of course; solidarity gave way to the biggest boom in personal consumption the world had ever seen, as car-packed suburbs sprawled from every city and women were retired to the kitchen. Business, eager to redeem its isolationist image and shake off New Deal restrictions, sold itself as the hero of the war effort, patriotic industrialists who had overcome mountains of government red tape to get the job done. And the modest “operations researchers,” who had entered and learned from the real world when they managed radar development during the war, retreated to their ivory towers and became much grander “systems analysts” once the conflict ended. Robert McNamara, a former Ford executive, brought an entire wing of the Rand Corporation to the Defense Department during the Kennedy administration, where the think-tank experts promptly privatized most of the government shipyards and plane factories, and used their out-of-touch computer models to screw up government programs like Model Cities, the ambitious attempt at urban rehabilitation during the War on Poverty. “The systems analysts completely took over,” Berk says, “and the program largely failed for that reason.”

Today we live in the privatized, siloed, business-dominated world that took root under McNamara and flourished under Reagan. The actual wars we fight are marked by profiteering, and employ as many private contractors as they do soldiers. Our spirit of social solidarity is, to put it mildly, thin. (The modern-day equivalent of Father Coughlin is now the Republican candidate for president.) So it’s reasonable to ask if we can find the collective will to fight back in this war against global warming, as we once fought fascism.

For starters, it’s important to remember that a truly global mobilization to defeat climate change wouldn’t wreck our economy or throw coal miners out of work. Quite the contrary: Gearing up to stop global warming would provide a host of social and economic benefits, just as World War II did. It would save lives. (A worldwide switch to renewable energy would cut air pollution deaths by 4 to 7 million a year, according to the Stanford data.) It would produce an awful lot of jobs. (An estimated net gain of roughly two million in the United States alone.) It would provide safer, better-paying employment to energy workers. (A new study by Michigan Technological University found that we could retrain everyone in the coal fields to work in solar power for as little as $181 million, and the guy installing solar panels on a roof averages about $4,000 more a year than the guy risking his life down in the hole.) It would rescue the world’s struggling
economies. (British economist Nicholas Stern calculates that the economic impacts of unchecked global warming could far exceed those of the world wars or the Great Depression.) And fighting this war would be socially transformative. (Just as World War II sped up the push for racial and gender equality, a climate campaign should focus its first efforts on the frontline communities most poisoned by the fossil fuel era. It would help ease income inequality with higher employment, revive our hollowed-out rural states with wind farms, and transform our decaying suburbs with real investments in public transit.)

There are powerful forces, of course, that stand in the way of a full-scale mobilization. If you add up every last coal mine and filling station in the world, governments and corporations have spent $20 trillion on fossil fuel infrastructure. “No country will walk away from such investments,” writes Vaclav Smil, a Canadian energy expert. As investigative journalists have shown over the past year, the oil giant Exxon knew all about global warming for decades—yet spent millions to spread climate-denial propaganda. The only way to overcome that concerted opposition—from the very same industrial forces that opposed America’s entry into World War II—is to adopt a wartime mentality, rewriting the old mindset that stands in the way of victory. “The first step is we have to win,” says Jonathan Koomey, an energy researcher at Stanford University. “That is, we have to have broad acceptance among the broader political community that we need urgent action, not just nibbling around the edges, which is what the D.C. crowd still thinks.”

That political will is starting to build, just as it began to gather in the years before Pearl Harbor. A widespread movement has killed off the Keystone pipeline, stymied Arctic drilling, and banned fracking in key states and countries. As one oil industry official lamented in July, “The ‘keep-it-in-the-ground’ campaign” has “controlled the conversation.” This resembles, at least a little, the way FDR actually started gearing up for war 18 months before the “date which will live in infamy.” The ships and planes that won the Battle of Midway six months into 1942 had all been built before the Japanese attacked Hawaii. “By the time of Pearl Harbor,” Wilson says, “the government had pretty much solved the problem of organization. After that, they just said, ‘We’re going to have to make twice as much.’”

Pearl Harbor did make individual Americans willing to do hard things: pay more in taxes, buy billions upon billions in war bonds, endure the shortages and disruptions that came when the country’s entire economy converted to wartime production. Use of public transit went up 87 percent during the war, as Naomi Klein points out in This Changes Everything; 40 percent of the nation’s vegetables were grown in victory gardens. For the first time, women and minorities were able to get good factory jobs; Rosie the Riveter changed our sense of what was possible.

Without a Pearl Harbor, in fact, there was only so much even FDR could have accomplished. So far, there has been no equivalent in the climate war—no single moment that galvanizes the world to realize that nothing short of total war will save civilization. Perhaps the closest we’ve come to FDR’s “date of infamy” speech—and it wasn’t all that close—was when Bernie Sanders, in the first debate, was asked to name the biggest security threat facing the planet. “Climate change,” he replied—prompting all the usual suspects to tut-tut that he was soft on “radical Islamic terrorism.” Then, in the second debate, the question came up again, a day after the Paris massacres. “Do you still believe that?” the moderator asked, in gotcha mode. “Absolutely,”
replied Sanders, who then proceeded to give an accurate account of how record drought will lead to international instability.

Had he won, it’s possible that Bernie could have combined his focus on jobs and climate and infrastructure into some kind of overarching effort that really mattered—he was, after all, the presidential candidate most comfortable with big government since FDR. Donald Trump, of course, will dodge this war just as he did Vietnam. He thinks (if that’s actually the right verb) that climate change is a hoax manufactured by the Chinese, who apparently in their Oriental slyness convinced the polar ice caps to go along with their conspiracy. Clinton’s advisers originally promised there would be a “climate war room” in her White House, but then corrected the record: It would actually be a “climate map room,” which sounds somewhat less gung ho.

In fact, one of the lowest points in my years of fighting climate change came in late June, when I sat on the commission appointed to draft the Democratic Party platform. (I was a Sanders appointee, alongside Cornel West and other luminaries.) At 11 p.m. on a Friday night, in a mostly deserted hotel ballroom in St. Louis, I was given an hour to offer nine amendments to the platform to address climate change. More bike paths passed by unanimous consent, but all the semi-hard things that might begin to make a real difference—a fracking ban, a carbon tax, a prohibition against drilling or mining fossil fuels on public lands, a climate litmus test for new developments, an end to World Bank financing of fossil fuel plants—were defeated by 7–6 tallies, with the Clinton appointees voting as a bloc. They were quite concerned about climate change, they insisted, but a “phased-down” approach would be best. There was the faintest whiff of Munich about it. Like Chamberlain, these were all good and concerned people, just the sort of steady, evenhanded folks you’d like to have leading your nation in normal times. But they misunderstood the nature of the enemy. Like fascism, climate change is one of those rare crises that gets stronger if you don’t attack. In every war, there are very real tipping points, past which victory, or even a draw, will become impossible. And when the enemy manages to decimate some of the planet’s oldest and most essential physical features—a polar ice cap, say, or the Pacific’s coral reefs—that’s a pretty good sign that a tipping point is near. In this war that we’re in—the war that physics is fighting hard, and that we aren’t—winning slowly is exactly the same as losing.

To my surprise, things changed a couple weeks later, when the final deliberations over the Democratic platform were held in Orlando. While Clinton’s negotiators still wouldn’t support a ban on fracking or a carbon tax, they did agree we needed to “price” carbon, that wind and sun should be given priority over natural gas, and that any federal policy that worsened global warming should be rejected.

Maybe it was polls showing that Bernie voters—especially young ones—have been slow to sign on to the Clinton campaign. Maybe the hottest June in American history had opened some minds. But you could, if you squinted, create a hopeful scenario. Clinton, for instance, promised that America will install half a billion solar panels in the next four years. That’s not so far off the curve that Tom Solomon calculates we need to hit. And if we do it by building solar factories of our own, rather than importing cheap foreign-made panels, we’ll be positioning America as the
world’s dominant power in clean energy, just as our mobilization in World War II ensured our economic might for two generations. If we don’t get there first, others will: Driven by anger over smog-choked cities, the Chinese have already begun installing renewable energy at a world-beating rate.

“It would be a grave mistake for the United States to wait for another nation to take the lead in combating the global climate emergency,” the Democratic platform asserts. “We are committed to a national mobilization, and to leading a global effort to mobilize nations to address this threat on a scale not seen since World War II.”

The next president doesn’t have to wait for a climate equivalent of Pearl Harbor to galvanize Congress. Much of what we need to do can—and must—be accomplished immediately, through the same use of executive action that FDR relied on to lay the groundwork for a wider mobilization. The president could immediately put a halt to drilling and mining on public lands and waters, which contain at least half of all the untapped carbon left in America. She could slow the build-out of the natural gas system simply by correcting the outmoded way the EPA calculates the warming effect of methane, just as Obama reined in coal-fired power plants. She could tell her various commissioners to put a stop to the federal practice of rubber-stamping new fossil fuel projects, rejecting those that would “significantly exacerbate” global warming. She could instruct every federal agency to buy all their power from green sources and rely exclusively on plug-in cars, creating new markets overnight. She could set a price on carbon for her agencies to follow internally, even without the congressional action that probably won’t be forthcoming. And just as FDR brought in experts from the private sector to plan for the defense build-out, she could get the blueprints for a full-scale climate mobilization in place even as she rallies the political will to make them plausible. Without the same urgency and foresight displayed by FDR—without immediate executive action—we will lose this war.

Normally in wartime, defeatism is a great sin. Luckily, though, you can’t give aid and comfort to carbon; it has no morale to boost. So we can be totally honest. We’ve waited so long to fight back in this war that total victory is impossible, and total defeat can’t be ruled out.

While the Democrats were meeting in that depressing St. Louis hotel room last June, I had my laptop open. Even as they voted down one measure after another to combat climate change, news kept coming in from the front lines:

In Japan, 700,000 people were told to evacuate their homes after record rainfall led to severe flooding and landslides. The deluge continued for five days; at its peak, nearly six inches of rain were falling every hour.

In California, thousands of homes were threatened in a wildfire described by the local fire chief as “one of the most devastating I’ve ever seen.” Suburban tracts looked like Dresden after the bombing. Planes and helicopters buzzed overhead, dropping bright plumes of chemical retardants; if the “Flight of the Valkyries” had been playing, it could have been a scene from Apocalypse Now.
And in West Virginia, a “one in a thousand year” storm dropped historic rain across the mountains, triggering record floods that killed dozens. “You can see people in the second-story windows waiting to be evacuated,” one local official reported. A particularly dramatic video—a kind of YouTube Guernica for our moment—showed a large house being consumed by flames as it was swept down a rampaging river until it crashed into a bridge. “Everybody lost everything,” one dazed resident said. “We never thought it would be this bad.” A state trooper was even more succinct. “It looks like a war zone,” he said.

Because it is.

Want to join the fight against climate change? Sign up on 350.org here.

Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College and co-founder of the climate group 350.org.

Illustrations by Andrew Colin Beck

https://newrepublic.com/article/135684/declare-war-climate-change-mobilize-wwii

August 15, 2016

Dakota Access Pipeline Standoff: Mni Wiconi, Water is Life

By Valerie Taliman
Indian Country Today Media Network

The controversial Dakota Access Pipeline project is back in the news. Over the weekend, tribal activists faced off against lines of police in Hunkpapa Territory near Cannon Ball as construction crews prepared to break ground for the new pipeline, while Standing Rock Sioux governmental officials resolved to broaden their legal battle to stop the project.

On July 26, 2016 the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe was stunned to learn that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had given its approval for the pipeline to run within a half-mile of the reservation without proper consultation or consent. Also, the new 1,172 mile Dakota Access Pipeline will cross Lake Oahe (formed by Oahe Dam on the Missouri) and the Missouri River as well, and disturb burial grounds and sacred sites on the tribe’s ancestral Treaty lands, according to SRST officials.

Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners will build, own and operate the proposed $3.78 billion Dakota Access Pipeline and plans to transport up to 570,000 barrels of crude oil fracked from the Bakken oil fields across four states to a market hub in Illinois. The pipeline—already facing widespread opposition by a coalition of farmers, ranchers and environmental groups—will cross 209 rivers, creeks and tributaries, according to Dakota Access, LLC.
Standing Rock Sioux leaders say the pipeline will threaten the Missouri River, the tribe’s main source of drinking and irrigation water, and forever destroy burial grounds and sacred sites.

“We don't want this black snake within our Treaty boundaries,” said Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II. “We need to stop this pipeline that threatens our water. We have said repeatedly we don’t want it here. We want the Army Corps to honor the same rights and protections that were afforded to others, rights we were never afforded when it comes to our territories. We demand the pipeline be stopped and kept off our Treaty boundaries.”

On July 27, SRST filed litigation in federal court in the District of Columbia to challenge the actions of the Corps regarding the Dakota Access pipeline. The suit seeks to enforce the tribal nation’s federally protected rights and interests. The nation is seeking a preliminary injunction to undo the Corps’ approval of the pipeline at a hearing on August 24. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and several other native nations have asked to join the lawsuit.

On August 8, Dakota Access called the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to give 48-hour notice that construction would begin on August 10 for an access corridor and staging area where pipes and other equipment will be stored for construction.

As news of the planned construction spread via social media among tribal citizens and activists, a grass-roots gathering assembled at what is now being referred to as the Sacred Stone Camp where people are holding the line to stop construction. After Dakota Access workers began clearing an area for preliminary pipeline work, several hundred protestors gradually assembled at the site, prompting law enforcement to intervene and arrest more than a dozen people. Among those were Chairman Archambault (in orange shirt in below video) and SRST Councilman Dana Yellow Fat, who quickly posted bond and were released.

“We have a voice, and we are here using it collectively in a respectful and peaceful manner,” Archambault said. “The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is doing everything it can legally, through advocacy and by speaking directly to the powers that be who could have helped us before construction began. This has happened over and over, and we will not continue to be completely ignored and let the Army Corps of Engineers ride roughshod over our rights.”

Archambault said the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples requires free, prior and informed consent for development impacting Indian land, territories and waters.

“We have a serious obligation, a core responsibility to our people and to our children, to protect our source of water,” he said. “Our people will receive no benefits from this pipeline, yet we are paying the ultimate price for it with our water. We will not stop asking the federal government and Army Corps to end their attacks on our water and our people.”

The proposed construction route is within a half-mile of the tribe’s reservation border, sparking concerns for protection of cultural resources that remain with the land. Hunkpapa religious and cultural sites are situated along the route of the pipeline, including burial sites of ancestors.
“The land between the Cannonball River and the Heart River is sacred,” said Jon Eagle Sr., STST’s Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. “It’s a historic place of commerce where enemy tribes camped peacefully within sight of each other because of the reverence they had for this place. In the area are sacred stones where our ancestors went to pray for good direction, strength and protection for the coming year. Those stones are still there, and our people still go there today.”

Eagle worries that the pipeline will harm many tribal nations along the Missouri.

“Wherever the buffalo roamed our ancestors left evidence of their existence and connection to everything in creation,” he said. “The aboriginal lands of the Oceti Sakowin extend as far west as Wyoming and Montana, as far north as Canada, as far east as the Great Lakes, and as far south as Kansas. Construction along this corridor will disturb burial places and cultural sites.”

According to the recently filed “motion for preliminary injunction” by the SRST, Dakota Access initially considered two possible routes: a northern route near Bismarck, and a southern route taking the pipeline to the border of the Standing Rock reservation. Federal law requires the Army Corps to review and deny or grant the company’s permit applications to construct the pipeline. The southern route takes the pipeline across the Missouri River and Lake Oahe, implicating lands and water under federal jurisdiction.

In the initial environmental assessment, the maps utilized by Dakota Access and the Army Corps did not indicate that SRST’s lands were close to the proposed Lake Oahe crossing. The company selected this route because the northern route “would be near and could jeopardize the drinking water of the residents in the city of Bismarck.” The Army Corps of Engineers has not issued a public response to the newly filed litigation or protest. In a statement that appeared in a May 4 story in the DesMoines Register, Col. John Henderson, commander of the Corps’ Omaha District said, “The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is not an opponent or a proponent of the project. Our job is to consider impacts to the public and the environment as well as all applicable laws, regulations and policies associated yet with this permission and permit review process.”

An Energy Transfer spokesperson told ICTMN, “It is important to note that Dakota Access does not cross any reservation land and is compliant with all regulations regarding tribal coordination and cultural resources. We have communicated with the various tribes that have an interest in the DAPL project as we recognize the traditional range of the Native Americans and their sensitivity to historic ranges for cultural properties. We are confident the USACE has adequately addressed the portion of the project subject to their review and where a NEPA analysis is required. They are the experts in this area, and we believe they have done an excellent job addressing any comments received to date.”

Tribal leaders and environmental activists say the company’s draft environmental assessment of December 9, 2015 did not mention that the route they chose brings the pipeline near the drinking water of tribal citizens. In fact, it omitted the existence of the tribe on all maps and analysis, in violation of environmental justice policies.
While federal law requires meaningful consultation with affected Indian nations, SRST governmental officials allege that didn’t happen despite numerous requests by the nation. Since they first heard of the proposed project in 2014, SRST leaders have voiced strong opposition to company, state and federal officials, and to Congress.

They met with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to discuss the harm imposed by the pipeline. All three agencies subsequently wrote letters to the Army Corps expressing environmental and cultural resource concerns related to the pipeline.

Archambault said they’ve been working on many levels for more than seven months to stop construction. But the tribe and the three federal agencies were apparently ignored by the Army Corps, which moved ahead with permits for the pipeline.

In addition, Standing Rock youth ages 6–25 from the reservation vowed to run to Washington, D.C. to deliver a petition with 160,000 signatures on change.org opposing the pipeline to the President of the United States. After running for 2,200 miles, they were able to meet with Army Corps officials and hold rallies along the way; they returned home on August 10.

Standing Rock leadership has also put out the call to Indian country to stand in support of protecting their water, land and people. Dozens of Indian nations have already written letters and resolutions to support the Lakota people.

As for the growing number of people at the grassroots rally, Archambault publicly asked that everyone be peaceful and respectful of one another in the coming days.

“We want peaceful demonstrations and I need everyone to understand that what we are doing, in the manner we are doing it, is working,” he said. “By being peaceful and avoiding violence we are getting the attention needed to stop the pipeline.

“We’re getting the message out that all the wrongdoing that’s been done to Indian people will no longer be tolerated,” he said. “But we’re going about it in a peaceful and respectful manner. If we turn to violence, all that will be for nothing. I’m hoping and praying that through prayer and peace, for once the government will listen to us.”

Archambault also honored the Lakota youth who want to make a better future in his message.

“Our youth carry powerful messages when they speak, and we respect our youth and listen to them,” he said. “We honor and support the youth, runners, elders, campers, and supporters, and we are thankful for all the important efforts they’re making to protect our water.”

http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2016/08/15/dakota-access-pipeline-standoff-mni-wiconi-water-life-165470

August 16, 2016
Louisiana flooding displaces 20,000, Baton Rouge churches call for volunteers

By Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

As Louisiana's governor announced the federal government had declared a major disaster for the state Saturday, Catholic churches in the Baton Rouge diocese called for volunteers to help those displaced by extreme flooding and asked flood victims what assistance they needed.

Gov. John Bel Edwards told reporters at a news conference that about 20,000 people had been rescued from their homes and more than 10,000 people were in shelters after a slow-moving tropical storm system dumped nearly 2 feet of rain on southern Louisiana. Several rivers crested at record levels.

As of mid-morning Monday, state officials said at least six people have died in the floods.

Baton Rouge Bishop Robert Muench visited three evacuation shelters Monday to comfort evacuees. In a statement the day before, he dispensed Sunday Mass obligations for all Catholics affected by the storm and urged parishioners to limit their driving over the weekend because of "the inherent dangers of unsafe driving conditions."

"Please know of my prayers for your safety and the safety of your church parishes and parishioners," he said in a message to pastors.

On Friday Edwards declared a state of emergency for the state of Louisiana and deployed the Louisiana National Guard. He then requested that President Barack Obama issue a federal disaster declaration. With that declaration -- which initially affects four civil parishes, with more expected -- residents can seek assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. At least 18 civil parishes have declared a state of emergency, with more expected to do so.

"This is a serious event. It is ongoing. It is not over," Edwards told reporters. "We are not in control as far as how fast these floodwaters will recede, and in fact they are still going up in some places."

He said he traveled to affected areas and saw firsthand "the destruction caused by this unprecedented flood."

In a notice on its website, St. Jude the Apostle Catholic Church in East Baton Rouge civil parish called on parishioners available to volunteer to attend a morning meeting Monday to help with "flood relief planning and implementation."

"It is possible that a significant number of our parish staff are unable to leave their homes and come to work, so we will need to rely heavily on parish volunteers," the notice said.
At least two other Baton Rouge parishes, St. George and St. Aloysius, have set up Web pages asking flood victims to submit requests for help and asking others to list the kind of help they can provide.


August 16, 2016

Marian devotees in Vietnam urged to take responsibility for environment

By Joachim Pham
National Catholic Reporter

Catholics in the central Vietnamese diocese of Vinh who attended feast of the Assumption celebrations Aug. 15 were urged to help victims of marine pollution and to work to protect the environment.

Some 50,000 Catholics gathered in Xa Doai Cathedral and its square in Nghi Loc, Nghe An province for feast day celebrations. Among them were more than 1,500 parishioners who marched 5 kilometers from Nhan Hoa deanery to the cathedral, carrying banners reading "Close down Formosa," and "protecting the environment is protecting our life."

Fr. Joseph Nguyen Xuan Phuong, parish priest of Nhan Hoa, said they marched to protest the Taiwanese-built steel plant, a unit of Formosa Plastics, which allegedly discharged toxic waste, including phenol and cyanide, into the waters of four provinces, killing masses of fish in April. The plant is based in Ha Tinh province under the diocesan administration.

The priest said diocesan leaders asked Catholics to attend the feast of the Assumption celebrations to pray for national peace and prosperity, for the victims of the environmental disaster and that the country's leaders would protect the country.

In his homily, Bishop Paul Nguyen Thai Hop of Vinh said Mother Mary loves, supports and consoles her children around the world. She is concerned about people's sufferings and the injustices they face, he said.

"As Catholics and citizens, we have responsibility for our nation and younger generations and are determined to build a fairer and more humane society, protect the environment and express our solidarity with victims of the environment disaster," Hop told the congregation.

He urged parishioners to "exercise your civil rights as allowed by law, to moderately request transparency of governing the country and dealing with the disaster from the government, and ask the government to bring those who caused the disaster to justice and compensate victims properly."
Vietnam's Natural Resources and Environment Minister Tran Hong Ha said July 29 that Formosa had paid the first half of a $500 million fine that will be used to clean the water and compensate those affected. Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Nguyen Xuan Cuong said the ministry was counting the number of people whose livelihoods were hurt by the marine disaster.

Activists said the compensation is insufficient to pay the cost of cleaning the sea, a multi-year process, and to help hundreds of thousands of victims return to their normal life.

On Aug. 7, the diocese organized a "day for the environment" in all parishes to raise public awareness about environmental protection. They held Masses and the adoration of the Eucharist, conducted peaceful demonstrations and cleaned up garbage around the churches and parish buildings.

The diocese's Justice and Peace Commission organized the event.

On July 27, the commission also petitioned the government to provide emergency aid to fishermen. "Many fishermen get into heavy debt due to losing [their] income and having no work," it said.


August 17, 2016

World Culture Festival: Sri Sri event destroyed Yamuna’s floodplain, biodiversity lost forever, expert panel to NGT

AOL rejects allegation, says it is asking tribunal to reconstitute panel of experts.

By Kaunain Sheriff M
The Indian Express

A committee of experts, appointed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to assess the damage caused to the Yamuna floodplain in Delhi where the World Culture Festival of The Art of Living was held last March, has found that the “entire floodplain area used for the main event site” has been “completely destroyed” causing “invisible loss of biodiversity” that “may never be able to return”.

In its report, submitted to the NGT on July 28, the seven-member panel, headed by Shashi Shekhar, Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, said “the entire floodplain area used for the main event site, i.e. between the DND flyover and Barapullah drain (on the right bank of river Yamuna) has been completely destroyed, not simply destroyed. The ground is now totally levelled, compacted and hardened, totally devoid of water bodies or depressions, and almost completely devoid of any vegetation (except a few large cattails at the base of of the DND flyover)".
The committee pointed out that its members were “prevented from making any study and were forced to retreat by the AOL volunteers on the site” on April 15, and that they visited the site again on June 6 “for a visual assessment”. It said its observations were supported by satellite images of the site taken on March 15 and May 10.

Reached for comments by The Indian Express, The Art of Living, in a statement, said, “The NGT is yet to hear our application for reconstitution of the committee.

Hence, it is not logical to take the report of the committee into consideration before our application is heard. Taking all facts into consideration, it is clear that the allegation of environmental damage are unscientific, biased and unsustainable. We will submit our objections to the report in detail once we have had a chance to go through it.”

**These are the key findings of the committee:**

* The main event site has been “totally destroyed by complete clearing of all kinds of vegetation on the floodplain (and loss of all dependent biodiversity), filling in of water bodies and all depressions, dumping of debris and garbage followed by levelling and heavy compacting of the ground”.

* “Most of the ecosystem functions of natural wetlands have been completely lost… This is an ‘invisible’ loss of biodiversity which cannot be easily assessed, and most may never be able to return. Far more significant changes are expected in the micro-organisms which are critical to the ecosystem functioning.”

* “Construction of ramps and roads, filling up of water bodies and levelling of the ground together with compaction have almost completely eliminated the natural physical features and diversity of habitats.”

* “Physical changes also occurred in the river channel due to the removal of riparian vegetation, construction of road and pontoon bridges, blocking of the side channel that would invariably disturb the flow and bottom sediments besides bringing in particulate material (sediments and organic matter) into it.”

* “The simplification of habitat into a flat land has eliminated all water bodies in the impacted area – shallow or deep form naturally in the floodplain. These water bodies control floods, help groundwater recharge, support vegetation, fish and other biodiversity. Overall, the floodwater retention capacity of the area has been severely compromised.”

* “The floodplain has lost almost all of its natural vegetation – trees, shrubs, reeds, tall grasses, aquatic vegetation including water hyacinth. The vegetation also includes numerous microscopic forms of algae, mosses and some ferns which inhabit the soil and water bodies. All of them have been destroyed in the area completely. Their total loss cannot be readily visualised and documented.”
* “The vegetation provides habitat, food and sites for breeding/nesting to a large number and
kinds of animals including birds, fishes, frogs, turtles, insects and innumerable bottom and mud-
dwelling organisms (molluscs, earthworms, insects, and various other micro and macroscopic
invertebrates). These organisms were rendered homeless, driven away by the intense activity and
many were consigned to their graves under the debris.”

The committee has told the NGT that it is “necessary” to get a detailed project report prepared by
an independent agency which will also estimate costs for a restoration plan.

On August 10, the NGT said, “We grant liberty to the committee to engage any specialised
agency if they so desire for which the Ministry concerned, that is Ministry of Water Resources,
shall bear the expense. Let a report, may be tentative with the regard to costing factor, be
submitted to the tribunal within 45 days.”

The NGT will hear the matter next on September 28.

http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/art-of-living-sri-sri-ravi-shankar-yamuna-
world-culture-festival-ngt-2979660/

August 19, 2016

LWF encouraged by member church action to review investments in fossil fuel companies

The Lutheran World Federation

*General Secretary Junge at Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America*

(LWI) – Key actions from the recent governing body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America (ELCA) included response to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) call to its member
churches to not invest in fossil fuels, advocacy for peace with justice in the Holy Land, and
support towards migrants children and their families.

At its 8-13 August meeting in New Orleans, United States, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly
voted to review its respective social teachings and Corporate Social Responsibility policies and
procedures “with the goal of not investing in, and removing the largest fossil fuel companies as
identified by Carbon Tracker, and investing in corporations which are taking positive steps
toward a sustainable environment.”

Voting members also called for the church’s benefits and retirement services agency Portico “to
evaluate the viability of an optional fossil-free fund for retirement plan participants.”

Addressing the Assembly prior to the vote, General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge explained
LWF’s decision at the June 2015 Council meeting to not invest in companies engaged in or
benefiting from fossil fuel-based activities was part of its commitment to climate justice. He said
he was “very encouraged” by the “sense of urgency” with which the ELCA had taken up this call.

**Responsibility for intergenerational justice**

“We don’t deal with climate change as an issue of abstraction, as an idea, but as an issue that is affecting sisters and brothers to whom we are linked up through communion relationships,” Junge noted, citing countries such as Brazil, Honduras, India, Myanmar and Namibia, often dealing with the reality of flooding and drought. “LWF knows about it. LWF feels about it, because it is touching the lives particularly of those most vulnerable,” he said.

The general secretary emphasized that tackling climate change is also about taking responsibility for intergenerational justice. This focus became more apparent for the LWF through the advocacy of its all-youth delegation to the United Nations Climate conferences, including the December 2015 COP 21 in Paris, France, he added.

“We won’t be able to tell our children and youth in the future how much we love and care for them if we are not able to show and share with them at the same time how much we care about creation,” Junge said amid applause. He noted the LWF Communion Office was already working on the Council’s request that the LWF become a carbon-neutral communion by 2050.

**Gratitude for ELCA’s support to LWF’s work**

The ELCA’s highest-legislative body also voted in favor of a strategy to advocate for and accompany migrant minors and their families and address the root causes of migration from Central America’s Northern Triangle and Mexico region. Junge expressed appreciation for this consideration and thanked the ELCA for its support towards LWF’s humanitarian work with more than 2.3 million refugees in the world.

The Assembly accepted the “Declaration on the Way” ecumenical document that marks a path toward greater unity between Catholics and Lutherans. At the heart of the document are 32 “Statements of Agreement” stating where Lutherans and Catholics do not have church-dividing differences, as well as remaining differences. The LWF general secretary said the document can be a helpful step on the way to a global agreement between Lutherans and Catholics on church, ministry and the Eucharist.

In other actions, the church body endorsed proposals calling for support toward the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and other Christians in sustaining their presence in the Holy Land.

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly met under the theme “Freed and Renewed in Christ: 500 Years of God’s Grace in Action.”

*(With contributions from ELCA news releases.)*
August 23, 2016

Native Activist Winona LaDuke: Pipeline Company Enbridge Has No Right to Destroy Our Future

By Amy Goodman
Democracy Now!

In North Dakota, more than a thousand indigenous activists from different tribes have converged at the Sacred Stone Spirit Camp, where protesters are blocking construction of the proposed $3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline. Protesters say the pipeline would threaten to contaminate the Missouri River, which provides water not only for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, but for millions of people downstream. For more, we are joined by Winona LaDuke, Native American activist and executive director of the group Honor the Earth. She lives and works on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota.

TRANSCRIPT
This is a rush transcript. Copy may not be in its final form.

AMY GOODMAN: This is Democracy Now!, democracynow.org, The War and Peace Report. I’m Amy Goodman, as we continue to look at the growing indigenous protest against the proposed $3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline, which they say would threaten to contaminate the Missouri River. We’re joined now by Winona LaDuke, Native American activist, executive director of the group Honor the Earth. She lives and works on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota. She was also the Green Party vice-presidential nominee in 1996 and 2000.

Winona, welcome back to Democracy Now! Can you talk about why, from the White Earth Reservation, where you live, you’ve gotten involved with this battle against the Dakota Access pipeline?

WINONA LADUKE: Well, good morning, first, Amy and Dave. Yeah, our reservation in northern Minnesota is the proposed site, our territory, for the Sandpiper. For the past four years, I’ve been fighting the Enbridge company. Enbridge company is proposing three new lines through our territory. One of them is the Sandpiper, and that would cross, affecting—basically, by the time they’re done, five of our reservations would be affected by these pipelines, which would go by the Mississippi River and through the heart of our wild rice beds.

Enbridge has been pushing for a brand-new corridor, because they have this old corridor. They say it’s got, you know, six pipelines in them, all about 50 years old, kind of falling-apart pipelines, and so they want to, instead of cleaning up their old mess, they want to make a whole new mess. So, for four years, we’ve been fighting them and telling them they cannot do that.
And the courts, you know, had ruled in our favor, and now a full EIS is required. And the tribes are demanding that the process include them and the tribes should have some say in it.

So, I was really surprised, because Enbridge told us all that the only thing that they could do, it was so important to them, the only way they could get their oil to market was to run it through northern Minnesota. And then, one day I wake up, and they forgot all about us, and they move out there to North Dakota. Seemed very disingenuous to me.

AMY GOODMAN: And so, you went—

WINONA LADUKE: I came out—came out to North Dakota, yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: And talk about what you found there.

WINONA LADUKE: Well, what I found out in North Dakota is that, you know, the state of North Dakota has been bending over backwards for the oil companies, although the fact is, is that there are now more lawsuits than active drilling rigs out there, you know, because there was such a big push to develop all this oil in the Bakken, basically bust up the bedrock of Mother Earth, put all those chemicals in it, look the other way and pretend like things are going swimmingly out in North Dakota. So, North Dakota has got this landlocked oil. They’re taking a beating on it right now. There is an 85 percent drop in active drilling rigs in the Bakken. Fact is, is that they don’t even have it going on out there, but they are bound and determined to get whatever oil out of there they can, and so they decided to throw this pipeline through them. You know, North Dakota’s regulators are, I would suggest, really in— you know, I would say, in bed with the oil industry, and they have looked the other way. And so, they have pushed these pipelines through, you know, really, really fast, without any tribal consultation and without a full environmental impact statement.

And that’s what needs to happen. You need a full environmental impact statement on this. And, you know, I say—what we say is that you should have a well-to-wheels impact. In other words, it’s not just hauling the oil. It’s not just endangering all those, you know, watersheds. It’s not just the fact that, you know, former editor of Scientific American Trudy Bell says 57 percent chance of a catastrophic leak. It’s not even just that. It’s what about all that carbon? We’re sitting here, you know, in this world, where there’s been no rain in Syria for five years. There’s catastrophic storms everywhere. And this pipeline is going to bring about 250,000-per-day tons of carbon into the atmosphere. That’s what this Dakota Access pipeline is. And that’s wrong. You know, a private corporation doesn’t get to destroy things—a Canadian corporation, at that. Enbridge isn’t even a U.S. corporation; you know, Enbridge is a Canadian corporation. And they have no right to destroy our water, no right to compromise our future.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk a little more about Enbridge? You recently wrote that Enbridge looks a lot like Enron. Explain.

WINONA LADUKE: Yeah, I mean, Enbridge is not doing so well. You know, I’ve been writing letters. I kind of feel like that Roger & Me thing. I write letters to Al Monaco, the president of Enbridge. I say, "Hey, it’s Winona down here on White Earth, wondering about a
few things." They had, you know, a few catastrophic blow-ups last year. And then, this year, first of all, June 30th, they lost this big pipeline. You know, Enbridge is in the pipeline business. The Northern Gateway pipeline, $7.9 billion proposal, they thought they had it with the Harper administration. You know, that was looking pretty good up in Canada, Stephen Harper. Trudeau gets in. Every tribe along the way, every First Nation along the way and the province of British Columbia is opposing this pipeline, which would take it to Port Kitimat, you know, really pristine area with all these fjords. Anyway, what happens is the Canadian Federal Appeals Court rules that all of the permits are void, that, in fact, Enbridge and the government have to go all the way back and talk to the First Nations, tribal consultation. That had to really hurt Enbridge quite a bit, $7.9 billion pipeline. You know, we got them on the ropes there in Minnesota. They’re now in the EIS process, although they would have liked to kind of like skirt around that. But the citizens of Minnesota and the tribes have forced that process.

And then you add this little problem that’s called the faulty pipes scandal. What happened is, is that in July, it was announced in a National Observer National Energy Board leak that Enbridge and this other company called Kinder Morgan had purchased these pipes from a—called Canada Oil, Canada Oil, and it’s a Thailand-based company, discount pipes. They purchased all these pipes and valves that are faulty. And the National Energy Board of Canada, Canadian government says, "Emergency situation. Where are those pipes, Enbridge?" Enbridge’s lawyers have said they need time to disclose where exactly all those pipes are. Now, I’m sitting here, and in northern Minnesota we’ve got six lines crossing through our really good ecosystem. I’m wondering if some of those pipes are there. Or maybe they’re over in a pile by Lake George, next to my reservation. We would like a full disclosure as to where the faulty pipes are that Enbridge has. You know, look at that, and then they got a 40 percent—their shares are down now, a 40 percent drop in their shares, you know, from two years ago. So I feel like Enbridge is not looking so good, not looking so good to their shareholders. And they’ve got a lot of liability they are putting on us, on Americans, on Native people, and trying to force it down the throat of the Standing Rock people. And I feel like that that company is not a reliable corporation.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Last month, Winona, the Laborers’ International Union of North America endorsed the Dakota Access pipeline. Terry O’Sullivan, general president of LIUNA, said in a statement, quote, "The men and women of LIUNA applaud the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for its fair and thorough review of the Dakota Access Pipeline. ... For the highly skilled and trained men and women of LIUNA, projects like the Dakota Access are more than just pipelines. They are crucial lifelines to family-supporting jobs," they said. Laborers Local 563 business agent Cory Bryson said, quote, "We’ve been inundated with calls from all over the country from people wanting to work on this pipeline project. Mainline pipeline projects like Dakota Access provide excellent working opportunities for our members and tremendous wages." Your response, Winona LaDuke?

**WINONA LADUKE:** My response is that the United States has a D in infrastructure. That’s why bridges collapse. That’s why Flint, Michigan, has a problem. That’s why everything is eroding in this country. And what we need is those skilled laborers to be put to work, pipelines for people. I’m saying take those pipes that are sitting there in northern Minnesota, and send them to Flint, Michigan. They need billions of dollars’ worth of pipe infrastructure out there. We don’t need any pipes in northern Minnesota. I say that most of our Indian reservations don’t have
adequate infrastructure. We’d like a little help with our water and sewer systems there. I am all for organized labor, but what I want is I want pipelines, I want infrastructure, for people, not for fossil fuels, not for oil companies. So I am all for that. There are plenty of people that could be put to work. And it’s five times as many jobs doing infrastructure for communities, doing for people, than one shot throw a pipe down and hope it works out for you. So I’m asking American labor to stand with us and to say we want pipelines, we want infrastructure, that goes for people, that goes for communities, and not for oil companies that are going to destroy our environment and cause more climate change destruction to our planet.

AMY GOODMAN: Winona LaDuke, we want to thank you for being with us, Native American activist, executive director of the group Honor the Earth. She lives and works on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota.

This is Democracy Now!, democracynow.org, The War and Peace Report. When we come back, we go to Tulsa and to North Carolina. stay with us.

http://www.democracynow.org/2016/8/23/native_activist_winona_laduke_pipeline_company

August 24, 2016

Dakota Access Pipeline Protests Recall America’s Historical Shame

By Sonali Kolhatkar
TruthDig

Until a few years ago, the word “occupation” was synonymous with power, imperialism and foreign invasion. Today, in the post-Occupy Wall Street era, more and more activists are using their physical presence to make demands. From Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park to Tahrir Square in Cairo, occupation has become a powerful method of organizing.

One of the most dramatic such occupations is occurring in the form of a growing encampment at the Cannonball River in North Dakota, where indigenous tribes are leading a coalition of environmental activists in protest over the building of a new crude oil pipeline.

The Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL) has stolen more than a name from American Indians (“dakota” means “friendly” or “allied”). If built, it would pass under the Missouri River twice. The pipeline, which could leak, as many pipelines do, threatens to contaminate the drinking water, crops and burial grounds of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. Federal regulatory agencies, including the Army Corps of Engineers, quietly approved DAPL, which will transport Bakkan crude oil from North Dakota through South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois.

Last November, President Obama rejected the Keystone XL pipeline, which would have transported tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to the U.S. Gulf Coast. The rejection was the result of a years-long, hard-fought battle by thousands of activists, many of whom made personal sacrifices, traveled long distances and were even arrested for their acts of civil disobedience.
DAPL, which is only seven miles shorter than Keystone would have been, has not received the same scrutiny. Now, the only thing standing in the way of the pipeline is a growing army of nonviolent protesters blocking construction. An occupation that began in April has grown to about 2,000 and is still growing. Members of the Standing Rock Sioux have set strict rules at the space they are calling Sacred Stone Camp: No weapons, alcohol or drugs.

Members of other North American tribes, including Canadian First Nations, are traveling to the site in solidarity. Celebrities such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Shailene Woodley and Ezra Miller have lent their support. The protesters are standing firm, and more than 20 people have been arrested.

Jason Coppola, a filmmaker and journalist who has been covering the protests, explained in an interview with me that one of the most important aspects of this story is one that is age-old: The U.S. government is violating its treaty obligations to Native American tribes. According to Coppola, “The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 guaranteed complete and total access, undisturbed access, [of the land] to the Great Sioux Nation of the Oceti Sakowin [Seven Council Fires].” But that treaty has not been respected. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration explains how—as a result of an expedition led in 1874 by Gen. George Armstrong Custer in search of gold on the Black Hills reservation in North Dakota—“[t]o this day, ownership of the Black Hills remains the subject of a legal dispute between the U.S. government and the Sioux.”

Coppola told me that it is “important to see this fight in the broader context,” because “the Lakota nation and its people have been fighting situations like this for a very long time.” The DAPL dispute is not just about a pipeline running under a river. It is, broadly speaking, about the rights of the original inhabitants of the United States.

At a time when white-supremacist notions are re-emerging and a major-party presidential candidate is encouraging America to hate again, this battle of government and corporate power against Native American rights is an important reminder of the real power dynamics in the U.S. and of who has been denied rights since the founding of the country.

Earlier this year, a group of armed white men led by Ammon Bundy occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon for more than 40 days in protest of federal land ownership. Those occupiers, who garnered far greater mainstream media attention than the DAPL protesters, ignored the fact that the original stewards of the land they were claiming were members of the Burns Paiute tribe. In fact, the tribe fought for decades in court to gain rights to the land, only to be given a paltry few hundred dollars per person as compensation.

By contrast, the very people that the U.S. has historically sold out and continues to betray lead the occupation in North Dakota. Just as it served the needs of white settlers in decades past, the government is putting corporate power and fossil fuel interests over Native American rights in the case of the DAPL project.

Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the pipeline, has launched a website with the innocent-sounding name of daplpipelinefacts.com. On it, the company touts seemingly optimistic economic gains, including the creation of “8,000 to 12,000 construction jobs” (contrasted with a
mere “40 permanent operating jobs”). It echoes the standard claim of “energy independence” by liberal politicians, saying that the pipeline will help the U.S. be “truly independent of energy from unstable regions of the world,” because “every barrel of crude oil produced in the United States directly displaces a barrel of imported foreign oil.”

Under the “frequently asked questions” section, the website asks: “What is Dakota Access Pipeline’s commitment to protecting sensitive areas and the environment, such as wetlands and culturally important sites?” The lengthy answer addresses only concerns such as restoring seed banks and vegetative cover, but says nothing about the “culturally important sites” that it raises in its own question. The rest of the page focuses mostly on the concerns of private landowners. There is no mention whatsoever of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. It is as if the tribe does not exist.

Obama claimed to set his administration apart from previous ones by partnering with Native American communities. He has made it a point to visit reservations, a rare act by presidential standards. In 2014, during a visit to North Dakota, he said he was “determined to partner with tribes … on just about every issue that touches your lives.” Indeed, his rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline could be viewed in light of that partnership (Oglala Sioux leader Bryan Brewer called Keystone “a death warrant for our people” during Obama’s visit). In the last few months of Obama’s administration, it remains to be seen whether it will intervene to stop the DAPL despite the approval of federal permits.

Regardless, indigenous activists are determined to occupy their own land for as long as it takes to stop construction of the pipeline. If they succeed, it will be one small measure of justice in a line of injustices going back to the founding of this nation.

August 25, 2016

In Effort to Kill Pipeline, Groups Call Directly on Obama to Oppose Permits

U.S. Judge James Boasberg said he would make a decision by September 9 on whether to halt work on the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline

By Nadia Prupis
Common Dreams

As Indigenous activists maintained resistance to a proposed oil pipeline in North Dakota this week, allied groups on Thursday sent an open letter to President Barack Obama asking him to urge the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to pull its permits for the project.

"After years of pipeline disasters—from the massive tar sands oil spill in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 2010, to the recent oil pipeline spills in the San Joaquin Valley and Ventura, CA—our
organizations and our millions of members and supporters are concerned about the threat these projects pose to our safety, our health, and the environment," reads the letter (pdf), signed by groups such as the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Sierra Club, and 350.org.

The letter was published as a federal judge delayed a decision on allowing the construction to continue.

U.S. Judge James Boasberg said after a hearing in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday that he would make a decision by September 9 on whether to halt work on the pipeline, amid a lawsuit filed against the corps by Standing Rock Sioux tribal leaders. Pipeline developers last week agreed to pause construction until the decision.

"Whatever the final outcome in court, I believe we have already established an important principle—that is, tribes will be heard on important matters that affect our vital interests," Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault II said Wednesday, according to the Bismarck Tribune.

If the $3.7 billion pipeline is built, it will transport 500,000 barrels of oil a day past the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota and through several rivers—including the Mississippi and Missouri rivers—which supply water to millions of people. It would traverse North Dakota, South Dakota, and Iowa, before eventually stopping in Illinois.

Camps have sprung up around the contested area, as the action against the pipeline stretches into its third week, and Amnesty International announced Wednesday that it had sent a delegation of human rights observers to the protest site. Opponents say the project would destroy sacred and culturally important lands and threaten their access to clean water.

Angela Bevans, an assistant attorney with Sioux background, told the Guardian on Thursday that "[a]ny delay is a win for us, it will give Dakota Access pause and it puts word out that Standing Rock still needs assistance on this."

"We've suffered incarceration, massacre and internment. This is just another chapter in the government allowing a private company to take something that doesn't belong to them just because they can," Bevans said. "It's not a matter of whether there will be a spill, it's when it will happen. Everyone knows what is at stake and we won't be sacrificed. We are protecting the lifeblood of our people, these rivers are the arteries of Mother Earth."


August 26, 2016

Rewrite: The Protests At Standing Rock (Video)

With Lawrence O'Donnell
In the Rewrite, Lawrence explains why a protest by Native Americans in North Dakota reminds us of the history American always tries to forget.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwsCuG1kSRk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwsCuG1kSRk)

**August 29, 2016**

Card Turkson gives keynote address at World Water Week 2016

Vatican Radio

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, gave a keynote address for World Water Week on Monday, in which he examined the links between faith and development in the search to make drinkable water accessible to all people.

His words came at the conference taking place in Stockholm, Sweden on 28 August - 2 September.

In his address, Cardinal Turkson noted several contributions religious faith can make to societal development.

“**Motivation to virtue** is the valuable contribution that religious faith and spiritual practices can and must bring to development, through their spiritual leaders and the multitudes of believers and adherents.”

He also listed several contributions of faith-based organizations to making universal and sustainable access to drinkable water a reality.

- Educate youth to embrace solidarity, altruism, and responsibility. The latter of these virtues will help them to be honest administrators and politicians.

- In teaching Sacred Scriptures and spiritual traditions, show that water is a precious and even a divine element. It is used extensively in liturgy. This should inspire us to use water with respect and gratitude, reclaim polluted water sources, and understand that water is not a mere commodity.

- Organize interreligious campaigns for cleaning rivers or lakes, in order to foster mutual respect, peace and friendship among different groups.

- Reaffirm human dignity and the common good of the whole human family in order to promote a wise hierarchy of priorities for the use of water, especially where there are multiple and potentially competing demands for water.
Below is Cardinal Turkson's full speech:

World Water Week - Stockholm, Sweden

Session “Water and Faiths: Faith based Organizations contributing to the Water SDGs”

29 August 2016

Keynote Address - Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

“Faith and Development”

Distinguished representatives of various Religions, Organizers, dear Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to greet you in the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Having been asked to speak on “Faith and Development”, I notice that many religions are represented here. This suggests that indeed there are many links between faith and development. Fruitful inter-religious collaborations and synergies have already started in several sectors, such as healthcare, food security, investment, education, stewardship of natural resources, and assistance to migrants.

From a Catholic perspective, our planet, its resources and ecosystems are a marvellous gift. So too, human life is a gift – we are not self-created, we receive our bodies and our first relationships through the same grand course of divinely-given nature. Hence, we readily understand that nature is intended to be shared between all the humans, one generation after the other, and that the whole human family is expected to take care of our common home. These fundamentals are easily found in other religions and spiritual traditions as well, regardless of their specific unique features.

Why is this shared fundamental understanding so important for development?

First of all, science can only explain concrete reality, its substances and causal relationships. Science can quantify the pollution in deep oceans or around a mining site, foreseeing its negative consequences and proposing remedies. But science cannot provide the motivation for virtuous action. The same holds beyond the realm of the natural sciences: sociologists, economists and lawyers can analyse and explain the negative effects of unemployment, speculation and corruption; they can warn us about rising inequalities, contradictory policies or geopolitical unrest. But in the end they cannot supply the motivation for virtuous action.

Pope Francis, in the Encyclical letter Laudato Si’, asks: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? […] What is the goal of our work and all our efforts?” (§160). Observing numerous alarming environmental and social indicators leads us to the daunting question: why should I care? Science and technology will not help here. Any technical solution is powerless “if we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well” (§200).
Pope Francis shares his conviction “that change is impossible without motivation and a process of education” – and for those purposes he proposes “some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience” (§15), since “faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters” (§64).

Simply put, motivation to virtue is the valuable contribution that religious faith and spiritual practices can and must bring to development, through their spiritual leaders and the multitudes of believers and adherents. They “must constantly feel challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions” (200). They must contribute, for example, to the adoption and further extension of ambitious and ethically-rooted frameworks for development action such as those pertaining to the implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

A second perspective grounded in faith touches on human dignity. We are much more than items or data to be measured and represented by GDP. We are not simply factors of production and consumption. When human beings are just human resources, they cease to be the measure of success of policies. Instead, humans become disposable. Throw these people away in favour of better producers. Displace those people in favour of more profitable consumption of water.

Our vision of being human must be much more complex. Pope Francis teaches that we must integrate spirituality, social relationality, and our connections with nature. This lies behind his conviction that “what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn” (§160).

Since we are gathered during the World Water Week, I would like to conclude by giving a few examples of the contributions that Faith-based-organizations can provide concerning water.

- Educate youth to embrace solidarity, altruism and responsibility. The latter of these virtues will help them to be honest administrators and politicians.

- In teaching Sacred Scriptures and spiritual traditions, show that water is a precious and even a divine element. It is used extensively in liturgy. This should inspire us to use water with respect and gratitude, reclaim polluted water sources and understand that water is not a mere commodity.

- Organize interreligious campaigns for cleaning rivers or lakes, in order to foster mutual respect, peace and friendship among different groups.

- Reaffirm human dignity and the common good of the whole human family in order to promote a wise hierarchy of priorities for the use of water, especially where there are multiple and potentially competing demands for water.

All this will help in making universal and sustainable access to drinkable water a reality. This most vital challenge has been a focus for the Catholic Church for many years. It is a continuing shame that so many of our brothers and sisters are systematically thirsty or compelled to drink
unsafe water; that their needs are secondary to industries which take too much and that pollute what remains; that governments pursue other priorities and ignore their parched cries. We already know how Jesus judges these matters. In the Gospel of Matthew (25:35), Jesus teaches what we are supposed to do: “I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink”. I pray that this conference will help the world to be more alert to the thirst of Jesus and give him sufficient, clean water to drink! Thank you.

(Devin Sean Watkins)


August 30, 2016

Why is Canada denying its indigenous peoples clean water?

By Amanda Klasing
The Globe and Mail

“She likes to take a bath, but [the water] irritates her skin,” Susan said of her active two-year-old daughter. When the little girl was 18 months old, Susan started to notice rashes all over her daughter’s legs. “I thought it was something from the grass,” she said. Instead, a doctor informed her that the baby’s rash was probably from her water. Susan can’t bathe her daughter at home now; she takes her to a daycare centre or relative’s house.

Susan lives in Grassy Narrows First Nation in Ontario, where I spoke to her and other families in February to learn about living under a “do not consume” water advisory.

The water in the well that supplies her home is contaminated with uranium; water trucked in from a local treatment plant to fill a cistern at her house has dangerous levels of a cancer-causing byproduct that comes from treating dirty source water.

I have visited many countries conducting human rights research for Human Rights Watch. Canada, with its global reputation as a rights-respecting country with bountiful fresh water, was the last place I expected to encounter parents worried that their water could harm their children. While investigating Human Rights Watch’s report on the drinking water crisis in Ontario First Nations, I spoke to dozens of parents and grandparents who cannot trust their water – which can weigh heavily on the heart and mind.

Unfortunately, Grassy Narrows and Susan’s situation are far from unique. As The Globe and Mail detailed Monday in its excellent reporting on water safety, there are currently 158 similar drinking water advisories in 114 First Nation communities. This statistic doesn’t reveal the full extent of water problems facing First Nations communities. Some lack any running drinking water, relying only on trucks and cisterns, and many households rely on well water, which is
often contaminated. The basic human right to water is seriously at risk in First Nations communities across Canada.

Exposure to the contaminants found in this water can cause illnesses ranging from gastrointestinal disorders to increased risk of cancer. Knock-on effects – like bathing less when people can’t trust their water – includes the proliferation or worsening of skin infections, eczema, psoriasis, and other skin conditions.

Yet, the federal government has not done enough to address this crisis. For decades, the government has invested in building new infrastructure without first creating the environment for communities to guarantee safe water – such as the regulations that exist in the rest of Canada. No safe drinking water rules exist for First Nation reserves. Introducing rules alone can’t guarantee safe water, but coupled with sustainable funding and support they can create an enabling environment.

Dozens of communities languish for years on the priority list analyzed by The Globe, thanks to years of unpredictable or insufficient funding for water systems. The federal government funds water budgets at a deficit, meaning that communities often do not have enough money to keep systems in good working order. Meanwhile, the quality and safety of source water has declined, with new contaminants such as personal care products and pharmaceutical waste making water more expensive to treat.

The Trudeau government has taken historic steps to resolve the crisis by increasing its water budget and promising to end long-term boil water advisories in five years. But the government data obtained by The Globe show that ending the crisis requires systemic changes to reduce risks for everyone living on reserve. The government should be collaborating with First Nations to develop a plan for long-term and sustainable solutions with measurable targets to monitor success.

Many countries face water crises, but few have the natural or financial resources of Canada. The First Nation drinking water crisis is a preventable and unnecessary burden borne most by children, the elderly, the sick and caregivers like Susan.

It’s time for Canada to fulfill everyone’s right to clean, healthy water.

_Amanda Klasing, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, specializes in the right to clean water._


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**August 30, 2016**

Disputed Dakota pipeline was approved by Army Corps over major objections by three federal agencies
Sioux tribe's concerns were echoed in official reports by the EPA and two other agencies, but Army Corps of Engineers brushed them aside.

BISMARCK, N.D.—Senior officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and two other federal agencies raised serious environmental and safety objections to the North Dakota section of the controversial Dakota Access oil pipeline, the same objections being voiced in a large protest by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe that has so far succeeded in halting construction.

But those concerns were dismissed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which relied on an environmental assessment prepared by the pipeline's developer, Dakota Access LLC, when it approved the project in July, according to public documents.

The 1,134-mile pipeline would carry approximately 500,000 barrels of crude per day from North Dakota to Illinois along a route that did not originally pass near the Standing Rock reservation, the documents show. After the company rerouted the pipeline to cross the Missouri River just a half-mile upstream of the reservation, the tribe complained that the Army Corps did not consider threats to its water supply and cultural heritage.

The EPA, the Department of the Interior and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation echoed those concerns in public comments on the Army Corps' draft environmental assessment. Citing risks to water supplies, inadequate emergency preparedness, potential impacts to the Standing Rock reservation and insufficient environmental justice analysis, the agencies urged the Army Corps to issue a revised draft of their environmental assessment.

"Crossings of the Missouri River have the potential to affect the primary source of drinking water for much of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Tribal nations," Philip Strobel, National Environmental Policy Act regional compliance director for the EPA, wrote in a March 11 letter to the Army Corps.

The current route of the pipeline is 10 miles upstream of Fort Yates, the tribal headquarters of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and the county seat. The Standing Rock Sioux rely on the Missouri River for drinking water, irrigation and fish.

The EPA shared its concerns and recommended that the Army Corps undertake a new draft environmental assessment and release it for public comment. In that process, the EPA asked the Army Corps to consider "other available routes or crossing locations that would have reduced potential to water resources, especially drinking water supplies," and to carry out a "more thorough" analysis of environmental justice concerns. The other agencies also asked for further assessments and consultation with the tribes.

The Army Corps instead published its final environmental assessment four months later, which constituted final approval of the project. In it, the Corps acknowledged the agencies' comments,
but said "the anticipated environmental, economic, cultural, and social effects" of the project are "not injurious to the public interest."

The Army Corps, which has jurisdiction over domestic pipelines that cross major waterways, declined a request for comment, citing ongoing litigation. Energy Transfer, owner of Dakota Access LLC, did not respond to a request for comment. The company has previously said "we are constructing this pipeline in accordance with applicable laws, and the local, state and federal permits and approvals we have received."

**Tribe Takes their Complaints Public**

The tribe's growing protest has gathered in a camp near Cannon Ball, N.D., and has drawn support from Native Americans from around the country as well as environmental activists. An estimated 1,200 people are camping there and Sioux leaders say 90 tribes are represented among the protesters.

The protest blocked construction equipment two weeks ago and Energy Transfer halted construction on the section of pipeline closest to the Standing Rock reservation. A federal judge said last week he will rule by September 9 on whether to grant the Standing Rock Sioux a temporary injunction. That would bar construction on sections of the pipeline where the ground hasn't yet been disturbed until a suit calling for the Army Corps to redo its permitting process can be heard.

The Standing Rock reservation spans 3,600 square miles across North and South Dakota, where 41 percent of its 8,217 residents live below the poverty level, more than triple the national average, according to a 2012 economic development report prepared for the tribe. Nearly a quarter of its population is unemployed.

In its comments calling for a re-do, the EPA said the environmental justice analysis in the Army Corps' draft environmental assessment used county-by-county or state-by-state data when the preferred level of analysis is "census block groups or census tracts."

"A screening level analysis for EJ [environmental justice] indicates there are several census block groups with substantial minority and/or low income demographics that could be potentially impacted by the project," the EPA wrote. "In addition to analyzing potential EJ impacts, Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice (February 16, 1994) also requires public outreach to potentially affected EJ communities."

In its final environmental assessment, the Army Corps said its analysis "contains an Environmental Justice analysis that conforms with recognized practice."

The agency also said the pipeline does not cross tribal land. "In fact, tribal land was specifically avoided as a routing mitigation measure," it said. "The Project does not anticipate any impact to water supplies along its route, and to the extent a response action is required, federal regulation will be complied with."
Route Became a Moving Target

The original route for the proposed pipeline crossed the Missouri River further north, 10 miles upstream of Bismarck, the state capital. North Dakota Public Service Commission documents show the route upstream of Bismarck in a May 29, 2014 map by Energy Transfer.

The company later rejected this route, citing a number of factors, including more road and wetland crossings, a longer pipeline, and higher costs. Also listed as a concern was the close proximity to wellheads providing Bismarck’s drinking water supply.

"They moved it down to Standing Rock, which is a very remote area, but people live at Standing Rock too. There is an environmental justice component here," said Jan Hasselman, an attorney with environmental advocacy organization EarthJustice, which filed the lawsuit on behalf of the Standing Rock Tribe against the Army Corps of Engineers.

In its public comments, the Department of the Interior, the government agency responsible for the administration and management of Native American lands, called for the Army Corps to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement, a more comprehensive analysis of the potential impact of the proposed pipeline.

"We believe the Corps did not adequately justify or otherwise support its conclusion that there would be no significant impacts upon the surrounding environment and community," Lawrence Roberts, acting assistant secretary of Indian affairs at the Department of the Interior, wrote in a letter to the Army Corps in March.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), a federal agency that promotes the preservation, enhancement, and productive use of the nation's historic resources, also expressed concern over the Army Corps' assessment.

Federal law requires federal agencies to take into account the effect a proposed project will have on historic property. The Army Corps' assessment, however lacked adequate consultation with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and focused on a limited number of water crossings rather than on the pipeline’s entire expanse, according to letters ACHP officials wrote to the Army Corps.

"Based on the inadequacies of the tribal consultation and the limited scope for identification of historic properties that may be affected, the ACHP questions the sufficiency of the Corps' identification effort, its determinations of eligibility, and assessments of effect," Reid Nelson, director of the office of federal agency programs for ACHP, wrote in a May 19 letter to the Army Corps.

In its final assessment, the Corps stated there is "no new significant information on environmental effects" as a result of comments from the EPA and others. "As such, neither a supplemental or revised EA [Environmental Assessment] for further public review nor additional NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] compliance actions was required."
"We're talking about a broad overarching and fundamental failure which is the decision to look very narrowly at environmental impacts at a few specific locations rather than the pipeline as a whole," Hasselman said of the Army Corps' assessment.

Having their concerns dismissed by the Corps, the tribe turned next to the courts. Their lawsuit calls for a halt to construction and full consideration of the pipeline's impact on tribal lands and water.

To obtain a preliminary or "emergency" injunction, however, attorneys representing the Standing Rock tribe will have to demonstrate imminent harm to historic sites if construction proceeds.

"To the extent that people are concerned about harm from oil spills, that is still a ways off," Hasselman said. "We can't really seek emergency relief on that front. That is something that we will be seeking in the course of the lawsuit."


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**September 2016**

Official Support for Standing Rock Sioux Tribe against DAPL

Organized by Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

**THE STORY:**

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST) has taken a strong stand against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), a 1,134 mile long oil pipeline starting from the Bakken Oil Fields in North Dakota and ending up in refineries in Patoka, Illinois. It is proposed to transport over 570,000 barrels per day.

To date, more than 300 tribes and first nations officially stand with Standing Rock by way of tribal resolutions, letters of support, or tribal delegations joining the camp. There are entire cities and municipalities such as Santa Barbara, Seattle, and Minneapolis/St. Paul supporting us, and they aren't the only ones. There are millions of people the world over standing in solidarity as well. 80,000 people in Ireland rallied recently to say #NoDAPL. The local, global, national, and tribal communities all support our fight and we've got more coming in every day. We're also receiving an outcry of support from our allies, friends, and relations who aren't able to come to North Dakota but want to provide for, look after, and contribute to the cause up here. That's what this crowdfunding is for.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has been providing a multitude of support services for the thousands of people resisting DAPL as we have seen the encampments grow and grow with each day. We have been supporting the camps by way of:
• Food and meals
• Porta-johns
• Trash Collection
• Hand Washing Stations
• Community Shelters and Tents
• Emergency Management Team
• Firewood and Hauling
• Community Wellness Initiatives
• And much, much more.

Please consider supporting us as we support the #NoDAPL water protectors who have come from so far away. We need your help however you can give it.

Dakota Access Pipeline would contribute to 50 million tonnes CO2 per year. This is the equivalent of 10 million cars or 15 coal plants. Every one of those tonnes of CO2 is a threat to all people on the planet. We can't all breathe poison air.

The pipeline is a huge risk to prairie, farm lands and critical waterways as well, including the Missouri River. It is a massive pipeline that would transport crude oil. News report after news report continues to come out about oil spills across the continent. It's never a matter of if the pipelines will leak and/or burst, it's a matter of when. Energy Transfer Partners, the owner of Dakota Access LLC, is already responsible for over $9 million in property damage stemming from their dirty operations. Thousands of gallons have already been spilled. We don't want to be the next statistic and we don’t want our children’s futures threatened by fossil fuels.

They’ve already desecrated burial sites of ancestors, effigies, and rock formations critical to the spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being of our communities. None of that can ever be brought back. That’s why everyone is here in support, so that no more of these abuses continue and healing can happen. This pipeline is proposed to cross the Missouri River, less than one mile away from our community and less than 500 feet from our border. 18 million people downstream stand to be affected, too. This is Standing Rock's fight but it's not just a native issue.

We have a saying here in Standing Rock: Mni Wiconi. It means "water is life," and it's true. You can't drink oil.

Please consider giving today and letting us know how you want the funds to be used. We'll make it happen.

With extended gratitude from us and the nearly 3,000 people camped up here in solidarity,

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

September 1, 2016

Catholics are obligated to care for the planet, just like care for the sick, Pope Francis says

By Julie Zauzmer
Washington Post

Pope Francis, who has made the environment a clear focus of his papacy over the past three years, deepened his vision Thursday of a green church in which caring for the planet is as important a Catholic commitment as caring for the sick and the hungry.

Catholics currently subscribe to seven corporal and seven spiritual “works of mercy” — obligations that include sheltering the homeless, visiting prisoners and burying the dead. On Thursday, in an address explaining why Catholics must make practical changes in their daily routines to safeguard the earth that God created, Francis added care for the environment as an eighth work of mercy.

The modern world has new forms of poverty, Francis said, and thus requires new forms of mercy to address them.

“When we mistreat nature, we also mistreat human beings,” he wrote in his message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which falls on Sept. 1. He discussed the effect of global warming, which he noted is caused in part by human activity, on the world’s poorest people.

“This is leading to ever more severe droughts, floods, fires and extreme weather events,” Francis wrote. “Climate change is also contributing to the heart-rending refugee crisis. The world’s poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact.”

Environmental awareness, along with concern for the world’s poor, especially in the global south, has been a clear concern of Francis’s papacy since he became the first non-European pope since the eighth century. His first major treatise as pope was last year’s “Laudato Si,” an encyclical on the environment that linked human mishandling of the climate to mistreatment of the poor. He quoted frequently from that encyclical in his message Thursday.

In this message, he said that every Catholic should go to Confession to repent his or her sins against the environment. Then that confession should lead to concrete changes in Catholics’ daily behavior, no matter how small: Francis suggests turning off lights to avoid wasting energy, taking care not to cook more food than necessary and using public transportation or carpooling to cut down on gasoline use.

Caring for the planet, Francis said, will be a new act of mercy alongside long-established forms of charity that were inspired by Jesus’ words in the book of Matthew. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger
and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me,” the text says.

To the five actions suggested in that passage, Catholics have also added burying the dead and giving alms to the poor to the list of corporal works of mercy, meaning physical actions. The list of seven spiritual works of mercy includes comforting the sorrowful, instructing the ignorant, and praying for the living and dead.

Francis said Thursday that care for creation actually belongs on both lists, spiritual and corporal. “Grateful contemplation of God’s world,” he said, is a spiritual mercy. And daily behaviors to protect the landscape of that world should be considered a corporal mercy.

William Dinges, a religious studies professor at Catholic University of America, said he has seen Francis’s earlier writings and speeches on the environment propel parishes to focus on ecological activism, and elevating that activity to a work of mercy will further spur Catholic volunteerism.

Catholics are long accustomed to social justice meant to help people, and are learning that helping the planet helps people too, Dinges said. “Where he’s really, I think, pushing us forward in Catholic social teaching is trying to get us to see that this is one problem. It’s not two, separate and unrelated,” Dinges said of the problems of climate change and poverty.

When Dinges started an eco-ministry in his own parish more than 25 years ago, few Catholics were concerned about the issue. Today, it’s at the forefront of parish discussions and theological inquiry, he said. “I could tell you 87 reasons to be concerned about the environment, none of which have anything to do with religion. But for those of us who are people of faith, this is a profoundly moral and religious issue,” Dinges said. “We are called to respond to it that way, with prayer.”

Brian Murphy contributed to this report. This post has been updated.


September 1, 2016

Deeming Pollution of Earth Sinful, Pope Proposes Climate Action as Sacred Duty

Humans are turning the planet into a 'polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation, and filth,' says Pope Francis

By Nika Knight, staff writer
Common Dreams

Pope Francis on Thursday put forth an urgent call for people to actively work to save the
environment, proposing that the Catholic Church add such a duty to the list of "seven mercies," which includes feeding the hungry and visiting the sick, which Catholics are required to perform.

"Francis described man's destruction of the environment as a sin," the Guardian reported.

"The modern world has new forms of poverty, Francis said, and thus requires new forms of mercy to address them," the Washington Post noted.

In his speech to mark the church's World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which the pope created last year, Francis accused humans of turning the Earth into a "polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation, and filth."

Remarking on the planet's rapid warming, Francis observed that "[c]limate change is also contributing to the heart-rending refugee crisis. The world's poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact."

"We must not be indifferent or resigned to the loss of biodiversity and the destruction of ecosystems, often caused by our irresponsible and selfish behaviour," he said. "Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence."

"We have no such right," Francis said.

Francis' speech built on ideas he first put forth last year in Laudato Si, his unprecedented encyclical on climate change and environmental protection.

Earlier this month, Francis also excoriated capitalism for leading to endless war.


September 1, 2016

Season of Creation marks month of eco-contemplation for Christians

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Christians across the globe Thursday joined in celebrating the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, but for many the day only marks the beginning of a longer contemplation on the planet the pope regularly refers to as our common home.

The Season of Creation is a month-long prayerful observation of the state of the world, its beauty and the ecological crises that threaten it and all its inhabitants. It runs from Sept. 1, the World Day of Prayer for Creation, through Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi.
For many Catholics, the day of prayer for creation landed on their radar for the first time last year after Pope Francis officially placed it on the Catholic liturgical calendar. Because of the timing -- Francis instituted the annual prayer day just three weeks before Sept. 1 -- many Catholic groups scrambled to piece together small celebrations with an eye toward larger, more coordinated events this year.

At the Vatican Thursday, Francis helped kick off the Season of Creation by celebrating the World Day of Prayer for Creation with a message that urged Catholics to view care for creation among the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The Season of Creation comes as the planet continues its own season of sizzling temperatures.

July 2016 was the warmest month ever recorded -- with modern records extending back 136 years -- and 15 consecutive months of record global heat. NASA has projected 2016 will eclipse 2015 as the warmest year on record, which would make it 16 of the 17 warmest years on record since 1880 occurring since 2001 (the remaining year, 1998, is tied for 6th on the list).

A Christian tradition of creation care

While 2016 marks the first year of concerted Catholic participation in the Season of Creation, other Christian denominations have recognized it for decades.

A common origin point is 1989, when Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I proclaimed Sept. 1 as a day of prayer for creation in the Orthodox church. From there, faith communities, often at the parish and grassroots levels, began extending the celebration beyond a day throughout the month and until the Assisi feast.

One of the earliest organized celebrations of the season occurred in 2000 at a Lutheran church in Adelaide, South Australia. Three years later, the Catholic bishops of the Philippines issued a pastoral statement creating a day and season for creation, with different dioceses then adding them to their calendars in subsequent years. In 2007 the Third European Ecumenical Assembly adopted it, with the World Council of Churches following suit the next year.

It’s been the passion at the local level that has grown the Season of Creation into something bigger, said Episcopal Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, an interfaith environmental coalition. That the pope, ecumenical patriarch and the archbishop of Canterbury now all recognize it “represents an affirmation of the really good work that people all over the world, that Christians all over the world have been doing,” he told NCR.

For many, the day and season have come to symbolize not only collective awareness of the responsibility to properly tend to the earth, but also a gathering point for all Christians and faiths.

“I can’t think of many themes and specific campaigns that bring Christians together at such scale as this one,” said Tomas Insua, co-founder and global coordinator of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, who added that this year’s efforts mark a first in terms of global coordination around the season.
Prayer and action

The 300-plus climate network of Catholic organizations has led coordinating efforts for the 2016 Season of Creation along with the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network, which produces the monthly papal prayer intention videos. For the Season of Creation, it released a modified version of Francis’ February prayer intention calling for care for creation. [The prayer intention for September is for the centrality of the human person.]

“As we are [the pope’s] official service of prayer we couldn't miss this project,” said Jesuit Fr. Frédéric Fornos, international director of the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network (formerly called the Apostleship of Prayer).

Fornos said the pope encourages all the Catholic church to be engaged in the day of prayer and the spiritual and lifestyle transformations he has called for in his encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home.”

“He gave us the direction, and then we commit ourselves,” Fornos told NCR in an email.

During a private audience Thursday morning, Fornos said Francis was aware of the ecumenical initiatives planned around the World Day of Prayer.

Other sponsors of the Season of Creation include the World Council of Churches, GreenFaith, the ACT Alliance and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network.

Events around the Season of Creation began Thursday morning with an ecumenical online prayer service. Almost 200 additional prayer services on six continents have been planned, according to the Global Catholic Climate Movement. A map of the various events is on its website and the Season of Creation website. Insua told NCR roughly half of the celebrations are ecumenical.

Prayer is essential to the season, said Fornos.

“[C]hanging our lifestyle is not enough, because change requires a deep conversion. It is the prayer, closeness to Jesus, at his word, which can transform our hearts and our lives and help us to live everyday with a simple way and solidarity style,” he told NCR.

Along with the pope’s video, people can pray with Francis through the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network by using its Click To Pray app. The daily prayer for Thursday read in part, “Father of All Creation, on this World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, I am thankful for the beauty of the world that you have created for all your children. Help me to live each day aware of my vocation as a steward of your creation and work with others for the care of our common home.”

In addition to prayer, many have used the Season of Creation as occasion to live out their litanies.
On Thursday morning the English charity Christian Aid announced that more than 3,500 churches in the United Kingdom have already or plan to substitute fossil fuels for renewable energy as an electricity source, including 2,000 parishes from 16 Catholic dioceses.

Along similar lines, the Global Catholic Climate Movement anticipates a major announcement at the season’s end of religious congregations divesting from fossil fuels. On the one-year anniversary of Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*, four Pacific-area religious orders announced their divestment intentions. Global Catholic Climate Movement will host a [Sept. 7 webinar](https://example.com) on divestment.

Other plans under way for the Season of Creation include:

- The Vatican produced a [booklet for vespers celebrations](https://example.com) on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. Similar liturgical resources have been compiled by the U.S. bishops’ conference, Global Catholic Climate Movement, Franciscan Action Network and Columban Mission Institute in Sydney. ([all available here](https://example.com))
- The Sisters of Mercy will share a visual meditation daily on their website, inviting photographers to send their own shots demonstrating “an aspect of the beauty of our world.”
- The Catholic Climate Covenant has released materials for its [annual Feast of St. Francis program](https://example.com), now in its fifth year. This year’s theme centers on the presidential election and echoes the pope’s call for constructive dialogue – at home and in politics – about the impacts of environmental harm on the poor.
- Numerous faith groups are using the season as a way to prepare for participation in a wider climate mobilization set for mid-October.

Having an official date for creation care on the Catholic liturgical calendar is “massively significant” in terms of making it concrete in their daily lives and communities,” Insua said.

“Having this happen every year will be a good way of not letting *Laudato Si’* fade away,” he said.

**Liturgical emphasis**

Another way to breathe life into the encyclical would be formally adding a season for creation in the liturgical year, according to one Australian priest.

Columban Fr. Charles Rue has proposed doing just that, viewing it as “one way to structurally help implement the vision of Pope Francis given in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*,” he wrote in a [proposal paper](https://example.com) that has circulated among faith-based environmental circles. A fellow Columban, Fr. Sean McDonagh, has [made a similar endorsement](https://example.com) of inserting creation care deeper into the spiritual and liturgical lives of Catholics.

Rue added that a new liturgical season focused on creation “would help believers face the 21st century ecological challenge” in a way that recognizes its magnitude.
“Church communities would be in a better position to dialogue with people of other churches and faiths, scientists and people of good will about earth as our common home, leading to new commitments as congregations and individuals,” he said.

Insua said the development of a liturgical season of creation would be a big step toward embedding Laudato Si’ into the mindset and lives of Catholics. For now, Harper of GreenFaith said seeing the day of prayer eventually raise to the significance of other notable days within the religious calendar would be a major step forward in ingraining environmental concern with faith.

“What I’d love to see is the day of prayer for creation assume some of that dignity and the ability to provoke the kind of introspection and change in life,” he said.


September 4, 2016

VIDEO: Dakota Access Pipeline Company Attacks Native American Protesters with Dogs and Pepper Spray

By Amy Goodman
Democracy Now!

On September 3, the Dakota Access pipeline company attacked Native Americans with dogs and pepper spray as they protested against the $3.8 billion pipeline’s construction. If completed, the pipeline would carry about 500,000 barrels of crude per day from North Dakota’s Bakken oilfield to Illinois. The project has faced months of resistance from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and members of nearly 100 more tribes from across the U.S. and Canada.

Democracy Now! was on the ground at Saturday’s action and brings you this report.

Watch the video here:

http://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/4/dakota_access_pipeline_company_attacks_native

September 5, 2016

Morocco to give 600 mosques a green makeover

Mosques across Morocco will be fitted with solar energy systems in government scheme to boost clean energy awareness

By Arthur Neslen
The Guardian
Six hundred “green mosques” are to be created in Morocco by March 2019 in a national consciousness-raising initiative that aims to speed the country’s journey to clean energy.

If all goes to plan, the green revamp will see LED lighting, solar thermal water heaters and photovoltaic systems installed in 100 mosques by the end of this year.

Morocco’s ministry of Islamic affairs is underwriting the innovative scheme, paying up to 70% of the initial investment costs in a partnership with the German government.

Jan-Christophe Kuntze, the project’s chief, said: “We want to raise awareness and mosques are important centres of social life in Morocco. They are a place where people exchange views about all kinds of issues including, hopefully, why renewables and energy efficiency might be a good idea.”

Morocco has established itself as a regional climate leader with high-profile projects, ranging from the largest windfarm in Africa to an enormous solar power plant in the Sahara desert, which opened earlier this year.

In November, Marrakech will host the COP22 climate summit to discuss preparations for implementing the Paris climate agreement.

The country’s environment minister, Hakima el-Haité, told the Guardian that religion could make a powerful contribution to the clean energy debate, shortly before an Islamic declaration on climate change last year.

“It is very important for Muslim countries to come back to their traditions and remind people that we are miniscule as humans before the importance of the earth,” she said. “We need to protect it, and to save humankind in the process.”

The new green mosques project plans to do this with established technologies that can be adapted to public buildings and residential homes. By training electricians, technicians and auditors, it hopes to direct Morocco’s clean energy along the path followed by German’s Energiewende, (energy transition).

But Kuntze stressed that Germany was offering technological support, rather than financial opportunities for its own industries.

“We are not representing any German business interests at all,” he said. “The good thing about this project is that the Moroccan government came up with the idea themselves. It is something new and really innovative and it has not been tried anywhere else before, to my knowledge.”

The initiative has broken new ground for gender equality in Morocco too. Many mourchidates (female clerics) have been involved in the project, as well as imams, and about a quarter of the participants in recent seminars have been women, Kuntze said.
Under the project’s energy service contract model, contractors will eventually be paid by the energy savings generated from the clean power systems they install. As the renovations should cut the mosques’ electricity usage by 40%, these should be substantial.

The first 100 mosques to get a green makeover are mostly based in big population centres – such as Rabat, Fez, Marrakech and Casablanca – but the project will quickly move on to smaller villages and towns. With 15,000 mosques dotted around the north African country, the idea’s growth potential is clear.

The objective was to kickstart a renovations industry for sustainable companies that could employ many Moroccans in the clean energy sector, Kuntze said.

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/05/morocco-to-give-600-mosques-a-green-makeover

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**September 8, 2016**

My 48,180-pound trash pile

By Jennifer Mertens
National Catholic Reporter

Four years of waste in a single mason jar?

"That's crazy!"

My reaction was similar to many who discover the [story of Lauren Singer](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/05/morocco-to-give-600-mosques-a-green-makeover), a 25-year-old woman committed to a "zero waste" lifestyle.

I discovered Singer's [TEDxTeen talk](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/05/morocco-to-give-600-mosques-a-green-makeover) while preparing to teach my high school students about Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. How could I make the pope's call to environmental stewardship real and engaging for teens? Although it seemed daunting -- even impossible -- to calculate every item of a person's trash, Singer's commitment nonetheless intrigued me.

So much so, that my students and I ended up investigating our own trash. For one week, we tracked all our waste production: plastic bags, banana peels, straws, toilet paper and more.

At every turn, I seemed to generate more waste. Never before had I thought twice about fruit produce stickers or plastic clothing tags.

Seven days later, our lists revealed a stunning quantity of trash. The results seemed on par with the Environmental Protection Agency’s estimate: the average American produces [4.4 pounds of trash daily](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/05/morocco-to-give-600-mosques-a-green-makeover) or 1,606 pounds each year. My own 30-year lifetime pile of trash? That's a whopping 48,180 pounds. And that's just one individual. Think about adding up all the trash of over 300
The EPA calculated that Americans produced approximately 254 million tons of trash; only about 34 percent of this was recycled or composted.

"What will we do when there's no place left to put all the garbage?" Pete Seeger's words echo urgently in my mind.

It's an important question, as my 48,180 pounds of garbage are not going anywhere. Hundreds of my baby diapers, chip bags and countless other plastics will never biodegrade. My produce bags are going to exist for centuries after my death. My straws will forever be buried alongside the 500 million straws Americans dispose of every day.

On this Earth -- our "common home" -- we cannot throw away our trash. There is no "away." We pour this trash into our oceans, now filled with 46,000 plastic pieces per square mile. In our landfills, it generates methane -- a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent then carbon dioxide. My own waste piles up in the local dump, topped with an American flag that now marks the highest elevation point in the county. Although I am privileged to never see or smell my waste, it hasn't gone "away." My 48,180 pounds of trash has been relocated from my own backyard to someone else's neighborhood.

Needless to say, the seven-day waste investigation was as eye-opening for me as it was for my students. It has since been daunting to investigate my environmental impact -- a lifestyle so unsustainable that, were it adopted by all people in the world, nearly five planets would be needed to support us all. This process, however, has also invited me to reflect anew on the vital link between environmental stewardship and my Christian faith.

Without doubt, the environmental challenges facing our planet are among today's most pressing ethical issues. Responding with the full weight of his papacy in *Laudato Si’,* Pope Francis denounces ecological degradation as a sin that reduces God's creation to "among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor" (*Laudato Si’,* 2).

In his push for action, the pope has supported the *Paris Agreement,* a landmark global climate pact just recently ratified by the USA and China. Last week, he added care for our common home as a spiritual and corporal work of mercy.

Pope Francis' witness compels us to ask: What is my relationship with the Earth? How am I called to care for God's creation? Can my lifestyle honor the integral connection between human life and our Earth?

As highlighted by our class investigation, waste management is just one aspect of these larger questions. Recast in this light, Lauren Singer's lifestyle doesn't seem so bizarre. Her approach is a necessary, even prophetic response to a moral crisis that is already profoundly impacting our planet's future.

No magic solution exists. God will not swoop down from heaven to clean up our trash. In the words of Alice Walker, "we are the ones we have been waiting for."
As Christians called to hope through the Resurrection, we can each take concrete action. We have been graced by Christ's own outpouring of love for us -- a love that can shape and sustain our response in our families, workplaces, church and in the broader community. Those of us privileged with time, resources and education bear particular responsibility.

Fortunately, we are the ones we have been waiting for. We don't need to wait any longer.

We can simply begin by taking time to reconnect with our Earth. Powerfully, *Laudato Si'* calls us to cultivate a sacred awe and gratitude for God's creation. Here, we are invited to an "ecological conversion" steeped in a "loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion" (*Laudato Si*, 220). Responding in love to God's own generosity, we can give ourselves generously for the Earth.

Start with one step. Choose just one.

Begin, perhaps, with your own seven-day trash investigation. As Singer suggests, get to know your garbage. What waste do you produce? Are there products you can recycle or replace with reusable alternatives? Even a few simple steps can reduce the amount of your daily trash.

For example, do you really need a plastic bag to hold just a couple of items? Consider bringing your own reusable shopping bags to the grocery -- including reusable produce bags. Find opportunities to shop bulk food aisles and local farmers' markets. Sign up for a compost workshop to reduce your food waste, turning it into rich soil instead of relying on synthetic fertilizers.

Many sustainable action steps do not need to be taken alone. There is tremendous community-building potential in gathering your parish, school, workplace and/or family to create a waste reduction program. You could even start by engaging your local community this weekend; learn how to reduce your car emissions waste by checking for local area events to celebrate National Drive Electric Week.

There are countless possibilities for getting started. As Pope Francis reminds us, "all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents" (*Laudato Si*, 14). We are the ones we have been waiting for.

[Jennifer Mertens teaches religion at a Catholic high school in Cincinnati. She holds a Master's of Divinity degree from the Catholic Theological Union.]

https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/my-48180-pound-trash-pile

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**September 8, 2016**

Caring for creation - central to Pope Francis' papacy
By Tony Magliano
Catholic Online

As the first pope in history to write an encyclical letter on the environment, Pope Francis demonstrated to the Catholic Church and world, the urgent importance of caring for God's creation.

But Francis' challenging green encyclical "Laudato Si" (subtitled "On Care for Our Common Home") was but the first major initiative of a papacy significantly dedicated to teaching us to care for both humanity and the earth - which he insists are intimately connected to each other - "integral ecology."

The Holy Father's next major environmental step was establishing the "World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation" celebrated every first day of September.

In this year's Sept 1 message titled "Show Mercy to our Common Home", Pope Francis highlights, along with Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, "the moral and spiritual crisis at the root of environmental problems."

Supported by overwhelming scientific evidence, the pontiff warns, "Global warming continues, due in part to human activity: 2015 was the warmest year on record, and 2016 will likely be warmer still. This is leading to ever more severe droughts, floods, fires, and extreme weather events. . The world's poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact."

The Holy Father points us to another fact: "Human beings are deeply connected with all of creation. When we mistreat nature, we also mistreat human beings. . Let us hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

In highly prophetic language, Pope Francis challenges us to personal and ecological conversion. He writes, "As individuals, we have grown comfortable with certain lifestyles shaped by a distorted culture of prosperity and a disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary.

"And we are participants in a system that has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature.

"Let us repent of the harm we are doing to our common home."

In "Show Mercy to our Common Home," Pope Francis then takes another major environmental step forward by adding "care for our common home" to the traditional works of mercy.

As a spiritual work of mercy, "care for our common home" should inspire us to have "a grateful contemplation of God's world which allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us," says Francis.
And as a corporal work of mercy, "care for our common home," should move us to exercise "simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness," and thus should lead us to actively build a better world.

The Union of Concerned Scientists has some great ideas to help us "build a better world."

Called "America's Best Idea," the 1872 designation of Yellowstone National Park - the world's first national park - inspired a worldwide national park movement comprising over 100 nations. This outstanding example of wise and loving care for our common home proves that we are capable of cherishing God's creation.

In "Show Mercy to our Common Home," Pope Francis urges us to ask ourselves, "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?"

How we answer this piercing question, will significantly determine the fate of our common home.


September 9, 2016

IUCN: Where Is The Concern Over Military’s Environmental Impact?

By Kelsey Amos
Civil Beat

Despite the threats military activities pose to the natural world, surprisingly few panel discussions at IUCN broached the subject.

A week ago, a group of 15-20 activists and students gathered on the University of Hawaii Manoa campus to share the remarkably similar and interconnected stories of nations and peoples from around the Pacific that are struggling against the environmental destruction and limitations on sovereignty caused by the U.S. military and U.S. interests.

There were seasoned demilitarization and aloha aina activists from Hawaii in attendance who spoke about the desecration of iwi kupuna to build Marine Corps base at Kaneohe, as well as activists concerned with the proliferation of military bases and their effects on the environment and local and indigenous life in Guahan (Guam), South Korea (notably on Jeju Island) and the Philippines. Also discussed were the legacies of French and U.S. nuclear testing in Tahiti and Micronesia.

Sometimes it’s a foreign military that does the dirty work for U.S. interests. We spoke about the violence and repression going on in West Papua as the Indonesian government makes sure that
the Grasberg mine — one of the largest gold mines in the world — continues to run for the benefit of its owner, Arizona-based Freeport-McMoRan.

What spurred this meeting was the visit of several activists from Okinawa who are struggling against the building of a new U.S. air base at Henoko Bay, the latest in a long history of adverse effects on Okinawa from the presence of military bases. These Okinawan activists were here to take part in the World Conservation Congress but also headlined in a panel talk on Okinawa attended by over 70 at Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies on Thursday night.

One general theme is that truly protecting our environment means paying attention to the effects of militarization and war on the land, indigenous peoples and local autonomy in Pacific Islands.

After all, it is well known that modern war is ecologically devastating and releases hundreds of thousands of tons of pollutants and greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. Closer to home, we know from the examples of Kahoolawe, Pohakuloa, Makua Valley, Puuloa (Pearl Harbor, which once boasted the most fishponds on Oahu) and many other sites that it is indigenous land and peoples and local people who pay the unspoken costs of housing the U.S. military.

Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists put it most simply in a post about the military’s turn toward considering its environmental impacts, writing that “military operations by their nature are not environment-friendly.”

What goes on in one part of this vast Pacific Ocean surely affects all other parts of it.

Yet, a quick search of all 1,349 items in the IUCN World Conservation Congress’ online program for the keyword “military activities” yields nine results.

Furthermore, the celebrated Papahanaumokukuakea Marine National Monument puts no limitations on the U.S. military. The proclamation that President Barack Obama signed to expand the monument states, “The prohibitions required by this proclamation shall not apply to activities and exercises of the U.S. Armed Forces, including those carried out by the United States Coast Guard.” It goes on to state that nothing in the proclamation will limit the U.S. military’s ability to use property under their control or limit the availability of property for their use.

In other instances around the world, such caveats allow for paradoxical situations around the Pacific and in other oceans where conservation areas actually house or provide a buffer for military bases.

Conservation and Connections

I participated in last week’s talk story and sign-making event as a student wanting to learn more from folks on the front lines of demilitarization and environmental struggles. One thing that became apparent is that in the Pacific, as in the world, we are all connected, and our efforts at protecting the environment need to first acknowledge and then foster our interconnectedness.
As Peter Apo has noted, the Western model of protecting the land, called conservation, depends on drawing an imaginary line around an area in order to “preserve” it. Too often such approaches sever the connections between indigenous peoples and their land while leaving unquestioned the logic that puts military objectives high above environmental concerns and regulations.

Under conservation models, the rest of us are also cut off from ever forming a real, respectful and responsible connection with land; what we get instead are touristic models where we conspicuously consume “outdoorsy” experiences and products that may still be environmentally harmful.

Conservation models, by setting aside only some land or ocean to protect, also make us feel like it’s OK to destroy other islands, lands and ecosystems when it’s convenient or “necessary.” But it’s not OK. #OurIslandsAreSacred and what goes on in one part of this vast ocean surely affects all other parts of it.

There will surely be positive effects on marine life from setting aside such a large tract of ocean and taking pressure off of over-fished species. And I’m glad that concern for the environment has gone mainstream.

But I am even more hopeful about the international coalition of activists, scholars, and advocates that is drawing connections between struggles and pointing in the direction of where more work has to be done.

Kelsey Amos is a graduate student and graduate assistant at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She is also a writer/coordinator for the Purple Maia Foundation, which provides "access to empowering technology education for underserved youth in Hawaii."


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September 9, 2016

To understand the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, you need to understand tribal sovereignty

Policy has to be paired with indigenous people’s experiences.

By Victoria M. Massie
Vox

Tensions are rising in North Dakota as Standing Rock Sioux members, activists, and allies protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which could damage their water supply.

In many ways, the story surrounding the 1,172-mile pipeline may seem familiar. Environmentalists have long criticized the US’s dependence on oil, and the increasing reliance on fracking to satisfy it. Dakota Access LLC, the company behind the pipeline, says the project
would create 8,000 to 12,000 jobs through construction (though Mother Jones reports that Iowa State University professor David Swenson disputes this figure). However, oil spills are fairly common and companies rarely catch them, leaving local communities to fend for themselves as corporate interests are prioritized over the environment.

But there’s also another key issue at play: race, and the need to recognize indigenous tribes’ right to self-determination.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, located just South of the pipeline, has sued the federal government for failing to consult the tribe before the Army Corps of Engineers discreetly approved the pipeline in July. As the Washington Post reported, the pipeline will run under the Missouri River, the major natural water supply, and through sacred areas that aren’t considered official parts of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

"#NoDAPL has made clear that climate change isn’t up for debate for most indigenous peoples," Aura Bogado, a staff writer at Grist.org who focuses on environmental racism, told me in an email interview. "It’s a real phenomenon that can mean the difference between life and death."

And while a federal judge has affirmed the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s concerns that corporate and government entities alike failed to consult them, American history shows there is a violent history of denying indigenous groups sovereignty over their own lives.

Bogado discussed what current protests can teach us about centering race in environmental journalism and the importance of amplifying indigenous people’s stories.

The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

**Victoria Massie:** To begin, how did you get involved in covering environmental racism as a journalist?

Aura Bogado: I’ve covered racial justice for a while, and have always had a particular interest in climate and the environment – but it’s really tough to write about this intersection. Although nonwhite people tend to live with more contaminated air, water, and soil, there remains a fundamental disengagement about this in both the mainstream environmental movement as well as in environmental journalism.

Pair this with the fact that I’m an indigenous woman who has a particular way of thinking about climate, and you get an idea of what I’m up against. Those challenges are changing and even decreasing, but not fast enough to catch up with the way the planet is warming. Nevertheless, I’m committed to writing about environmental racism.

**VM:** A major component of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests is the fact that the pipeline isn’t just an environmental hazard; it’s one that is being implemented with pretty much no regard for the Standing Rock Sioux. How does this fit into a broader discussion of tribal sovereignty?
AB: This is such a great question, because the issue of tribal sovereignty, which is just as important as the environmental hazard, is getting lost in the pipeline story.

Too many people tend to think of tribal sovereignty as something that’s allocated, which can be given or taken away depending on the circumstance. But it’s not. The Standing Rock Sioux Nation’s tribal sovereignty, which essentially precedes colonization, is permanent, and it’s recognized (as opposed to granted) by the federal government.

The nation is concerned that its waters would be contaminated and that its sacred sites will be desecrated by this pipeline project. On the surface, that claim can easily look like a specific racial group got together to lodge an environmental complaint, but there’s a lot more than that: It’s actually a tribal sovereign nation that’s making an important claim about self-determination and its ability to survive and exist in the future.

But this isn’t just lost on journalists. It extends to the highest office in the federal government. During his trip to Laos this week, President Obama was asked about the pipeline. He issued, at best, a lackluster answer. Obama gave great lip service to his culturally appropriate communication with indigenous peoples, but he added that he couldn’t even provide an answer "on this particular case."

Aside from asserting ignorance on a topic I can’t help but think he’s already been briefed on, Obama also missed an opportunity to publicly recognize the Standing Rock Sioux Nation’s tribal sovereignty. That’s a real shame, as is his decision to skirt the environmental and climate hazards the pipeline presents.

VM: When we talk about environmentalism, we hear a lot about climate change, politicians, and CO2 emissions. These are all a part of the story, but as the #NoDAPL protests are showing, they’re not the full story. Race is also a critical part of the issue. How have you seen race erased from the environmentalism story as a journalist, and how does #NoDAPL demonstrate the importance of foregrounding race in the conversation?

AB: Environmental racism is woven into our society’s fabric. The very founding of this country was an environmental disaster, made possible through settler colonialism, and vice versa. The historical emissions produced by white colonists have greatly contributed to climate change, leaving indigenous peoples and people of color — that is, the very people who didn’t contribute to global warming much at all — most vulnerable. I see a lot of stories that reference climate change without much of an understanding about who’s responsible for creating it. It didn’t appear out of nowhere; it was part of a larger violent process of theft and genocide, and it’s stunning to me that most environmental journalists don’t really seem to get that.

But it wasn’t only in colonizing the land. It’s also about the way cities were constructed. Racial housing covenants often segregated people of color into areas that had the most factories, oil refineries, heavy industry, and so forth. Although explicit racial segregation for housing is illegal today, the legacies of those neighborhoods, and who’s affected by contamination and pollution, haven’t changed much.
If you live in a city, look up your closest landfill. Chances are that landfill, and all the health and environmental concerns that stem from it, is in a neighborhood of color. These neighborhoods and sacrificial zones were literally designed to be that way, and not much has changed.

You’re right that a lot of environmental and climate stories focus on science and policy — and too often, that casts people aside. As an environmental journalist, I understand and keep up with the science: We can nerd out on greenhouse gases, lead, and particulate matter for days. But I also pay attention to how much science matches up to experience.

The people I focus my stories on don’t worry about the number of parts per million of carbon dioxide allowed in the Paris climate deal; they worry about the number of asthma inhalers they can afford to buy in order to survive.

#NoDAPL has made clear that climate change isn’t up for debate for most indigenous peoples. It’s a real phenomenon that can mean the difference between life and death.

VM: What questions do you find journalists aren’t asking when it comes to covering the #NoDAPL protests?

AB: You asked a great question about tribal sovereignty — but few journalists even understand what that means. There are several Indian law scholars who’d like nothing better than to have a journalist call and ask them to explain what tribal sovereignty is. That attorney might not be quoted in a story, but that journalist will be armed with a crucial understanding moving forward with which to explain what’s happening in Standing Rock and elsewhere.

I’m also surprised that reporters aren’t pressing the two leading presidential candidates on the pipeline. I can imagine what Trump’s answer might be, but what about Clinton? She’s claimed she supports environmental justice — her claim could be buffered by issuing a simple statement, although it seems rather late for that now. Since she’s failed to say anything about the pipeline, reporters might want to press her campaign on it.

Aside from what’s not being asked, I also wonder who’s being asked. I think it’s great that more white folks are getting involved, and even heading to North Dakota, but I worry about the way that white voices are validating what indigenous peoples, and people of color who are in solidarity, can say for themselves. So I think it’s incumbent upon reporters to get out of their comfort zones and talk to more than just white sources for this story.

VM: The Toronto chapter of Black Lives Matter just recently traveled down to stand with #NoDAPL protesters. Why are these kinds of alliances important for understanding the complexity of the problem?

AB: The enslavement of black people in the Americas complicates the settler colonial matter I talked about earlier. One legacy of enslavement is that black skin continues to be an indicator that marks one’s place in a racial hierarchy. Black Lives Matter has built a worldwide movement and has also taken the time to work thoughtfully with indigenous peoples. There’s probably an amazing story waiting to be told about the meetings, especially among women and gender
nonconforming people, that have taken place behind the scenes before and after BLM arrived at Standing Rock.

BLM knows it has the media’s attention, so it made a strategic decision to head to Standing Rock in order to get journalists to pay attention. It’s also brought much-needed supplies there. And it’s created some visibility for black indigenous folks to also be recognized. Every step of the fight against the pipeline has seemed historic to me. But this allegiance is toward the top of that list, and deserves more coverage.

VM: What can coverage (or lack thereof) of the #NoDAPL protests teach us about how indigenous communities stories are told?

AB: For the most part, stories about indigenous communities aren’t being told. We have a way of relegating indigenous peoples to the past, so stories that are taking place today rarely resonate with mainstream journalists. There are, of course, indigenous reporters and reporters of color that write about this — but the system that keeps journalism so white tends to keep the publishing gate closed in terms of what we can cover and when.

Then again, I do think that #NoDAPL has revitalized the argument [that] it’s important for journalists to pay attention to the fact that already marginalized communities are the ones on the front lines, fighting against environmental injustices. There’s a great opportunity here created by indigenous peoples. I hope we don’t miss it.


September 12, 2016

Native American Activist Winona LaDuke at Standing Rock: It's Time to Move On from Fossil Fuels

By Amy Goodman
Democracy Now!

Watch the video here:

http://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/12/native_american_activist_winona_laduke_at

While Democracy Now! was covering the Standing Rock standoff earlier this month, we spoke to Winona LaDuke, longtime Native American activist and executive director of the group Honor the Earth. She lives and works on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota. She spent years successfully fighting the Sandpiper pipeline, a pipeline similar to Dakota Access. We met her right outside the Red Warrior Camp, where she has set up her tipi. Red Warrior is one of the encampments where thousands of Native Americans representing hundreds of tribes from across the U.S. and Canada are currently resisting the pipeline’s construction.
AMY GOODMAN: This is Democracy Now!, democracynow.org. The War and Peace Report. I’m Amy Goodman. While Democracy Now! was covering the standoff at Standing Rock earlier this month, on Labor Day weekend, we spoke to Winona LaDuke, longtime Native American activist, executive director of the group Honor the Earth. She lives and works on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota. She spent years successfully fighting a pipeline similar to Dakota Access, the Sandpiper pipeline. We met her right outside the Red Warrior Camp, where she has set up her tipi. Red Warrior is one of the encampments where thousands of Native Americans, representing hundreds of tribes from across the U.S. and Canada, are currently resisting the pipeline’s construction. Her tipi is painted with animals that are threatened by climate change. We began by asking Winona LaDuke why communities are now protesting the pipeline.

WINONA LADUKE: It’s time to end the fossil fuel infrastructure. I mean, these people on this reservation, they don’t have adequate infrastructure for their houses. They don’t have adequate energy infrastructure. They don’t have adequate highway infrastructure. And yet they’re looking at a $3.9 billion pipeline that will not help them. It will only help oil companies. And so that’s why we’re here. You know, we’re here to protect this land.

AMY GOODMAN: Explain what happened to the Sandpiper pipeline, the one that you protested, the one that you opposed.

WINONA LADUKE: What we opposed, yeah. So, for four years, the Enbridge company said that they absolutely needed a pipeline that would go from Clearbrook, Minnesota, to Superior, Wisconsin. That was the critical and only possible route. They proposed a brand-new route that would go through the heart of our best wild rice lakes and territory, skirting the reservations, but within our treaty territory. They did not consult with us, and they made some serious errors in their process. They underestimated what was going to happen there. And so, for four years, we battled them in the Minnesota regulatory process, which is a process which is more advanced and slightly more functional than North Dakota’s regulatory process, which, from what I can see, is largely nonexistent. And in that process, we attended every hearing. We intervened legally. We rode our horses against the current of the oil. We had ceremonies. And they cancelled the pipeline. That’s what they did, after four years’ very, very ardent opposition by Minnesota citizens, tribal governments, tribal people, you know, on that line.

And that pipeline, you know, big problem—we still have six pipelines in northern Minnesota to go to Superior, the furthest-inland port. But their new proposals are not going to happen there. Enbridge has said that they still want to continue with their proposals for line three. The first pipeline they want, they want to abandon. The beginning of a whole new set of problems in North America, the abandoning of 50-year-old pipelines, with no regulatory clarity as to who is responsible. And so we are opposing them on that, that they cannot abandon, and they cannot—they still cannot get a new route.
But when they announced that, you know, in my area, I could have said, "Hey, good luck, y’all. We beat it here. Good luck." You know? But, no, we said we’re going to follow them out here, too, because we believe that—you know, we could spend our lives fighting one pipeline after another after another, but someone needs to challenge the problem and say, "This is not the way to go, America. This is not the way to go for any of us." So, we came out here to support these people.

AMY GOODMAN: So talk about everyone who’s out here.

WINONA LADUKE: There are a lot of people out here, you know? It’s very funny, because I feel like I’ve been like the Standing Rock switchboard, the travel guide, for the past two weeks. You know, everybody hits me up on Facebook, calls me up: "Hey, LaDuke, I want to bring out this. I got some winter coats. You know, what should I do?" I was like, "Oh, my gosh!" You know?

So, a lot of people are coming here, united. You know, so what I know is out here is like—you know, I go walk in here, and I’ve seen people from the—you know, from Wounded Knee in 1973. I’ve seen people I worked with in opposing uranium mining in the Black Hills in the 1970s and ‘80s, you know, out here. I mean, I’ve been at this a while. You know, it’s like Old Home Week out here. I’ve seen people from Oklahoma that opposed the Keystone XL pipeline, and Nebraska. And I’ve seen people from, you know, out in our territory that are opposing the pipelines here. The tribal chairman of Fond du Lac is here, and, you know, a whole host of Native and non-Native people. And there are a lot of people that just do not believe that this should happen anymore in this country, that are very willing to put themselves on the line, non-Indian people, you know, as well as tribal members, and they are here. And it is a beautiful place to defend.

AMY GOODMAN: For people who are watching in New York and Louisiana, in California and India, China and South Africa, why does this matter to them?

WINONA LADUKE: This matters because it’s time to move on from fossil fuels. You know, this is the same battle that they have everywhere else. You know, each day or each week, there’s some new leak, there’s some new catastrophe in the fossil fuel industry, as well as the ongoing and growing catastrophe of climate change. The fact that there is no rain in Syria has directly to do with these fossil fuel companies. You know, all of the catastrophes that are happening elsewhere in the world has to do with the fact that North America is retooling its infrastructure and going after the dirtiest oil in the world—the tar sands oil and the oil out of North Dakota, the fracked oil—rather than—you know, they were working with Venezuela’s—it also has to do with crushing Venezuela, because Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world. And rather than do business with Venezuela, they were bound and determined to take oil from places that did not want to give it up, and create this filthy infrastructure. So, this carbon—this oil is very heavy in carbon and will add hundreds of millions of tons of CO2 to the environment, if these pipelines are allowed through. So, that is—you know, it affects everybody.

AMY GOODMAN: Now, some tribes are for the pipeline. Can you describe the division?
WINONA LADUKE: You know, I don’t know that I would say some tribes are for it. I would say some interests in Indian country have been for the pipeline. I mean, historically, the Three Affiliated Tribes is an oil-producing tribe, but they came down here to support the opposition to the pipeline. They came down there. Their whole tribal council came down here a couple of days ago. You know, but the fact is, is that, you know, some tribes have been forced into production of fossil fuels. Eighty-five percent of the Navajo economy, for instance, is fossil fuel-based. About the same percentage of the Fort Berthold economy is fossil fuel-based.

So, you know, just to give a little historic picture: You come out here with your smallpox, and you wipe out 95 percent of the people, the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara people, in the early 1800s. They live along these villages, you know, just trying to hang in there. Then you come out here, and you flood their lands. And the agricultural crops that they produced are now owned by Monsanto and Syngenta as trademarked varieties that they created. Right? And then you’re out here in North Dakota, and everybody in the country flies over North Dakota and looks down and says, "Well, that’s North Dakota." Nobody comes out here. And so stuff continues out here for a hundred years, where these people are treated like third-class citizens, you know, where they have no running water in their houses, and they have oil companies coming out here. And you have high rates of abuse and violence against women and children, and it accelerates and increases in the oil fields, until you have an epidemic of drugs, which now hits this community. This community doesn’t get any benefit from oil, but the meth and heroin that came out of those fields is here, you know? Because those dealers came up here, and then they saw these Indian people, and they said, "Well, we’ll just go there." And so these reservations are full of it. You know? And then you say, you know, to that tribe up there, the BIA cuts some backyard deals and starts oil extraction. And so, then you—

AMY GOODMAN: The Bureau of Indian Affairs.

WINONA LADUKE: Bureau of Indian Affairs. And then you end up with oil—you end up with haves and have-nots in the oil fields. And you end up with a tribe that now has oil revenues that are coming in. And they look out there, frankly, and they say, "You know? Things haven’t been going too well for us, so we’re going to sign a few more of these leases, because, after all, you know, nothing has ever worked out well for us. And so, we’re going to get a little bit of money." And that’s how you get—you know, you force people into that, with a gun to their head, and then they end up destroying their land, you know, which is what is happening up there on that reservation. And they’ve had huge investigations into corruption at the leadership. But, you know, you force poor people. You force people into that situation, and that’s a perfect storm.

AMY GOODMAN: You’ve talked and written about Native Americans having PTSD, post-traumatic stress syndrome.

WINONA LADUKE: Yeah, we have ongoing; I didn’t finish it, I still have it. You know, you say "Enbridge," and I get this little like quirk, you know, and because the Indian wars are far from over out here. But, you know, what you get is intergenerational trauma, is what it is known as, historic trauma. And other people have it. But you have a genetic memory, and you look out there, and you see—every day you wake up, and you see that your land was flooded. And that big power line that runs through this land, that doesn’t benefit you. You still have to—you know,
everything that is out here was done at your expense, but you still have to pay for it. And every
day you go out there, and some—you know, you got a roadblock, that the white people put up,
coming into your reservation. And every day you go out there, and you look at your houses, and
you see that you’ve got crumbling infrastructure, and nobody cares about it. And you’ve got a
meth epidemic, and you’ve got the highest suicide rates in the country, but nobody pays
attention. You know, and so you just try to survive. That’s what you’re trying to do. Like 90
percent of my community, generally, I would say, is just trying to survive.

You know, I mean, in my community, we have rice. We still have our wild rice. And we can go,
and we can harvest wild rice. And we can be Anishinaabe people. You know, we can still live off
of our land. You know, these people have a much tougher time living off of their land. The
buffalo were wiped out, you know? But this year is their stand. This is their stand. They’ve got a
chance to not have one more bad thing happen to them. And from my perspective, my
perspective is, is that $3.9 billion pipeline, these guys don’t need a pipeline. What they need is
solar. What they need is wind. Look at this wind. You know, what they need—they have like
class 7 wind out here. What they need is solar on all their houses, solar thermal. They need
housing that works for people. They need energy justice. This is this chance, America, to say,
"Look, this community does not need a pipeline. What this community needs is real energy
independence." They call this energy independence, you know, shoving a pipeline down people’s
throats, so that Canadian oil companies can benefit, and, you know, a bunch of people can—the
world can worsen. That is not energy independence. Energy independence is when you have
solar. Energy independence is when you have wind. Energy independence is when you have
some control over your future. That’s what these people want.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Winona LaDuke, longtime Anishinaabe activist from White Earth
Reservation in northern Minnesota.

http://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/12/native_american_activist_winona_laduke_at

September 14, 2016

Native Rights and Concerns at Standing Rock: The Important Role of Science

By Andrew Rosenberg, director, Center for Science & Democracy
Union of Concerned Scientists

Over the past months, we have all had an opportunity to see democracy in action with all its
challenges. No, I don’t mean the endless coverage of the presidential campaign. I am talking
about people taking action to protect the rights, health, safety and culture, standing with the
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and other Lakota nations in North Dakota. I mean free speech, the
right of peaceful assembly, the right to petition our government for redress of grievances, the
importance of the United States honoring its commitments to Native nations, and the well-being
of all people. Because these principles have not been applied equally to all people—and
especially to Native Americans—in North Dakota, Native Americans are on the ground
demanding that these rights be upheld.
I believe that in addition to the many social, economic, legal, cultural, and other perspectives upon which others may speak more eloquently and authoritatively than I, the Dakota Access pipeline battle has a core element of the role of science in promoting democracy.

**Dakota Access Pipeline construction in North Dakota**

At issue is the construction of part of an oil pipeline in North Dakota, a state that has seen a boom, and yes, partial bust of oil production over the last decade or so. The state of North Dakota and the Army Corps of Engineers have approved moving forward with construction near Standing Rock Sioux tribal lands, crossing the Missouri River, through lands held as sacred to sovereign tribes. To some, the pipeline is a vital economic development with literally billions to be made. But at what cost? And to whom? And where do the benefits flow from those billions?

Notably, the route of the pipeline has already been moved from a proposed crossing under the Missouri River north (upstream) of Bismarck, ND because of concerns about water contamination of the municipal water supply serving the city and high potential consequences of leaks and spills. The new route that the company is moving forward with is a half-mile north of the Standing Rock Reservation—implying, perhaps, that the tribe’s water supply is less “consequential”.

The company has made lengthy assurances of the safety of the pipeline and its monitoring plans, claiming it will transport crude oil in a “safer and environmentally responsible manner”. Given that pipeline leaks and spills are far from rare, for such a project—encompassing four states and in the vicinity of many tribal nations—the environmental impact assessment should be based on sound science instead of foregone conclusions. Such an assessment would give people the best information from which to exercise their political rights.

**Science and public policy at Standing Rock**

When government makes decisions on a project like the pipeline, science comes into play, not only in designing the project itself, but in analyzing the consequences. When federal agencies, in this case the Corps of Engineers, take an “action” such as permitting construction of this pipeline through federal lands or watershed areas of the Missouri River under federal control, they must analyze the impacts on the “affected environment” including the natural and human environment, according to the National Environmental Policy Act. This scientific analysis may start with a limited environmental assessment (EA) to determine if any environmental impacts are likely. The EA process has only limited opportunity for public input. If no “significant” impacts are determined to be likely, the analysis can end there and the permit process moves forward. But if there are possible significant environmental impacts, then a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required.

Without going into too much detail, there are four key points about the process of preparing an EIS:

1. It requires a detailed scientific analysis of a proposed “action” (e.g. permitting a specific route for the pipeline) and several reasonable alternatives;
2. It requires an extensive process of public input as well as consultation with other government bodies (including, notably in this case, sovereign tribal governments);
3. The scientific work in preparing a properly done EIS doesn’t have a foregone conclusion. That is, it doesn’t mean from the outset that it has been decided that there are significant impacts that must be mitigated or that there is only one acceptable alternative. That emerges from the analysis which includes the public and other input; and
4. It is a timely and costly process as befits a costly and highly lucrative development project.

For Dakota Access (the company that wants to build the pipeline), only an EA was prepared and it was determined the project could go ahead because it found no significant impact.

Hmmm. I used to oversee management of marine fisheries around the country, and the agency I worked for frequently and very laboriously prepared EISs to permit fishermen to go out and catch fish. And now a pipeline carrying millions of barrels of toxic fossil fuels that will be used for energy, chemical products, and plastics can be said a priori to have no impact on natural and human communities? That seems to defy common sense.

The way the project is structured and the specific lobby efforts by the fossil fuel industry are revealing. Even though the pipeline is more than a thousand miles long, for the purposes of federal permitting it is “considered” to be just a series of small projects, each of which are analyzed for their environmental impacts independently. The industry secured that particular set of exemptions from requirements of the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and National Environmental Policy Act to ease permitting of their construction projects.

I wonder what would happen if the project developers were not allowed to refer to the economic benefits of the full collection of sections of the pipeline when talking about its importance. In that scenario, the section under review would be essentially worthless because moving oil only through that section isn’t worth anything. No billions of dollars in revenue, no claims of energy independence, no big employment numbers, because that section is unrelated to other sections in its benefits just like they analyze the impacts?

The Dakota Access Environmental Assessment (EA) does not consider the low-income and Native communities that could be affected by the proposed pipeline. Only the communities outlined in red and blue were evaluated for environmental justice impacts.

**Environmental justice**

One of the biggest problems highlighted by this project is the issue of Native rights and environmental justice. In this case, the burden was directly and consciously shifted onto Native American tribes and communities as has happened too many times throughout the history of the country.

The Dakota Access project should have been fully and deeply analyzed and, most importantly, included consultations with the sovereign tribal governments before issuing a permit. But it wasn’t. The US Environmental Protection Agency said the analysis was inadequate.
Standing Rock tribal government said it was inadequate. In fact, Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II said that that “the first draft of the company’s assessment of the planned route through our treaty and ancestral lands did not even mention our tribe.”

As important as it is for human and environmental health, possible water contamination is not the only concern here. There is a critical question of impacts on lands sacred to Native people. How can the Army Corps, or Dakota Access, or anyone for that matter determine the impacts on sacred lands, sites, and burial grounds without consulting with the tribe? How can one determine \textit{a priori} that there will be no impacts? At the very least, a thorough analysis of environmental justice concerns—fully engaging with the tribe and surrounding communities—is essential.

Moving the route away from the city of Bismarck to near the reservation, ignoring the need for input from the people near the changed route, dismissing concerns out of hand about sacred sites and lands and cultural impacts, and proceeding with construction based on a claim of economic benefits without regard to the costs to those most impacted: these are the meat and bones of how environmental injustices are allowed to happen.

By no means is this an isolated case. Indigenous people of America have lived this story time and again. The sacrifice of tribal lands and sacred areas in the name of “development” is all too common. Another case in point is the fight over designation as a National Monument of the Greater Grand Canyon area, sacred to Native American tribes who have already suffered devastating effects from uranium mining, impacts on drinking water and other development impacts. What could be more monumental than the Grand Canyon? What could be more monumental than the cultures of the indigenous peoples of this land?

At Standing Rock, and at the Grand Canyon, as well as many other examples too numerous to speak to here, our democracy has a chance to listen to its people. It is important that science not be used for purposes of political, economic and cultural repression. Science can be an instrument for justice, and that is what needs to happen here.


\textbf{September 16, 2016}

Indigenous communities mobilize to defend Guatemala’s forests from loggers

By Jeff Abbott
Waging Nonviolence

Across Guatemala, indigenous communities are organizing to challenge logging in the country’s vast forests. These communities are concerned with the impact that both legal and illegal logging will have on their watersheds and on the environment.
On June 15, concerned residents from the highland Ixil Maya municipality of Nebaj, Quiche staged a protest outside the municipal building to express their concern with the steady increase in trucks leaving town loaded with lumber. The action was organized by residents and members of the Indigenous Authority of Nebaj in order to pressure the state authorities to strip the nine companies of their licenses to exploit timber on private lands. Residents raise concern over the fact that the deforestation affects everyone in the area.

Following the protest, concerned residents in the neighboring Ixil municipality of Chajul blocked and detained several trucks transporting lumber from the region for a number of hours. They demanded that the National Institute of Forests, or INAB, and the Division for the Protection of the Environment cease their operations and described the amount of lumber being taken from the local forests as “excessive.”

The initiative in Nebaj and Chajul follow the actions taken by the members of the Indigenous Authorities of Cotzal, another neighboring Ixil municipality, who filed the initial complaint to INAB over their concern of the cutting of trees.

The Indigenous Authorities of Nebaj also issued a statement to INAB asking them to take action. But the government body declined to act and issued a statement that they are planting new trees for every one that is cut down. But this response did not satisfy concerned residents.

“We went to the government bodies and issued statements asking to cease extending licenses for the exploitation of forests,” said Caty Terraza, the communications representative for the Indigenous Authorities of Nebaj. “They told us that they are sowing new trees, but how long will it take for those trees to grow to the same size as the trees that were there before?”

The companies involved in logging operations responded to the protests by significantly reducing the number of trucks transporting lumber from mountains. According to residents, however, it is unclear if this will continue into the future.

The mobilization of communities organizing to challenge logging operations in the highlands of Guatemala represent a growing concern over the destruction of the environment by companies. This challenge to logging companies reflects the understanding of communities of the vital part forests play in the protection of the water sources.

“The trees serve us and the animals,” Terraza said. “The loss of trees is drying up the aquifers. As a youth and as human, I must think of my future, and what I’m leaving my children.”

Other communities held similar protests following the actions taken in the Ixil region.

On June 26, a similar action was held in Santa Cruz del Quiche, the department’s largest city. Once again protesters were demanding that authorities stop issuing licenses for the exploitation of forests.

**Increase in logging across Guatemala**
Guatemala is home to vast forests and jungles, but these regions have increasingly come under threat to deforestation. Critics blame uneducated campesinos clearing land for agriculture as one of the prime culprits. This does represent a threat, but there are other bigger threats, including lumber companies, and organized crime.

The protest over logging industry activity in indigenous regions occurs at a time in Guatemala of increased concern over deforestation, and comes after the historic march for water in April 2016. Community representatives, nongovernmental organizations, and activists see a connection between forests and water. The Guatemalan government too maintains a campaign of reforestation, but this has not stopped companies from cutting down forests for the valuable woods, or the razing of forests by narco-traffickers in the northern department of Petén to build landing strips.

The Guatemalan Ministry of the Economy actively promotes the investment of companies interested in exploiting the country’s nearly 2 million acres of forests. Logging companies and lumber traders have taken an interest in the vast forests of the highlands of Guatemala, where they can find rare hard and soft woods, such as teak, mahogany, oak and the more common pine. These resources can fetch hefty prices at market.

The exportation of lumber and products produced from wood from Guatemala has increased significantly. From 2013 to 2014, lumber exports increased eight percent, from $6.7 million dollars to $8.6 million. This continues the long trend of the increase in the exportation of lumber and wood products, such as furniture.

But this increase in export of lumber brings the companies into conflict with indigenous communities. According to research by Guatemalan environmentalist and researcher, Juan Skinner, the indigenous regions of the country on average contain more forest cover than the non-indigenous regions of the country.

A 2005 report that he authored highlights that municipalities that are less than 25 percent indigenous have forest cover of around 12 percent. Whereas regions where the population is more than 75 percent indigenous have forest cover of around 35 percent.

**Protecting communal forests**

Guatemala’s Mayan communities are not alone in their concern with the destruction of forests. The southern Xinca community of Quesada, Jutiapa has long taken steps to protect the forests that make up their communal territory.

The Xinca people are one of the many ethnicities that make up Guatemala. The rural community in the southern department of Jutiapa has held their forest as communal lands since the 1850s, with subsequent generations continuing to protect the mountain and the forests. Today the forests represent 80 percent of the more than 13,500 acres of land, with the remainder utilized for crops, such as coffee and maize.
“Our ancestors left us the land and a group to protect our mountain,” said Jak Mardogueo Ogorio, a representative of the communities’ Directive Council. “All this was passed down through the generations, and we continue this today. In order to cut a tree down, you first must receive permission from the council.”

The community leaders have also barred any large-scale logging operations.

“We don’t permit companies to operate in our forests,” Ogorio said. “In past epochs companies tried to negotiate for access to the forests, but they always wanted more. How many years for a new tree to grow? Up on the mountain there are trees that you cannot encircle with three people. This is what we are protecting.”

Ogorio and the other 13 members of the community council work directly with the residents to build awareness of the importance of the forests through regular meetings, trainings and a campaign to build alternative cooking stoves that utilize less firewood. In August and September 2016, the council implemented the insulation of 400 cooking stoves in conjunction with Utz Che, a Guatemalan non-governmental organization.

“This project allows us to slow deforestation because the stoves use less firewood, and there is no need for more and more wood,” Ogorio said. “These stoves allow us to protect our forests.”

Community leaders of Quesada maintain vigilance over the threat of forest fires on communal lands for which they receive funding from INAB. This has generated work opportunity in a region where there are not many options.

**Facing down logging firms**

The community of La Bendición in the southern department of Esquitla is one of the few regions on Guatemala’s southern coast not dominated by sugar and African oil palm plantations. Residents of the small community were displaced by the country’s 36-year-long internal armed conflict. At the end of the war they negotiated the purchase of a 5,500-acre coffee farm through the Land Fund in 2000 for about $1 million, far more than the value of the land.

When the families already burdened by debt arrived in 2001, they were shocked to learn that the land was not in the state that the Land Fund had promised. There were no rivers, as they were promised there would be, and the high winds meant that their crops were damaged, and there was no paved road. But there was a forest that contained an aquifer. Disappointed residents quickly left the community, leaving just 53 families of the original 170.

Residents continued to be burdened by debt, despite the rich forests. In 2002, the Land Fund proposed a solution: sell the forest.

“The same Land Fund that assisted us in purchasing our land was pressuring us to sell the forests in order to resolve the debt,” said Veronica Hernandez, a 47-year-old community leader. “But we refused because if we would have sold our forests, we would have been left without water, or with contaminated water.”
Since refusing to sell the land to logging interest, the community has organized to maintain the forests, and protect them from illegal logging and from forest fires. The residents also hold regular community-wide meetings to work to train everyone on the importance of the forests, and to guarantee that no one goes up into the mountain to cut down the precious trees.

“The forests are a source of life,” Hernandez said. “If there are no forests and no trees, then there is no life. The forests give us water, the air and fruits, which we are able to eat and to sell at market.”

Residents have also worked to develop projects like those being implemented in Quesada in order to decrease their impact on the forests. These stoves and solar projects are received across the community to great success.

The residents’ resolve to protect their forest was further strengthened following the April 2016 water march, when thousands of campesinos marched to demand the protection of Guatemala’s water sources.

“The April march was important for us and other communities along Guatemala’s coast,” Hernandez said. “It has strengthened our drive to protect the forests and the mangroves along the coast.”

Despite the fact that the community was able to hold off the lumber interests following the purchase of the land, Hernandez and the other residents maintain vigilance to guarantee that no company comes to exploit their land and forests.

“These companies always come into our communities to rob from us,” Hernandez said. “They then leave us with all the costs.”

**Building consciousness in the community**

Back in Nebaj, the Indigenous Authority is working to replicate the awareness in La Benedición and Quesada over the importance of forests.

“We are trying to inform community members of the impacts of deforestation,” Terraza said. This sharing of information is strengthened through the local Ixil University, which works to build awareness, and bring higher education to the region.

“But we have to do more,” Terraza added. “We must struggle to guarantee that people know what the impacts are.”

The Indigenous Authorities of Nebaj stated that they are considering other actions, including the continuation of pressure on the state bodies, including INAB, the continuation of protests, and the direct action of blocking trucks transporting lumber.
“[INAB] is an institution of the state,” Terraza said. “If we have all these trees, then it is because
we have protected the forests for some time; our ancestors also protected these forests. It should
not be so easy for them to arrive and issue licenses to companies to exploit the forests.”

http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/guatemalan-indigenous-defend-forests/

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September 16, 2016

The ‘spiritual battle’ over the Dakota Access pipeline

By Emily McFarlan Miller
Religion News Service

NEAR THE STANDING ROCK SIOUX RESERVATION, N.D. (RNS) -- It’s being called “the
largest, most diverse tribal action in at least a century”: scores of Native American tribes camped
among the hills along the Cannonball River.

They’ve gathered in tents and teepees, and in prayer and protest, to oppose the construction of an
oil pipeline, engaged in what both activists and religious leaders are calling a spiritual battle.

And they won a partial victory on Sept. 9, when the federal government ordered a provisional
halt on construction near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation.

What’s behind the opposition to the pipeline, and what makes it spiritual? Let us ‘Splain …

What’s the backstory?

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has filed a lawsuit over a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit
for the construction of a $3.8 billion underground pipeline that would run nearly 1,200 miles
from the Bakken and Three Forks oil fields in North Dakota to an existing pipeline in Illinois.

The Dakota Access pipeline would transport 470,000 barrels of crude oil per day, according to
Dallas-based Energy Transfer, the parent company of Dakota Access. It would reduce the
amount of oil shipped by truck and train, providing safer transport of oil, the company argues.

But it also would snake through sacred sites on lands where the Sioux once lived and, according
to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, a spill would “present an existential threat” since the pipeline
would come within a half-mile of their reservation.

Who’s protesting?

An estimated 8,000 people were camped along the Cannonball River this past week.
Camp coordinator Phyllis Young says members of 280 Native American tribes have come to express their support — from as far away as Hawaii and Ecuador, according to the Sacred Stone Camp Facebook page. Many non-Native people also have joined.

So what does opposition to the pipeline have to do with religion and spirituality?

“You can’t separate spirituality from our everyday life,” said Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Councilman Dana Yellow Fat. “We do everything with prayer.”

The demonstration began in April with a 26-mile prayer ride on horseback from Sitting Bull’s burial site in Fort Yates. Prayer continues at the camps throughout the day: in the morning and evening and at mealtimes, in vigils, in songs, in prayer ties knotted to fences along construction sites, in the sage and cedar and tobacco that is burned.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II has mentioned visions and dreams by several Lakota and Dakota Sioux about “a black poisonous snake trying to come among us.” He has also cited instructions the Sioux believe the Creator has given them to care for the land, including the water and all creation.

“Mni wiconi” — “Water is life” — has become one of the rallying cries of those opposing the pipeline.

Mark Charles, a Navajo Christian and Washington correspondent for Native News Online, puts it this way: “The way most Natives feel about the land where they’re living is the way most European Christians (American Christians of European origin) feel about Israel. Why? Because that’s where their creation story takes place.”

Why are Christians getting involved?

Bruce Ough, bishop of the United Methodist Church’s Dakotas-Minnesota Area and president of the United Methodist Church’s Council of Bishops, calls it “a spiritual battle.”

“Ultimately, this is a protest about the stewardship of God’s creation and justice for the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains,” Ough said.

It’s also about reconciliation, said Shantha Ready Alonso, executive director of Creation Justice Ministries. Many non-Native Americans participating in the demonstration want to acknowledge the injustices done to indigenous peoples by European Christians who took their lands and played a role in massacres of Native Americans.

“There’s a lot to confess, there’s a lot to repent and, in this case, this is an opportunity to stand with the tribe and affirm and follow their leadership in taking one more step toward reconciliation,” Alonso said.

Representatives from several Protestant Christian denominations, including the United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA) and
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — as well as the Nation of Islam — have visited the camps or spoken out against the pipeline project.

http://religionnews.com/2016/09/16/the-splainer-the-spiritual-battle-over-the-dakota-access-pipeline/

September 18, 2016

As Blessing of the Waves hits 9th year, paying respect to the ocean and each other

By Laylan Connelly
Orange County Register

Pedro Castagna gingerly held onto Fr. Christian Mondor, known as “surfing padre,” waves lapping at their feet as they walked into the water.

The 91-year-old Catholic priest from the Saint Simon and Jude Catholic Church, who swapped out his long brown robe for a wetsuit, stopped and blessed Castagna just before the surfer joined others forming a circle and splashing water toward the sky, a gesture to give thanks to the joy the ocean provides.

“We are all brother and sister and the water is our source of life,” Castanga said of the various religious believers who showed up Sunday near the Huntington Beach Pier for the annual Blessing of the Waves event. “We are such a free country, where else can you do this? I’ve been to a lot of places where you can’t fly another flag or preach another religion.”

And that is the purpose of the annual event, now in its ninth year: to listen and learn about a spectrum of spiritual beliefs, all of which pay respect to water and the ocean in various ways.

Fog loomed as the event started early morning with a special tribute to H20 church pastor Sumo Sato, a well-known figure in the surfing community and recent Surfers’ Hall of Fame inductee who is battling stage 4 colon cancer.

“It’s a nasty disease. Thanks for praying for me,” he said to the hundreds of people who showed up for the service on the north side of the Huntington Beach Pier.

He talked about surrendering to God, and told a story about nearly dying in big Hawaiian surf last October, at first panicking but then recognizing he was being cared for by a higher power.

Anthony Boger, pastor at Surf City United Methodist Church, spoke about how a person can live for up to 60 days without food - but no one can live more than three days without water.

“Water is so every present in our American lives, we actually take it for granted because it is so readily available to us,” he said. “You won’t miss your water until the well runs dry.”
Nancy Cotta, council secretary of the King of Glory Lutheran Church, talked about the ocean’s powers and strength.

“There is beauty and relaxation. Besides this calm, there is turmoil. There is sunshine, and there is overcast. It can feed us and give us life, or it can take life away,” she said. “It gives us needed storms in the winter, and it cools us from the heat in the summer... They can be a source of entertainment, and they can be a source of disaster. These waves have the power to take down our pier, and they have.”

Rhonda Ragab, Muslim representative for the event, told people about how her religion uses water as a cleanser. Before praying five times a day, it is Muslim tradition to wash the face, hands and feet with water as a physical cleanse.

Before the surfers hit the water, Mondor and others sprinkled the crowd using rosemary branches soaked in salt water.

“We ask your blessing upon all the creatures that inhabit the sea, from the smallest plankton to the formidable sharks and humpback whales, for they all have a place in the order of your creation.

“But please keep the great whites always in their space, and not in ours,” he said, drawing a chuckle from the crowd.


September 19, 2016

10 Photos That Show the Magnificent Light Shining on Standing Rock

Despite all the news of pipeline regulation, court appeals, and activist arrests, Native photographer Josue Rivas reminds us that it is actually a peaceful place.

By Josue Rivas
Yes! Magazine

A month and a half ago, I was deeply moved by an urgent plea for support from friends and relatives who are in solidarity with the people of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota. As a Native photojournalist, I believe it’s important to let our people tell their own stories. That’s why I drove 1,545 miles to connect with the protectors of this land and report on what is happening here. This tribe has been fighting to protect their clean water, critical habitats, and sacred sites from an oil pipeline that would cross under the Missouri River.

For the most part I’ve been documenting the action on the front lines, but there came a moment when I realized I had to take a step back and see something else. I don’t consider myself a landscape photographer, so learning how to capture the beauty of the land was a challenge.
One day I sat near the Cannonball River and listened to the water. It was then that the spirits of this land told me to just follow my light. This is what I saw.

See the photos here: http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/10-photos-that-show-the-magnificent-light-shining-on-standing-rock-20160919

Josue Rivas wrote this article for YES! Magazine. He is a member of the Mexica Tribe and a photographer and activist based in Los Angeles. Follow him on Instagram @josue_foto and Twitter @josue_foto.

http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/10-photos-that-show-the-magnificent-light-shining-on-standing-rock-20160919

September 19, 2016

Mining leaves a Wisconsin tribe's hallowed sites at risk

*Modern boundaries complicate —and stymie—the Menominee Tribe's effort to protect burial grounds.*

*A “Sacred Water” story.*

By Brian Bienkowski

Environmental Health News

*Editor's Note: This story is part of "Sacred Water," EHN's ongoing investigation into Native American struggles—and successes—to protect culturally significant water sources on and off the reservation*

Part 1 of 2

MENOMINEE RESERVATION, Wisc.—Guy Reiter was an archaeologist before he was an activist. But the two merged after a dream six years ago.

“I was in a van and when we drove by the White Rapids I looked over and saw an elder sitting on a dam, in full Indian regalia,” Reiter says. “He flagged me down, I climbed the dam, and he started talking to me in Menominee.”

Menominee is the language of Reiter’s tribe, the Menominee Indians of Wisconsin. The dam is on the Menominee River, where the history of the tribe begins.

We were climbing down, and as soon as my feet hit the ground, I woke up, with tears in my eyes,” he says.
Reiter won't say what the elder said that brought such tears. The dream was a gift, not to be shared. “Anytime I get to experience ancestors is a real profound time,” he says.

But four months later, on an archeological trip in 2010 with other researchers from the College of Menominee Nation, Reiter saw the dam: It was indeed on the White Rapids, a former settlement site for the Menominee people.

Downstream from the rapids is the fight that has consumed Reiter's life since: A proposed open-pit copper, gold and zinc mine along the river on the Michigan side of the border. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality this month announced their mining permit approval. There are still hurdles before shovels hit dirt—including a pending wetland permit and public comment period—but time is running out for the tribe.

The river and mine are both off the reservation. But the river and land around it remain central to Menominee culture.

That's the crux facing tribes across the nation today: Cultural resources—both on and off reservation—get sullied, destroyed, defaced by activities happening off reservation and forces beyond Native Americans' control.

The Sioux—and hundreds of other tribes—are getting headlines now, protesting the destruction of off-reservation cultural artifacts and the risk to water resources by a North Dakota oil pipeline. But as the Menominee show, tribes across the country are fighting similar battles.

“Unfortunately these problems didn’t occur overnight and the solutions won’t come overnight,” says Lawrence Roberts, assistant secretary of Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of Interior.

“Sometimes it’s litigation or just working with state and local government so they’re fully educated about tribal rights,” he says. “In permitting and development it’s important to recognize tribes’ rights to hunting and gathering and fishing … that means protecting streams and sacred objects.”

That's hard to do. For tribes already beset by a host of social ills—poorer health, higher unemployment, greater alcoholism, even less plumbing than neighboring populations—such environmental injustices add further insult.

This is about far more than preserving sacred burial mounds. These injustices degrade the quality of life for Native Americans nationwide, tainting their traditions, and saddling their populations with illness and poor health.

Our six-month investigation into environmental injustice in Indian Country found tribes nationwide in a struggle to protect rivers that are cultural birthplaces, revered forests and outcrops that serve as spiritual retreats, plants that have been gathered centuries before reservations were invented, and the remains of their dead. These represent the last vestige of tribal freedom before artificial borders changed their way of life.
We also found successes: Tribal coalitions in the Pacific Northwest bringing the Native perspective into fisheries management; south-central U.S. tribal involvement in drought planning and climate change adaptation and the strong, unified tribal voice fighting for the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah.

The most recent example of this revival of Native pride—and rights—is a bit of windswept prairie that has become the flashpoint for Native American voice and culture: The Standing Rock Sioux tribe's fight against the Dakota Access pipeline. The pipeline, aimed to carry crude oil from North Dakota's Bakken fields to existing pipe in Iowa, would span four states, pass under the Missouri River a half mile upstream from the tribe’s reservation, and impact burial grounds and other culturally important sites.

Earlier this month, the same day a federal judge declined to halt construction, the Obama administration rescinded pipeline permits for U.S. Army Corps land at the Missouri River and called for a nationwide examination of the protection of tribal lands and resources.

“This case has highlighted the need for a serious discussion on whether there should be nationwide reform with respect to considering tribes’ views on these types of infrastructure projects,” the departments of Army, Justice and Interior said in an unusual joint statement.

But while hundreds of tribes are gathered in solidarity with the Sioux at Sacred Stone Camp, the Menominee are waging—and losing—their fight in northern Michigan without that same national spotlight.

Menominee burial grounds left outside reservation boundaries may soon become islands in an industrialized, strip-mined landscape as three groups of mounds sit within the boundaries of the Back Forty project site.

The mine's tailings will sit 150 feet from the river; acid leaching from waste ponds could contaminate groundwater, the river and its fish. The tribe's reservation is about 80 miles away, across the state border. But its cultural headwaters are along the Menominee River, where Aquila Resources Inc., hopes to start digging.

With the mine on track for state approval, Reiter and other Menominee members are appealing to the federal government and the power of grassroots opposition in order to stop the mine.

“We don’t have a migration story like some tribes,” says Reiter, a member of the tribe’s Conservation Commission.

"Our story starts right there."

**Off-reservation challenges**

The Menominee held title to 10 million acres across northern Michigan and Wisconsin before encroaching settlers and questionable deals forced them to 226,000 acres 60 miles northwest of Green Bay. The waters of the Menominee remain an important part of their culture. But
important decisions are controlled by Michigan. The feds are mostly out. And Michigan, just before Labor Day, announced its intent to approve the mine.

Tribes are sovereign under federal law. They deal with states and the feds in a government-to-government capacity. Certain aspects of preserving off-reservation resources have been clear: fishing or hunting rights, for example, on traditional lands, lakes and rivers, even in the off-season. But rights become opaque when disputes arise over aspects that aren’t readily tangible—especially the preservation of spiritual and historically relevant places.

A lot of this murkiness stems from the more holistic environmental perspectives from Native Americans, which doesn’t always jive with modern laws and regulations.

“When a waterway is polluted, for other communities it’s inconvenient: You can’t recreate, maybe you can’t go boating,” says Elizabeth Hoover, a Brown University assistant professor and researcher of environmental health and justice in native communities. “But for indigenous people that had a very specific relationship with that river, a kinship, to have that interrupted is a very different thing culturally.”

Brian Howard, a legislative associate at the National Congress of American Indians, says that for a lot of off-reservation development, specifically energy projects, “tribal consultations are happening after the fact” in an attempt to streamline permitting and approvals.

Howard cited a case in the Southwest where Apaches from the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation, established in 1872 in Arizona, are fighting a proposed copper mine in the Tonto National Forest, which forms the western border of their reservation lands. The Apaches have long considered the Oak Flat area of the Tonto National Forest as hallowed. It also happens to have a lot of copper ore underneath it.

Last year mining company Resolution Copper got the ore, via a rider tucked into the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. The language, inserted largely due to efforts from Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., authorized a swap of 3.8 square miles in the Flats for company-owned land outside the forest. As a litany of federal environmental reviews take place, the Apache are stuck fighting as Resolution Copper burrows into the ground for exploratory drilling while awaiting approval.

“Congress mandated the land for the private company and then there was the awareness of the sacredness of the site,” Howard says.

In Massachusetts, two Wampanoag tribes—the Aquinnah and the Mashpee—fought the proposed Cape Wind Farm in the Nantucket Sound. The turbines, they argued, would block views of the first light, part of traditional ceremonies. The Aquinnah sued the federal government for not consulting the tribe under the National Historic Preservation Act. The lawsuit was consolidated with others, and they lost. The wind project, however, is still in limbo, mired in other litigation.
In Wisconsin, the Ho-Chunk Nation this year fought a state bill that would have removed some burial mound protections in the state. The bill failed to pass in April—a victory for Wisconsin tribes, but the ruling doesn’t impact the Menominee in their current fight, as their burial mounds lie unprotected across the border in Michigan, a further sign that 19th century boundaries don't work for indigenous tribes.

Just four years ago, in a case similar to the Menominee’s, the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community of the Lake Superior Band of Chippewa fought the Eagle Mine in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula—about 160 miles north of the Menominee reservation in Wisconsin—over pollution fears and its location near Eagle Rock, a spiritual gathering place for the tribe. They lost; the mine owners, Lundin, have been conducting exploratory drilling since.

In each case, the cultural relevance of certain areas didn't fit neatly into legal frameworks, checked boxes and permit requirements.

“We’re trying to change that,” says Roberts, of the U.S. Department of Interior. Just like states and counties, some tribes are just better equipped to analyze and tackle and organize around environmental issues, he adds.

For the Coast Salish tribes in the Northwest, unifying across both state and international borders has propelled Native interests to the forefront of political and scientific decisions made on the Salish Sea, a network of waterways in northwestern Washington state and British Columbia. The tribal coalition has become central to efforts to save and spur salmon stocks.

“For years it was fragmented jurisdictions: departments of water, departments of land," says Emma Norman, chair of the science department and Native environmental science program at Northwest Indian College in Washington state. "By fragmenting, state and federal agencies were losing the bigger context.”

“When the Coast Salish tribes came together they brought out the relationship to land, to the family, to ancestors, your unborn, future generations.”

The power of tribal unification can also be seen in Utah right now, where 27 tribes—the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition—have banded together to propose the Bears Ears National Monument on land where Native artifacts are subject to looting and tribes still graze cattle and hunt. President Obama is expected to make a decision on the monument under the Antiquities Act—the first time tribes have invoked the presidential act—before he leaves office.

“That’s our grandmas, aunts and uncles in that ground”

On an unseasonably warm day in May back in Wisconsin, Guy Reiter is in constant motion—answering calls, setting up meetings, honking and waving to friends, then switching gears in an instant and pointing to the history tucked into the inconspicuous forests and rivers of the reservation.
“I just love this place, man,” he says, tugging on his Green Bay Packers hat. He pulls the truck off to stop at Spirit Rock, a rock so central to Menominee that legend says when the rock crumbles away, the Menominee tribe will disappear. Reiter offers tobacco at the rock and bows his head in silence.

Next he pulls the truck near Keshena Falls on the reservation. Out on the bridge, the water rolls and swirls below him.

This is where Menominee members would come in the spring for sturgeon, he says. “It was a big deal after a hard winter.” Before dams interrupted the flow, lake sturgeon would migrate to the falls to spawn in the spring, providing much-needed calories for Reiter’s ancestors.

The Menominee now celebrate annually with a powwow and sturgeon feast with fish provided by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Reiter’s ancestors traveled widely. Spirit Rock and the Keshena Falls are on the reservation, but the tribe also lived along the Menominee River, harvesting wild rice. And the mouth of the river, where it spills into Lake Michigan, 60 miles from the reservation border, is the center of tribe’s creation story.

The controversy sits near Stephenson, Michigan. Canada-based Aquila's proposed 83-acre open-pit mine—dubbed the Back Forty Project—would pull gold, zinc, copper and silver out of the ground along the Michigan-Wisconsin border. It would open a 750-foot-deep gash next to the Menominee River, the largest drainage system in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

The state of Michigan has met with and included the Menominee tribe as it reviewed Aquila's application, says Joe Maki, head of the mining division of Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality. But there’s a clear impasse. Tribal authorities say the state holds too much power and argue federal agencies’ ability to step in and protect tribal resources has been neutered through litigation.

“That’s our grandmas, aunts and uncles in that ground,” Reiter says.

The Menominee is a massive river system, making up the border between northern Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. More than 100 tributaries drain into it, a watershed covering 4,000 square miles. It supports large populations of bass, pike, walleye and spawning grounds for sturgeon.

Aquila has spent $70 million over the past decade figuring out a way to mine while protecting the environment. Water used at the mine and processing plant would be sent to a wastewater treatment plant then discharged to the river, or seeped into groundwater. Cliff Nelson, vice president of U.S. operations at Aquila, says they haven’t yet decided on what type of water treatment system but most of the water will be recycled and re-used. “The rest will be cleaner than rainwater before we’re allowed to discharge,” he says.
New tax revenue for the four-county area near the mine in a typical operation year is estimated at $20 million, according to a study by the University of Minnesota Duluth and commissioned by Aquila.

The same study estimates almost 250 new mine jobs, 1,330 construction jobs and royalties of more than $16.5 million. These jobs are far from the tribe, and would come from three counties in Michigan—Menominee (a different county from the tribe’s home in Wisconsin), Dickinson and Delta—and Marinette County, Wisconsin. All four counties are more than 94 percent white and all have unemployment rates between 5 and 6 percent—slightly above the national rate of 4.9 percent.

“People say there are not enough people here to fill all the jobs needed and they’re probably right,” Nelson says. “But our intention is to hire as many local people as possible.”

Aquila expects to pull 532,000 ounces of gold, 721 million pounds of zinc, 74 millions pounds of copper, 4.6 million ounces of silver and 21 million pounds of lead from the mine. The mine would have an estimated 8-year lifespan, Nelson says.

Alexandra Maxwell, executive director of the environmental nonprofit Save the Wild UP, says company documents hint at a longer lifespan, which would mean more time for potential pollution.

Nelson admits the total years for the life a mine could change if they find more resources. “Which would require getting more permits,” he says.

Maki, of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, says the agency’s goal is “a mine designed to close. We want them to make money but also leave behind a self sustaining environment,” he says. The current mine plan calls for about 23 years of Aquila cleanup, reclamation and monitoring after the eight-year life of the mine.

Maki and his team have the final say on state mines, and on Sept. 2 they said “yes.” While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reviews permits to check for air emissions and water discharge red flags, no other federal agencies have to sign off. Aquila needs a wetlands permit from the state and to sit out a two-month public comment period. The state has to make a decision by Dec. 1.

Preservation Act neutered

Tribes fighting for off-reservation resources largely rely on two federal laws—the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

Neither guarantee protection. Both force officials to consider impacts upon historic and cultural resources before granting developers, such as mining companies, permits and access to resources.
Tribes can apply through the EPA to take water quality standards into their own hands, and currently 53 tribes (the Menominee do not) enforce such water standards. But such regulatory power is limited to waters on the reservation.

The National Historic Preservation Act, designed to protect anything that could be eligible for the National Register, lost most of its teeth 13 years ago when the National Mining Association took exception to the feds interfering in state and local permitting issues and sued.

The mining association won in court at the United States Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C. The case homed in on language in what’s called Section 106 of the act, which allows the federal agency to review projects and nominate properties for national and tribal registers, offering protection from potentially destructive development.

In the court case, however, the circuit court found that mining is a state-regulated activity, not federally funded or licensed, so the Council can’t intervene.

Before the case, the Council could have gotten involved in cases such as the Menominee’s, says Charlene Dwin Vaughn, assistant director of the federal permitting, licensing and assistance section of the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation Council, which enforces the Historic Preservation Act protections. Now, once state rules are in place, they have no say.

“The rug has been pulled out from under us,” she says.

Litigation isn’t the only route for Natives, says Al Gedicks, a sociology professor at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse, who focuses on mining and Native American communities.

“Some of the most effective opposition comes from the public education and organizing process,” says Gedicks, who knows a thing or two about organizing. Gedicks has worked with Wisconsin tribes for decades protesting environmentally risky mining projects and advising them on holding on to land and resources guaranteed in treaties.

“Changing that public opinion and highlighting the injustice … we’re going to mobilize communities all the way downstream,” Gedicks says of the current mine fight.

There is a palpable change in the tribe as it gathers its voice against the mine, Reiter says. Speaking events, fliers, websites and new partnerships proliferate, but that’s only half the story: Tribal members have taken to days-long walks from the reservation to the Menominee River, tracing their ancestors' steps. They’ve re-seeded the river’s mouth with wild rice—Menominee is Algonkian for "People of the wild rice," and other tribes in the region said that when the Menominee appeared, wild rice followed. When they left, the rice passed.

The tribe has also reinstituted language programs at schools. The mine debate, Reiter says, has rekindled the tribe’s river roots.

It's a revival Reiter himself has lived. In rallying against the mine, he's learned from elders of the obligation to watch over the river.
“It’s pretty inspiring to see how those connections to the river are starting to come back,” Reiter says. “With this mine, if there is a good part, it’s making that connection again and speaking up for water, animals and trees.”

“We’re starting to get back in touch with our culture."

*Part 2 tomorrow: Mine fight rekindles Menominee river roots*


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**September 20, 2016**

Genesis Farm | Restoring Paradise: One Watershed at a Time

Kosmos: Journal for Global Transformation

**A Kosmos Interview with Sister Miriam MacGillis**

*Editor’s note: On September 3, 2016 I had the great honor of enjoying a day with Sister Miriam MacGillis and our mutual friend, social activist Judy Wicks, at Genesis Farm in northern New Jersey. Walking the land with two remarkable women, I had a pervasive sense of being in both a physical space and a metaphysical one. Over a lovely and simple lunch, sitting amid the trees behind Sister Miriam’s home, we discussed what it will take to restore our communion with the Earth. We continued this conversation via email. (R. Fabian)*

*...The whole thing is grace. Everything of the Universe—everything that has brought forth the carbon in my body, my body itself, the trees that are shining outside my window, the bees that are flying around collecting pollen—it’s all grace if we recognize it. It’s there for us.” – Sister Miriam MacGillis*

**Kosmos: How has the concept of Earth Literacy informed and inspired the mission of Genesis Farm?**

**Miriam MacGillis:** ‘Earth Literacy’ is a term often used by Thomas Berry. He would say that we are not literate in the language and meaning of the natural world, the planet Earth and the greater cosmos from which everything has emerged. Our literacy has been centered only on the last few thousand years of human history which has shaped our perceptions about our identity and purpose. Earth Literacy suggests a process of learning the bigger story out of which everything has come, which has only recently been enabled by the scientific instruments we created, expanding our ability to see, hear and explore aspects of the inner and outer processes of this evolving Universe.
Thomas Berry’s insights into the “bio-spiritual-psychic nature of the universe” from its beginnings over 13 billion years ago, provided a scientific confirmation of the total unity of the Universe, Earth, Life and human life. It called into question the fundamental principles on which western civilization had been developing over the last five thousand years, a worldview that assumed only humans possessed souls, spirit, psyches. This worldview relegated all other existence to mere physical matter and incorporated that thinking into our major western institutions which continue to selectively give rights to humans and no rights to what is not human. It explains why human fictions like corporations have more rights than rivers or seeds or mountains or eco-systems.

In the late 1980’s, a group of people were gathered by Dr. McGregor Smith of Miami-Dade College, to develop curricula around these ideas for colleges and universities. This group used the term Earth Literacy to describe this academic program and to underscore its implications across all disciplines. A paper by Thomas Berry titled *The American College in the Ecological Age*, was a seminal resource and later became a chapter in his book, *The Dream of the Earth*. It was revolutionary.

Genesis Farm was part of this group and by 1993 we were offering the first accredited graduate courses in Earth Literacy through St. Thomas University in Miami, Florida. This university, in collaboration with Miami-Dade College and the efforts of McGregor Smith, was pivotal in pioneering this work.

Thomas Berry’s work was central to the focus of the mission of Genesis Farm. I first heard him speak in 1977 while I was still on the staff of Global Education Associates. This organization founded by Gerald and Patricia Mische was also central to the focus of Genesis Farm, grounded as it was in the unity of the planet and the imperative of moving beyond the intense nationalism and militarism of the nation state system.

Thomas Berry also emphasized the needs for human societies to recognize that while Earth is a living unity with itself, Earth is also highly differentiated in the bio-regions which have taken shape over the five billion years of the planet’s existence. Because of all the complexities of its tectonic activity and its distance to Sun and Moon and other planets in the solar system, each region of Earth needs to be understood in its own evolutionary terms. Each region’s landforms, waters, climates and evolving communities of life are unique and highly vulnerable to the human societies which reside there, often without this prior understanding to temper the raw force of their technologies.

From our beginnings in 1980 until now, these ideas have inspired and totally challenged our small efforts to understand and share them.

**Kosmos: What do you mean by the term ‘resacralizing’ the land and water?**

**Miriam MacGillis:** The great American poet, Kentucky farmer and agrarian philosopher, Wendell Berry said “There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.”
The realization that the entire Earth and all its life communities are the primary revelation of the divine, is a mystery we are immersed in on these lands comprising Genesis Farm and in this bioregion. From this perspective, every place is fundamentally, inherently sacred. It is a fragment of the most sacred text out of which the divine or the Great Mystery can be encountered. To desecrate it is not only sacrilegious but is also blasphemous. Western cultures especially have not been able to understand that our abstract understandings of the divine need to be corrected to include what Thomas Berry would describe as ‘the primary revelation, the primary sacred text’, from which our different cultural texts were derived in the first place. Thus he challenged all the worlds’ religions to go back to their “origin stories” and without losing any of the wisdom they might contain, adjust them to the cosmological deficiencies they are now able to correct.

In the more recent years of growing ecological awareness, geologists, hydrologists, ecologists and others have been suggesting that the actual scale of a watershed is an appropriate scale to begin the restorative work necessary to correct the massive destruction, poisoning and habitat extinction that has accompanied the last century of industrialization.

For the last several years, through a very slow process of awareness and many, many conversations with people along the Musconetcong River Valley and watershed, we have been giving rise to the belief that at this scale we can contribute to the restoration and healing of our watershed both spiritually and physically. It will take mutually supporting collaboration to rid it of poisons related to its history in industrial chemical agriculture and manufacturing and weapons development.

Equally important, we sense it is absolutely essential that we acknowledge the violence done to the Lenape people who were the first peoples of this bioregion and watershed. Whatever our European ancestors and we have done here we have done on stolen lands. It is critical that this is acknowledged and that restitution be given in whatever ways are possible.

So too, the river and lands are violated. We create rituals of atonement to acknowledge this reality and to ask the spirits of the Lenape as well as the rivers and soils for guidance to address the alienation in our own minds and hearts. Hoping to join with multiple efforts of many groups and organizations involved in conservation and preservation work, we are planning to map a contemporary “way of pilgrimage”. A pilgrimage route through this water basin will provide an ancient experience of the archetypal journey into self-discovery and discovery of the sacredness of place. It will also open its vast geological story and its sacred legacy of life, abundance and beauty to be preserved at all cost.

Our attempt to restore the lands is through grass-roots organizing encouraging farmers and land owners to stop the flow of agricultural poisons and genetically-engineered crops from the soils of this river valley and to transition their farms into sources of affordable, healthy foods for all the people and animals of the watershed. One of our first projects is helping transition some farms into growing vital, chemical-free grains, restoring local mills, and encouraging bakers to provide bread from locally grown, safe and nutritious flours.

We believe the scale of most watersheds provides an attainable vision for resacralizing the desecrated places almost anywhere on this continent. We also believe it is essential that we heal
the alienation from the natural world in our own hearts and minds and work to recover from our own addictions to consumerism. The mantra Genesis Farm holds in its present form of mission is: “Restoring Paradise: one watershed at a time.”

Economic growth, progress, development, fossil fuel energy, massive corporatization and war making have become relentless and ferocious physical forces. These forces have become institutionalized and increasingly centralized. It is possible in this dire hour of destruction to correct the cosmological course of this alienation and to recover our fundamental embeddedness and dependency on the entire Earth as a single sacred community.

All photos | Rhonda Fabian

More About the Work at Genesis Farm

The new expanded edition of Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth

The first edition of this book (published in 2013) fostered the emergence of the “Spiritual Ecology Movement,” which recognizes the need for a spiritual response to our present ecological crisis. It drew an overwhelmingly positive response from readers, many of whom are asking the simple question, “What can I do?”

This second expanded edition offers new chapters, including two from younger authors who are putting the principles of spiritual ecology into action, working with their hands as well as their hearts. It also includes a new preface and revised chapter by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, that reference two major recent events: the publication of Pope Francis’s encyclical, “On Care for Our Common Home,” which brought into the mainstream the idea that “the ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual problem”; and the 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference, which saw representatives from nearly 200 countries come together to address global warming, including faith leaders from many traditions.

Bringing together voices from Buddhism, Sufism, Christianity, and Native American traditions, as well as from physics, deep psychology, and other environmental disciplines, this book calls on
us to reassess our underlying attitudes and beliefs about the Earth and wake up to our spiritual as well as physical responsibilities toward the planet.

**Contributors include:** Chief Oren Lyons, Thich Nhat Hanh, Sandra Ingerman, Joanna Macy, Sister Miriam MacGillis, Satish Kumar, Vandana Shiva, Fr. Richard Rohr, Bill Plotkin, Jules Cashford, Wendell Berry, Winona LaDuke, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Brian Swimme, and others.


This land we inhabit was given as a gift to my Congregation of Dominican Sisters. One of the first things we did was to put it into preservation so that it would be safe from development. So even if the Dominican Sisters were to lose this land, it’s deed-restricted and the state holds that conservation easement, that covenant. It can’t become a mall or a condo; it has to remain in farming and open space. If somebody gave you sacred texts to hold in your library, you would make sure they weren’t subject to being violated—so that’s an analogy.

Some twenty-plus years ago, we also dedicated a section of the land here to the wild, saying, “Humans are not permitted here.” It’s a sanctuary. It’s going to be left alone—we are not mature enough to go there. Let it be what it wants to be and it will reveal itself. And a hundred, two hundred years from now, who knows what will be there? The idea was to constrain our inquisitiveness and our need to control it, or even to know it.

And so these things seem simple. We’ve also marked the equinoxes and solstices for thirty years here. As humans who are part of this land, we honor our unity with all the community of life as we circle the Sun at a particular moment in time. Whether we are entering into the phase of springtime renewal or summer ripeness, autumn inwardness or winter pregnancy, we just keep doing it.

Because that is the true endowment we carry in the collective consciousness of our human species, and it’s written into the DNA of our bodies, even though we’re not usually aware of that. But it’s written into the DNA and memory of every single creature on this land. We carry that memory. We try to recover the memory of the whole inside ourselves—reconnect with that phenomenon. And it’s sacred in its nature. Totally, totally sacred.

And then we have a little garden where we plant old varieties of seeds that have never been hybridized. The planet’s seeds are in terrible danger, and we’re just a very, very small part of a global movement in great alarm over what is happening to seeds. Not only through hybridization—which has accelerated because all the tiny local seed companies have been bought by huge corporations—but far more alarming because more and more companies like Monsanto are buying up the seed stock of the planet and then manipulating them and patenting them and claiming ownership of them.

The engineering of seeds and animals and all of life is a basic violation of the DNA memory. It’s very real—it’s happening. Monsanto has patents on all kinds of seeds and has manipulated
government and government policies to give them the right to plant these seeds everywhere. Their pollen then moves out into the commons: the air, the water, the soil. The birds pick it up. The bees pick it up and transfer it unknowingly to the rest of the plants.

Our work is to help people understand the sacramental aspect of seeds, this primary revelation of the sacred in seeds. When you think of how many generations of plants have adapted to a place as members of an ecosystem over eons of time—before humans—and have creatively worked their way into that community of all beings and have both given themselves to it and been nourished by it—this is a primary sacred community. It’s the primary source of a region’s health, its sustainability, its ability to regenerate.


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**September 20, 2016**

Online courses awaken beginners to unfolding universe story

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

A set of online courses set to debut this week will offer students an introductory dive into cosmological thought and the epic story of the unfolding of the universe and life itself.

“Journey of the Universe: A Story for Our Times” is a course series created by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, both research scholars in Yale University’s School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and co-founders of its Forum on Religion and Ecology.

The three-class program explores the universe’s formation through a multidisciplinary lens, along with the evolutionary implications for humans and their ecological future. It builds off the worldview of Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry, with one of the classes dedicated to his life and insights.

Tucker and Grim, who will teach the courses, are both students of Berry. In Tucker's words, she and Grim, her husband, have “lived and breathed” elements of the “Journey” work for more than 30 years since they studied with Berry in graduate school.

In 1992 Berry co-authored *The Universe Story* with cosmologist Brian Swimme, but it’s a book Swimme wrote with Tucker a decade later, *Journey of the Universe*, that forms the backbone of the academic program bearing the same name. Along with the book, the classes draw on a 2011 film, also titled *Journey of the Universe*, and an educational DVD series, “Journey Conversations,” where Tucker interviews scientists, historians, environmentalists and artists.

The trio of courses, along with a capstone, are a type of MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). They are offered through Coursera.org, which partners with universities worldwide in an effort to make education more accessible. The courses, which are open to anyone, start Wednesday and
run through November; the six-week capstone project begins Nov. 2. Students can opt to enroll in any one of the courses on its own (at $79 per course) or enroll in the full program ($284). Portions of each course are also available to audit for free. The courses, however, do not earn university credit.

Two of the classes focus on the “Journey of the Universe,” with the first looking at the unfolding of life, and the second envisioning what our evolutionary journey could be today by weaving knowledge with activism. The third course examines Berry’s vision of the Earth community functioning as a living cosmology.

The “Journey” program, which is geared toward novices to cosmology, ties together recent scientific and evolutionary discoveries with history, philosophy, art and religion. The courses examines cosmic evolution as a creative process from the very beginnings of our universe 14 billion years ago. It envisions what role compassionate human beings, awaken to their integral role in the universe narrative, might hold “at this critical juncture in our planetary history.”

The Yale program dovetails with the ongoing Christian celebration of the Season of Creation, which began Sept. 1 with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and concludes on Oct. 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. That the season and the course intersect “is a marvelous synchronicity,” Tucker told NCR in an email.

“The Season of Creation is a further invitation to participate in the call of the papal encyclical toward an ecological conversion,” she said, responding from Germany where she was speaking at a Potsdam Institute conference looking at Laudato Si’ as a catalyst for social change.

The Yale program adds an expanded dimension to the Season of Creation by celebrating the wonder of who humans are -- direct descendants of the stars. As Swimme and Tucker wrote in their book, “The essence of the Universe story is this: The stars are our ancestors.”

Berry, a historian of world religions who recognized the environmental crisis early on, insisted that celebrating this “star truth” will save the world from environmental devastation. It is ultimately wonder and delight that will guide us, he reiterated many times throughout his life. In The Universe Story Berry and his student Swimme tell how a solitary molten spark, unleashed by a creative force 14 billion years ago, has unfolded over time from stars into butterflies, giraffes, roses, oceans, mountains and humans.

Understanding the lineage of a continuous cosmic history can have dramatic real-life impacts, as evidenced through several of the interviews Tucker conducted in “Journey Conversations” that are part of the online course.

Belvie Rooks, for example, is an educator who helped a group of disgruntled African American kids living in South Central Los Angeles place themselves in the context of star people. Caught up in the violence of neighborhood turf wars, they lacked an expanded sense of who they were, Rooks told Tucker.
To move them out of their hopelessness, Rooks created an interactive computer program where the youths could tell their own stories -- those of their immediate families and as far back as they could, including the history of slavery -- and then view their own histories against a timeframe of 14 billion years. They looked at images of the universe from the Hubble Telescope and the famous NASA “Blue Marble” photo of Earth, as well as pictures of mountains and oceans and forests throughout the world, moving them beyond the pollution and ugliness in their own neighborhoods.

The project inspired them to “re-invent” their surroundings by joining a community program sponsored by a local congresswoman to help restore a trash-strewn empty lot into a green space.

Franciscan Sr. Marya Grathwohl, director of Earth Hope in Dayton, Wyo., has taught *The Universe Story* to prison inmates for a number of years. In her interview with Tucker, Grathwohl relates the story of an extremely unrepentant burglar. Once he participated in the three-week program in which the class made their own art -- ”Beauty creates relationships,” she noted -- the man decided there might be a way to escape from his destructive lifestyle.

“It doesn't feel right to break into people's houses and steal their stuff when I'm so connected to everything and everybody,” he told Grathwohl.

As Bay Area hip-hop artist/environmental activist Drew Dellinger summed up in his interview with Tucker, immersing oneself in the universe story “brings us face to face with a sacred revelation not based on dogma. We awaken to the mystery of creativity. We realize that there is no such thing as a thing, and that everything has a 'within.””


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**September 22, 2016**

**Tribes Across North America Unite in 'Wall of Opposition' to Alberta Tar Sands**

More than 50 tribes signed on to the historic treaty alliance, banding together for the sake of their health and planet

By Lauren McCauley, staff writer

Common Dreams

In a historic show of unity, more than 50 First Nations across North America on Thursday signed a new [treaty alliance](#) against the expansion of [tar sands](#) mining and infrastructure in their territory.

Citing the threats to water and land through a spill or pipeline leak, as well the industry's undeniable impact on "catastrophic climate change," the [treaty](#) (pdf) states, "Tar Sands expansion is a collective threat to our Nations. It requires a collective response."
"Therefore," it continues, "our Nations hereby join together under the present treaty to officially prohibit and to agree to collectively challenge and resist the use of our respective territories and coasts in connection with the expansion of the production of the Alberta Tar Sands, including for the transport of such expanded production, whether by pipeline, rail or tanker."

Leaders gathered in Vancouver, which sits on Musqueam Territory, as well as on Mohawk Territory in Montreal for simultaneous ceremonies to cement the continent-wide agreement, which specifically unites the tribes in opposition to all five current tar sands pipeline and tanker project proposals—Kinder Morgan, Energy East, Line 3, Northern Gateway, and Keystone XL—as well as tar sands rail projects.

Canada's National Observer reported, "At the signing on Musqueam land in Vancouver, the lineup of chiefs waiting to put their names down filled up an entire room. It was a powerful ceremony, and participants clad in the regalia of their nations traveled from across [British Columbia] and northern Washington to be part of the growing movement."

"What this Treaty means is that from Quebec, we will work with our First Nation allies in B.C. to make sure that the Kinder Morgan pipeline does not pass and we will also work with our Tribal allies in Minnesota as they take on Enbridge's Line 3 expansion, and we know they'll help us do the same against Energy East," said Kanesatake Grand Chief Serge Simon.

As Carrier Sekani Tribal Chief Terry Teegee observed, "a pipeline cannot hope to pass through a unified wall of Indigenous opposition," nor can it find an alternate route around it.

"We are in a time of unprecedented unity amongst Indigenous people working together for a better future for everyone," added Rueben George of the Tsleil-Waututh Sacred Trust Initiative.

Indeed, the signing comes amid a historic display of strength and solidarity against the Dakota Access Pipeline, with thousands of representatives from more than 185 tribes across Canada and the U.S. joining the Standing Rock Sioux encampment in North Dakota.

The Treaty Alliance Against Tar Sands Expansion also comes the same day that a landmark report confirmed that tar sands mining in Alberta has poisoned the air and sickened local First Nations communities in that region.

"In this time of great challenge we know that other First Nations will sign on," said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, who signed the document, referring to the threat of climate change.

"Indigenous people have been standing up together everywhere in the face of new destructive fossil fuel projects, with no better example than at Standing Rock in North Dakota," he continued.

As the treaty itself states, the tradition of reaching across tribal borders follows generations of similar agreements.
"We have inhabited, protected, and governed our territories according to our respective laws and traditions since time immemorial," it reads. "Many such treaties between Indigenous Nations concern peace and friendship and the protection of Mother Earth. The expansion of the Alberta Tar Sands, a truly massive threat bearing down on all of the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and beyond, calls now for such a treaty."


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**September 22, 2016**

Archeologists denounce Dakota Access pipeline for destroying artifacts

Coalition of 1,200 archeologists, museum directors and historians say $3.8bn Dakota Access pipeline disturbs Native American artifacts in North Dakota

By Oliver Milman
The Guardian

Archeologists and museum directors have denounced the “destruction” of Native American artifacts during the construction of a contentious oil pipeline in North Dakota, as the affected tribe condemned the project in an address to the United Nations.

The $3.8bn Dakota Access pipeline, which will funnel oil from the Bakken oil fields in the Great Plains to Illinois, will run next to the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. The tribe has mounted a legal challenge to stop the project and claimed that several sacred sites were bulldozed by Energy Transfer, the company behind the pipeline, on 3 September.

A coalition of more than 1,200 archeologists, museum directors and historians from institutions including the Smithsonian and the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries has written to the Obama administration to criticize the bulldozing, which Energy Transfer claims did not disturb any artifacts.

The letter states that the construction work destroyed “ancient burial sites, places of prayer and other significant cultural artifacts sacred to the Lakota and Dakota people”.

It adds: “The destruction of these sacred sites adds yet another injury to the Lakota, Dakota and other Indigenous Peoples who bear the impacts of fossil fuel extraction and transportation. If constructed, this pipeline will continue to encourage oil consumption that causes climate change, all the while harming those populations who contributed little to this crisis.”

The Obama administration has halted construction of the 1,170-mile pipeline that occurs on federal land while it reassesses the initial decision by the Army Corps of Engineers to allow the project to proceed. The approval sparked furious protests at a camp near the North Dakota
construction site but Energy Transfer has vowed to push ahead after a federal judge sided with the company.

“What the Standing Rock Sioux are going through is just one example of a systemic and historical truth around how extractive and polluting infrastructure is forced upon Native communities,” said James Powell, former president and director of the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum.

“It is long past time for us to abandon fossil fuel projects that harm native communities and threaten the future of our planet.”

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe has taken its case to the UN, addressing the human rights commission in Geneva on Tuesday. Dave Archambault II, chairman of the tribe, said that Energy Transfer has shown “total disregard for our rights and our sacred sites”.

“Thousands have gathered peacefully in Standing Rock in solidarity against the pipeline,” Archambault told commission members. “And yet many water protectors have been threatened and even injured by the pipeline’s security officers. One child was bitten and injured by a guard dog. We stand in peace but have been met with violence.”

Archambault said the pipeline violates the UN’s declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and called on the UN to use its “influence and international platform” to help the tribe.

Energy Transfer did not respond to a request for comment. The company has previously denounced “threats and attacks” perpetrated upon its employees.


September 25, 2016

UN Experts to United States: Stop DAPL Now

"The tribe was denied access to information and excluded from consultations," says UN special rapporteur

By Andrea Germanos, staff writer
Common Dreams

Backing up the Standing Rock Sioux and its allies, a United Nations expert has called on the United States to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Echoing pipeline opponents' concerns, the statement from the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, cited the pipeline's threats to drinking water
and sacred sites. She also admonished the U.S. for failing to protect protesters' rights and failing to properly consult with communities affected by the fossil fuel infrastructure.

"The tribe was denied access to information and excluded from consultations at the planning stage of the project, and environmental assessments failed to disclose the presence and proximity of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation," Tauli-Corpuz stated Thursday—just two days after Standing Rock Chairman Dave Archambault II urged the UN Human Rights Council to help the tribe stop the pipeline.

Informed consent from those affected—and abiding by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—is essential, she said, "particularly in connection with extractive resource industries."

Responding to the crackdown on pipeline protesters, she said, "The U.S. authorities should fully protect and facilitate the right to freedom of peaceful assembly of indigenous peoples, which plays a key role in empowering their ability to claim other rights."

According to Tom Goldtooth, the director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, "The UN Expert got it right."

"What the U.S. calls consultation is not consultation but a statement telling people what they're doing after millions of dollars have been invested, painting Indigenous Peoples as spoilers. The right of free, prior, and informed consent begins prior to the planning process, not when their bulldozers are at your doorstep."

Tauli-Corpuz's statement was endorsed by seven other UN experts, including Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Léo Heller; Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, John H. Knox; and Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, Karima Bennoune.

The pipeline, slated to snake a 1,172-mile path across four states from the Bakken fields of North Dakota to a hub in Illinois, has faced months of building resistance.

Given the continued protests—and legal hurdles—"the way forward won't be simple" for the pipeline company, the Bismark Tribune reports this weekend.

And if it is ultimately halted, that'd be good news for pipeline opponents and proponents alike, according to Jacob Johns, a Spokane, Wash. resident and member of the An akimel O'Othm (Gile River Pima) and Hopi tribes.

"We're out there protesting on behalf of the people who were for the pipeline," he said to KXLY. "They don't realize we're out there fighting for each other, we are humanity trying to heal itself and save itself."

September 27, 2016

President Obama should listen to the indigenous people fighting the Dakota Access Pipeline

By Celeste Goox yadí Worl
Grist

Something historic is happening right now in North Dakota. At the camp in Standing Rock, more than 4,000 indigenous people from 280 tribes have come together, bringing totem poles, handmade canoes, and other sacred objects to commemorate the occasion.

The last time this many tribes gathered to protect their homeland and sacred sites was 140 years ago — in 1876 at the Battle of Little Bighorn, or Custer’s Last Stand, an armed conflict against colonialism.

Now, tribes are uniting in a peaceful, nonviolent collective prayer camp, making pilgrimage to support one of the most important causes of our time: fighting the Dakota Access Pipeline. That includes my own tribe, the Tlingit of Southeastern Alaska, who brought our war canoe. We are standing for our right to water, to keep fossil fuels in the ground, and — importantly — for the value of indigenous lives.

All of us have read in our history books about injustices against the Native American people. Genocide, broken treaties, stolen children sent to far-away boarding schools where they are abused if they speak their native tongue. The list is never-ending. And, as evidenced by violence against Native Americans trying to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline, still happening to this day. On Sept. 13, the government began mass arrests of indigenous people at the prayer camps, just days after oil-company security guards unleashed attack dogs on us.

When you grow up as an indigenous person, this history is intimately personal. And so it should be no surprise that we have a breaking point.

When the Standing Rock Sioux Nation first rose up against the Dakota Access Pipeline — a pipeline that not only threatens their water but our Earth itself — they struck a chord within all of us. In their prayer, in their protest, they moved indigenous people across the country to stand up.

Enough is enough. It is time to draw a line in the sand.

In 2014, President Obama visited the Standing Rock Sioux Nation Reservation. During his visit, he said, ”I know that throughout history, the United States often didn’t give the nation-to-nation relationship the respect that it deserved. So I promised when I ran, to be a president who’d change that — a president who honors our sacred trust, and who respects your sovereignty.”

Now, more than ever, we need him to fulfill this vow.
We won a small victory earlier this month, when the Obama administration requested that the company building the pipeline voluntarily pause all construction activity within 20 miles of Lake Oahe, near the Standing Rock reservation, and then a federal court officially ordered a halt to construction in the area. But this action is only temporary. The company might yet be allowed to proceed as planned, or it might build this section of the pipeline at another spot down the Missouri River, which would still put our water at risk. And building the pipeline anywhere puts our climate at risk.

President Obama, we urge you to forge a new path and leave behind the one walked by so many presidents before you — presidents who have broken treaties and discarded our families and our culture without a second thought. President Obama, don’t break your promise to us now.

Draw the line. This is bigger than one pipeline. This is about ongoing injustices Native Americans face across the country. This is about keeping fossil fuels in the ground and taking a stand on climate change.

We are in the midst of one of the most historically important indigenous unity events in history. For too long, many Americans have watched the ongoing injustices against Native Americans as if they are happening in a history book. But we are here, we are unified — and we are calling on you to join us.

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Celeste Goox yadí Worl is a member of the Women Donors Network. Born in Southeast Alaska, she is Alaska Native, Tlingit from the Thunderbird House. She lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

http://grist.org/justice/president-obama-should-listen-to-the-indigenous-people-fighting-the-dakota-access-pipeline/

September 27, 2016

From prairie to the White House: Inside a Tribe's quest to stop a pipeline

By Ernest Scheyder and Valerie Volcovici
Reuters

Three days after guard dogs attacked Native Americans protesting an oil pipeline project in North Dakota in early September, an unprecedented event took place at the White House.

Brian Cladoosby, president of the National Congress of American Indians, which represents more than 500 tribes, spoke to nearly a dozen of President Barack Obama's Cabinet-level advisers at a September 6 meeting of the White House's three-year-old Native American Affairs Council.
It was the first time a tribal leader addressed a session of the council, and Cladoosby was invited in his role as the Indian Congress' leader.

Cladoosby, a Swinomish Indian from Washington state, spoke twice at the one-hour roundtable. He told Reuters he praised the Obama administration in his opening statement for its track record on Native American issues such as pushing to reform the Indian Health Service.

But when Cladoosby gave his closing speech, he delivered an impassioned request to his audience: stand with Native Americans who have united with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and block construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, a 1,100 mile conduit to get oil from North Dakota to Illinois.

That plea marked one of the previously unreported turning points in a drama that played out since February and culminated September 9 with an about face by the U.S. government, from giving the pipeline a green light to backing a request from North Dakota's Standing Rock Sioux to halt construction of the pipeline.

The tribe fears sacred sites could be destroyed during the line's construction and that a future oil spill would pollute its drinking water.

This month's win for the tribe, which could be reversed by regulators, is a rare instance of protests resulting in quick federal action and the triumph of an unusual alliance between environmentalists and Native Americans, who both say they were emboldened by the defeat of the Keystone XL pipeline last fall.

It also was the most galvanizing movement in Native American politics in decades, some tribal leaders said, as Crow, Navajo, Sioux and other traditional rivals united to fight what they considered an assault on their way of life.

Cladoosby did not play a high-profile role in the early days of the pipeline controversy. But that day he spoke to a high echelon of power, including Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, White House Domestic Policy Council director Cecilia Munoz, and the heads of the Departments of Energy; Agriculture; Education; Health and Human Services; and the Environmental Protection Agency, according to a senior administration official who asked not to be named and to a photo of attendees seen by Reuters.

"The world is watching," he said in prepared remarks shared with Reuters.

A few days earlier, video of pipeline security personnel in North Dakota armed with guard dogs and mace trying to disperse protesters went viral on social media.

One of the first videos was taken and posted on Facebook by Lonnie Favel, a member of Utah's Ute tribe who traveled to North Dakota to support the protests.

"I was getting messages of support from New Zealand, from Europe, from all over the world," Favel said.
Until then, Obama had not weighed in on the Dakota dispute even though he personally had visited the Standing Rock in June 2014.

Just a day after Cladoosby issued his plea to administration officials, Obama attended a young leaders conference in Laos where a Malaysian woman asked him about the Dakota Access pipeline and how he could ensure a clean water supply and protect ancestral land.

Obama said he needed to ask his staff for more information, but touted his track record protecting Native Americans' "ancestral lands, sacred sites, waters and hunting grounds," adding, "this is something that I hope will continue as we go forward."

A FATEFUL DECISION

In late 2014, pipeline operator Energy Transfer Partners made a fateful decision.

Dallas-based ETP chose to route its proposed Dakota Access pipeline away from North Dakota's capital, Bismarck, and southward within half a mile of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's reservation.

Part of its rationale, laid out in a report for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which regulates infrastructure projects that traverse certain inland waterways, was that the route would avoid Bismarck and thus pose no threat to the city's water supply. The Bismarck route also is more populated and thus would require more easements from multiple landowners. Ironically, that 139-page report concluded the Standing Rock route would raise "no environmental justice issues" because the pipeline would not cross tribal lands.

The Army Corps' decision angered environmental activists and unwittingly introduced a powerful new element into the environmental movement: Indian rights groups, who quickly tapped into an extensive network of green activists forged during five long years of protests against TransCanada's Keystone XL pipeline, which Obama formally nixed last November.

CAMPAIGN GAINS STEAM

The protest gained steam in February when Standing Rock Sioux leaders asked for legal help from Earthjustice, an environmental law group that had previously helped U.S. tribes and Canadian First Nations fight Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline, according to Jan Hasselman, an attorney from Earthjustice working on the North Dakota case, and tribal leaders.

Two months later, about 18 tribe members started praying daily near the pipeline's planned route in North Dakota. The participants would grow in size, creating a group called the Sacred Stone Camp.

The international environmental movement soon took notice, including, 350.org, an environmentalist group that helped defeat the Keystone XL pipeline. In July, the group sent a delegation to the Sacred Stone Camp to see how they could help.
In many ways, the Dakota Access pipeline drew its inspiration from the fight to stop the Keystone XL pipeline, according to organizers from 350 and other environmental groups.

"We didn't have to totally reinvent the wheel," said Josh Nelson of Credo, a progressive advocacy group.

By then the Sacred Stone Camp, located alongside the confluence of the Cannon Ball and Missouri rivers about an hour south of Bismarck, had swollen in size to thousands, forming a de facto town of tents, teepees and trailers, a school, medic, communal kitchen, horse corrals and a legal clinic.

The tribal members and environmentalists agreed to seize on the U.S. Army Corps' "fast-tracking" of permits for the pipeline in late July, which they argued was illegal and a violation of tribal rights, 350.org told Reuters. In this case, the Corps had the right to approve pipelines in general and consider specific local concerns, such as Native issues, if appropriate. The Corps said it effectively considered its due diligence requirement met when it green lit the line in July.

Later that same month, the tribe filed suit against the Army Corps in federal court.

INTERNAL RIFT

While the government's reversal in September caught most by surprise, a March 29 letter from the Department of the Interior to the Army Corps reviewed by Reuters shows that disagreements within the administration had been percolating for months.

The Interior department, which is responsible for protecting Native Americans' welfare, said the Army Corps "did not adequately justify or otherwise support its conclusion that there would be no significant impacts upon the surrounding environment and community" from the pipeline.

Energy Transfer, the Department of Justice, the Army Corps and the Department of the Interior did not respond to requests for comment.

The letter presaged the intra-government fighting ahead of the White House's decision to temporarily block the line.

The federal delay of the pipeline "isn't something that just fell out of the sky," Archambault, the tribe's chairman, said in an interview. "We feed (federal regulators) information all the time on everything that's illegal here."

Archambault declined to discuss responses from federal regulators he received.

On September 9, just three days after Cladoosby made his plea at the White House, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg rejected a request from the tribe to block the $3.7 billion project.

Minutes after that ruling, the Interior and Justice Departments, along with the Army Corps, suspended construction on a two-mile stretch of federal land below the Missouri River.
White House spokesman Josh Earnest said federal regulators, who could still ultimately approve the project, called the pause to make sure the concerns of all parties were taken into account. James Gette, a senior official in the environment and natural resources division of the DOJ, noted in a September 16 hearing that construction was halted mainly because the Dakota Access pipeline didn't have an easement for the area where the tribe gets its drinking water.

Protesters have vowed not to leave their camp until the pipeline is scrapped or moved far away from their reservation. Their concerns about potential spills, it turns out, have precedent.

An analysis of government data by Reuters shows that Sunoco Logistics, the future operator of the pipeline and a unit of ETP, has had the highest rate of spills since 2010 than any of its competitors. Sunoco told Reuters it has taken measures to reduce its spill rate.

Cladoosby admits he "was really surprised" by the fast moving events after his strategically-timed entreaty.

He will be back at the White House on Monday and Tuesday. Leaders of 567 native American tribes will meet with Obama in Washington to tackle a range of issues facing Native Americans from economic development to environmental protection - including the Dakota Access pipeline.

(Additional reporting by Mica Rosenberg, Ruthy Munoz, Julia Harte and Timothy Gardner; Writing By Terry Wade and Ernest Scheyder; editing by Eric Effron and Edward Tobin)


September 29, 2016

N.D. militarized police push back Water Protectors with armored vehicles, tear gas and rifles

By Navajo
Daily Kos

Regardless of where our Water Protectors travel in North Dakota to conduct a peaceful prayer event against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline that threatens the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s drinking water, you would think that they wouldn’t be met with armored vehicles and assault rifles. But they were.

Ever since North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple declared a state of emergency and activated the National Guard to protect the pipeline, our Water Protectors don’t know what they’ll face. They have been pushed back by private security guards armed with attack dogs and pepper spray. Some were bitten and sprayed as a newly reported ancestral burial site was deliberately bulldozed to destroy evidence.

Wednesday, September 28, the Water Protectors’ caravan was met with armored vehicles, helicopters dropping tear gas and police armed with military-style rifles.
Video shows that as the resisters are confronted, the militarized force starts locking and loading their weapons. Our people immediately raise their hands in unison and yell that they are not armed, that they are praying! The arrests begin, tear gas goes off and one videographer flees to get his footage out. Twenty-one are arrested.

Thomas H. Joseph II’s video account is below the fold.

Alternative media outlet Unicorn Riot also has footage of the menacing confrontation.

BOHICA has more discussion here: 9/28/16 Standing Rock - Riot Gear, Tear Gas, MRAP about how our government gives law enforcement surplus military vehicles.

BACKGROUND

April 2016:

Tribal members began protesting the 1,172-mile, four-state, Dakota Access Pipeline construction by setting up camp along the banks of Lake Oahe in North Dakota.

August 2016:

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe filed suit in federal district court in Washington, D.C., against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is the primary federal agency that granted permits needed for construction of the pipeline. Background here—Sacred tribal sites still in danger from DAPL by Earthquake Weather

September 2016:

The small Sacred Stone Camp grows supporters there by the thousands with 280 tribes represented.

National attention grows from the next two events.

— The Dakota Access Pipeline guards unleash attack dogs on our American Indian water protectors by navajo (23,515 Facebook shares)

— North Dakota activates National Guard to protect the pipeline instead of our tribes by navajo (40,061 Facebook shares)

— The Vicious Dogs of Manifest Destiny Resurface in North Dakota by Jacqueline Keeler

— North Dakota v. Amy Goodman: Arrest Warrant Issued After Pipeline Coverage

Federal court denies the Standing Rock Tribe’s request for injunction. However, a joint statement from the Department of Justice, the Department of the Army, and the Department of the Interior asked for construction to voluntarily be ceased on federally controlled lands.
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s request to stop Dakota Access Pipeline denied, Dept. of Justice steps in by navajo

Partial Victory for Standing Rock Sioux by EarthquakeWeather

Sacred Stone Camp is feeling this: Erased By False Victory: Obama Hasn’t Stopped DAPL

A detailed analysis provided by attorney Robin Martinez—who is coordinating legal advice and representation for protesters at the North Dakota camps: What You May Not Know About the Dakota Access Pipeline

Sept. 13 — 22 Water Protectors are arrested and jailed without bond after locking themselves to construction machinery.

North Dakota’s Governor Declared a State of Emergency to Deal With Peaceful Oil Pipeline Protesters. We Call It a State of Emergency for Civil Rights by Jennifer Cook, Policy Director, ACLU of North Dakota

Sept. 14 — Morton County Sheriff pursues felony charges on those arrested. Twenty-three people and their charges are named. As of 9/14 a total of 69 individuals have been arrested for illegal protest activities.

Judge drops injunction against tribal leaders allowing them to protest lawfully

Cherokee give $50,000 to oppose North Dakota pipeline

Sept. 16 — U.S. Army Corps of Engineers grants Special Use Permit to Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to use Federal lands managed by the Corps near Lake Oahe for gathering to engage in a lawful free speech demonstration.

Appeals court halts Dakota Access Pipeline work pending hearing that will give the court more time to consider the tribes' request for an injunction.

Sept. 20 — Standing Rock Sioux Chairman asks the United Nations for protection of the tribe’s sovereign rights by navajo

Sept. 23 — 1,200 archeologists denounce desecration of Standing Rock burial grounds by DAPL, UN agrees by navajo

Sept. 26 — N.D. pipeline activism sparks White House to plan consultations with Native tribes on infrastructure by Meteor Blades

Earthjustice’s FAQ on Standing Rock Litigation on the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s lawsuit.

YOU can help:
September 29, 2016

Standing Firm at Standing Rock: Why the Struggle is Bigger Than One Pipeline

By Sarah Anderson
Nation of Change

The first sign that not everything is normal as you drive down Highway 1806 toward the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota is a checkpoint manned by camouflage-clad National Guard troops. The inspection on Sept. 13 was perfunctory; they simply asked if we knew “what was going on down the road” and then waved us through, even though the car we rode in had “#NoDAPL” chalked on its rear windshield.

“What is going on down the road” is a massive camp-in led by the Standing Rock nation, aimed at blocking the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (the DAPL in question), which would carry oil from the Bakken shale in North Dakota across several states and under the Missouri River. What began with a small beachhead last April on the banks of the Cannonball River on land belonging to LaDonna Brave Bull Allard has expanded to both banks of the river and up the road, to multiple camps that have housed as many as 7,000 people from all over the world. Because of them, first the Obama administration and then a federal court stepped in to temporarily halt construction of the pipeline near the campsite. Still, the people of Standing Rock and their thousands of supporters aren’t declaring victory and folding their tents just yet.

The legal struggles for a permanent shutdown of the pipeline construction continue: the people of Standing Rock have filed a lawsuit to halt construction, as has one of the South Dakota Native American nations and landowners in Iowa as well. As the lawsuits proceed, other members of the camp have been involved in nonviolent direct actions, locking their arms around construction machinery to prevent digging. Dozens have been arrested as part of those actions, including 22 people on Sept. 12, the day I arrived at the camp. That was days after the Obama administration’s call for a temporary halt to construction on the pipeline, and a stark reminder that the struggle was not over.

In addition to the legal battles and the direct actions, though, the people of the Oceti Sakowin and Sacred Stone camps were preparing for another challenge: a North Dakota winter. Already at night, the temperature drops to 40 degrees Fahrenheit; deliveries of blankets and warm clothing were constant, as was the chopping of wood for fires and discussion of what kinds of structures would allow the camps to stay in place through the bitter cold months ahead.
“We’re already winterizing in all aspects of the camp, young people working with the elders to find, whether it’s longhouses, whether it’s yurts, whether it’s any kind of structures that would keep us warm for the winter,” said Lay Ha, who traveled to North Dakota from the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming in late August and became part of the camp’s youth council.

They’re staying partly out of suspicion: A temporary halt is, of course, just temporary. “As far as I can see, it’s just another way to lull us to sleep, make us go to sleep so we leave and then they’ll start again,” said Ista Hmi, an elder from Wanblee, South Dakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation and a member of the Seven Council Fires. “The Missouri [River] here, it was poisoned already from the pesticides and all that but we were still able to clean it,” he said. “But those are just topical compared to this oil. The oil, if it gets in here, it will start destroying the ecosystem underneath; it’ll be dead water.”

“We’re protecting the water, we’re not protesters,” explained Lay Ha. To him, as to many others in the camp, that the action is led by Native people, that it is built around their belief in nonviolence and in the spirit of prayer, is vital. It is, to them, much more than a protest.

Ha is Arapaho and Lakota on his father’s side and Eastern Shoshone on his mother’s; he is part of what has become the largest coming together of Native people in, many said, more than 100 years. The flags that flap overhead represent something more than a fight for clean water — they are a powerful statement of solidarity, a declaration of common interest.

The first camp you pass once through the checkpoint is a small one on the side of the road overlooking the construction site. Further along, signs, flags and banners hang from the barbed-wire fence along the road. A massive banner declares “No DAPL!” Spray-painted on a concrete barrier are the words “Children Don’t Drink Oil.” Then emerges the breathtaking sight of what is now called the Oceti Sakowin camp: Flags from well over 200 Native nations and international supporters line the driveway into the camp, flapping in the high plains wind. People ride through the camp on horseback. At the entrance, when you drive in, you are greeted by security and a man with burning sage to smudge your car. Just beyond, at the main fire, a microphone is set up for speakers and performers: When we arrived, Joan Baez sat by the fire, singing “Blowin’ in the Wind.”

Kandi Mossett of the Indigenous Environmental Network was wearing a “No Fracking” T-shirt when I met her at the media tent, doing an interview alongside a delegation from Ecuador of indigenous people who have also fought the oil companies there. She is from northwestern North Dakota, the Fort Berthold reservation, and the oil that would travel through the Dakota Access Pipeline is extracted from her community. She came to Standing Rock for the formation of the original camp, known as the Sacred Stone camp, on LaDonna Allard’s land. At first, she remembered, the camp had anywhere from five to 30 people. Then, when Energy Transfer Partners, the company behind the pipeline, put out notification that it was going to begin construction, the camp swelled to 200, then 700. It spilled over the river, into what was at first simply called the overflow camp. But as that camp grew, the campers began to feel it deserved its own name. Oceti Sakowin is the name for the Seven Council Fires, the political structure of
what is known as the Great Sioux Nation. “We had for the first time in 200 years or more, the Seven Council Fires of the Great Sioux Nation coming together in one place to meet again,” Mossett said.

Faith Spotted Eagle is also part of the Seven Council Fires, from the Ihanktonwan or Yankton band. She too was there on what she remembered as a wintry, blowing day in April when the Sacred Stone camp first opened. An elder and grandmother, she had also been part of the successful fight against the Keystone XL Pipeline, and pointed out that the networks activated by that fight were coming together again in North Dakota. In 2013, she said, a dream of her grandmother sent her to look at the 1863 treaty between her people and the Pawnee. On the 150th anniversary of that treaty, Jan. 25, 2013, those nations, along with the Oglala and Ponca, signed the International Treaty to Protect the Sacred from Tar Sands Projects. “In that treaty, we declared that forevemore we would be allies to stop this extractive move to destroy Mother Earth from the Boreal forest down to the Gulf,” she said. Since that time, other nations have joined, and the treaty was renewed with prayers and a donation to the Sacred Stone camp.

“A lot of those networks, it took years for them to come together. Standing Rock will do the same thing for the next one. It is a progressive healing and learning,” Spotted Eagle continued. In the unlikely alliances that came together, from the Keystone XL fight to Standing Rock, with farmers and landowners joining their actions, she noted, “That was where the power was.”

To Dave Archambault II, the tribal chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux, the struggle — and the response from indigenous people — is global. He greeted reporters Sept. 14 alongside the delegation from Ecuador. “We all have similar struggles, where this dependency this world has on fossil fuels is affecting and damaging Mother Earth,” he said. “It is the indigenous peoples who are standing up with that spirit, that awakening of that spirit and saying, ‘It is time to protect what is precious to us.’” Nina Gualinga, one of the Ecuadorian visitors, noted, “The world needs indigenous people. The statistics say that we are 4 percent of the world’s population, but we are protecting more than 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity.”

In an age where courts have deemed corporate entities “persons” with legal rights, Spotted Eagle sees a certain symmetry in the encampment’s philosophy: “The corporations have become individuals, the privatization has given them rights of individuals to just go out and wreak havoc,” she said. “Well, the river has a right and that right is being infringed upon.”

So do the people who live around it, she argues. “We are above all challenging the lack of consultation, of course, and the free prior and informed consent. Then, just our cultural freedom. We would never put a native pipeline underneath Arlington Cemetery,” Spotted Eagle added. But, she noted wryly, “It’s always a risk when you go into the courts. These courts are the courts of the conqueror.”

Winter will be hard, Spotted Eagle concedes. She said she hopes “the outside world will help” with donations. But, she added: “The ones that will stay are really going to have to bear down and address their cooperation even deeper, because if you go wandering off by yourself, you can perish, literally, up here.”
That outside support from individuals and environmental groups, she said, should respect the leadership of the Native people.” The message to the big greens is, stand by us, don’t co-opt us. And sometimes, they have to stand behind us, because 4,000, 7,000 Indians is a lot of Indians.”

Some of the campers were planning trips back and forth, while others were committed to staying. The nature of the camp has been to swell and shrink; on the weekends, Kandi Mossett said, it grows exponentially. The estimate of 7,000 at one time does not count all the people who have passed through briefly, bringing messages of solidarity from places like Charlotte, North Carolina and Flint, Michigan. “I have people calling me, emailing me every day: ‘I am going to be able to come out in two weeks, are you still going to be there?’” Mossett said. “I say, ‘Of course.’”

For those who can’t make it to the camp, Mossett noted, there are other ways that supporters have held actions in solidarity with the camps. “We are targeting the financers of this project: the banks,” she said.

There are petitions, Facebook pages for the Sacred Stone and Red Warrior camps, and a call for Barack Obama to visit the camp. “We will welcome you, we will greet you, we will feed you, we will put up a tepee for you,” Mossett said.

The long-term strategy, she said, is similar to that of the Keystone XL project. “They told us ‘You are crazy. It is a done deal.’ They told us that about the Keystone XL and they are telling us that now about Dakota Access, that it is a done deal. We respectfully disagree.” If the permit is granted, she said, they will continue to hold the space, to risk arrest, to halt construction. “Companies and shareholders, they only have so much patience and they are losing money,” she noted. “That is the bottom line: money. The more we can delay them, the more we can stall them, the more we know we are winning.”

The sentiments of Mossett and Spotted Eagle underscore what is perhaps most significant about the camps along the Cannonball River: What is happening here is something more than just a fight to stop a pipeline.

The word I heard over and over again from the people I interviewed was “decolonize.”

In the speak-outs and prayer circles, speaker after speaker, from the Pacific Northwest and from the Amazon, from New York to Arizona recalled the historic violence committed against Native American people not far from where the camp stood. Many recalled the Battle of the Greasy Grass, what is taught to schoolchildren as the Battle of Little Bighorn, which LaDonna Allard wrote was the last time the Oceti Sakowin came together. But for her and others, the massacres at Wounded Knee and Whitestone were closer to mind. It was the anniversary of the Whitestone massacre, where 250 women and children were killed by the US military, when private security guards turned dogs on the protesters at Standing Rock. It was Faith Spotted Eagle’s people, the Ihanktonwana, along with the Hunkpapa, that were killed there, and the use of police and security against peaceful protesters brought up those memories.
The echoes of historic struggles were everywhere, and to Spotted Eagle, they were reminders that the fight for the water is just a part of the fight for an entire way of life that was nearly crushed. She was raised speaking Dakota, and counted herself lucky to have her language and the worldview that came with it. The grass-roots organizing that brought together the camp, she said, was helping the Standing Rock people and other tribal governments to look past the structures imposed on them by the process of colonization. “If we don’t stop and every single day examine how I have become like the colonizer, I asked my daughter, ‘What is going to happen someday if we lose our songs, if we lose our language and we no longer think like Natives?’ She said, ‘Then the colonization process is complete.’”

In the camp, they experimented with bringing back the long-ago structure of the Oceti Sakowin. “The second part of that struggle is to wade through the colonialism that has happened between then and now and to figure out, ‘What can we bring back with some modifications that will work for the people?’” she said. “There have been a lot of attempts to revive the Oceti Sakowin, but it hasn’t happened because we didn’t have a common focus.”

The common struggle has in turn opened up a space for different people to come together and share their songs and dances, their prophecies and histories. The lack of good cell phone service, Lay Ha noted, forces people to be more present. “It just brings you back to the old days where you hear the language, you hear our culture, you get to see youth riding on horseback and it’s really a change, it’s really decolonizing ourselves.”

“We are at the right point in time,” Spotted Eagle agreed. “We are free at this space in time.”

Walking around the camp, you pass singing circles and the kitchen — Tuesday night the menu was moose, brought all the way from Maine by a visitor to the camp. A nurse from the medic tent made rounds, making sure that people knew that at night, the Standing Rock ambulance parked on the grounds would leave but the medics would be on duty. Young children played volleyball and posed for photographs, finished from their day at school — a fully recognized school that teaches both the core curriculum so children at the camp won’t fall behind their schools at home, and also teaches songs and dances, languages and history, about the treaties and the fight for the water.

At night, campfires burned and tepees glowed, lit from within, as the open mic for speak-outs gave way to singing and dancing.

“We have had a few growing pains, but that is to be expected when you go from 30 people to 1,000 people in two or three days,” Mossett said. “There are a lot of logistics behind the scenes, things that people don’t see. Where are people going to go to the bathroom? Bringing in porta potties. Waste disposal. It was a really beautiful thing to see the community step up on our own and say, ‘Did you forget we are sovereign nations? We are going to do this and make it happen.’”

The coming together of the nations was something Mossett wanted for as long as she could remember, and that more than anything helped her envision a victory, not just against the Dakota Access Pipeline, not just against the whole extractive industry but for something much bigger.
"This pipeline would have already been built if we hadn’t come out here, taken back the power for ourselves and said, ‘Hey, nobody is going to help us or protect us except for us,’” Mossett said. “I think it was the nonviolent direct actions. In fact, I know that it was the nonviolent direct actions that got us to this point.”

*See photos of the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline here:*


**September 29, 2016**

Military-Style Raid Ends Native Prayer Against Dakota Pipeline

Telesur

**Up to 21 people were arrested during a peaceful prayer service.**

North Dakota police with military-style equipment surrounded Native Americans gathered in prayer against the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline on Wednesday, disrupting their plan to cross sacred and treaty-protected land in protest of a project they fear will destroy their livelihood.

“ND authorities deploy armed personnel with shotguns and assault rifles, military vehicles, and aerial spray on peaceful Water Protectors gathered in prayer,” wrote the Sacred Stone Camp, in a Facebook post.

Officers with military-style armored vehicles and shotguns threatened the protesters, who call themselves “water protectors” for defending the Missouri River from imminent pollution, reported Unicorn Riot. Up to 21 were arrested, the channel reported.

Witnesses filmed the crackdown but said their access their Facebook was blocked. One participant, Thomas H. Joseph II, posted a chilling video narrating the mobilization and his getaway. Helicopters are heard as he says that tear gas is being dropped, and an officer loads his gun as protesters, some on horseback, chant, "We have no guns."

In the video, Joseph said that “one guy’s about ready to blast us” but later added that no fires were shot.

“We gathered in prayer un-armed, prayed, sang songs, and attempted to leave,” he later wrote in a Facebook post. "No threats, No vandalism, No violence was taken on our part.”

Police and *private security* personnel have been more aggressively cracking down on actions against the pipeline since the governor declared a state of emergency. The state is currently investigating an incident in which contracted private security film Frost Kennels *unleashed dogs*
during a nonviolent direct action, ending with six bitten, including a pregnant woman and a child, according to organizers at the action.

Alternative media outlet Unicorn Riot previously accused Facebook of censoring its livestream of police repression, saying they received a popup security alert when they tried to post the video.

“We will not let them stop our mission to amplify the voices of people who might otherwise go unheard, and broadcast the stories that might otherwise go untold,” they told RT.

The pipeline, expected to transport over half a million barrels of oil a day through four states, has united over 300 tribes in resistance. Several lawsuits are pending against the company, which has retaliated with restraining orders. The White House halted construction on federal land, which makes up three percent of the pipeline’s path, but has not issued any other statement against the pipeline—motivating Facebook users to demand a response after Wednesday’s crackdown.

President Barack Obama met with tribal representatives on Monday but only made an indirect reference to the historic native gathering: “I know that many of you have come together across tribes and across the country to support the community at Standing Rock,” he said. “And together, you’re making your voices heard.”


September 30, 2016

The growing indigenous spiritual movement that could save the planet

By Jack Jenkins
ThinkProgress

When Pua Case landed in North Dakota to join the ongoing Standing Rock protests in September, she, like thousands of other participants, had come to defend the land.

Masses of indigenous people and their allies descended on camps along Cannonball River this year to decry the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, a series of 30-inch diameter underground pipes that, if built, would stretch 1,172 miles and carry half a million barrels of crude oil per day—right through lands Native groups call sacred.

“We are not here to be anything but peaceful, but we are here,” Case told ThinkProgress, describing the moment she linked arms with fellow demonstrators and stared down rows of police in Bismarck. “We will stand here in our tribal names in respect and honor.”

But while media attention has focused on the massive, sometimes heated demonstrations—which include several alleged instances of brutality and dog attacks—there has been less attention paid
to how the protest is recharging the lager climate movement, not to mention the peculiar nature of the participants. Case, for instance, traveled quite a long way to the Peace Garden State: she is from the sunny shores of Hawaii, not rugged North Dakota, and she claims a Native Hawaiian identity, not a Native American one. And she wasn’t there just to protest; the sacredness of the land is especially important to her, so she was also there to pray.

“Standing Rock is a prayer camp,” she said. “It is where prayers are done.”

Case’s experience is shockingly common—both as a protester visiting a far-flung land to support a Native cause, and as a witness to an emerging indigenous spiritual movement that is sweeping North America.

She’s part of something bigger that is, by all accounts, the theological opposite of the aggressively Christian “awakenings” that once dominated American life in the 18th and 19th centuries, when primarily white, firebrand ministers preached a gospel of “manifest destiny”—the religious framework later used to justify the subjugation of Native Americans and their territories. The diverse constellation of Native theologies articulated at Standing Rock and other indigenous protest camps champions the reverse: they seek to protect land, water, and other natural resources from further human development, precisely because they are deemed sacred by indigenous people.

And this year, after centuries of struggle, their prayers are starting to be answered.

The size and intensity of the Standing Rock protest caught many observers off guard—the media included. Beginning with just a few tents sprinkled across a barren field earlier this year, protesters now say nearly 10,000 people have visited the thriving camps, with guests hailing from as many as 300 different indigenous tribes.

“Seeing all the tribes come out was just incredible,” Caro “Guarding Red Tarantula Woman” Gonzales, a 26-year-old Standing Rock protester and founding member of the International Indigenous Youth Council, told ThinkProgress. “We can do that for every single indigenous fight.”

Expressions of solidarity between indigenous groups may sound predictable, but the history of Native American activism is pockmarked with internal squabbles. Early attempts to unify indigenous causes in the United States, such as the creation of the American Indian Movement in the 1960s, have since been marred by controversy and factionalism. Native Hawaiians once avoided connections between their cause and that of Native Americans, lest they suffer the same humiliating defeats as those in the continental United States. And while flashes of unified activism persisted throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, indigenous communities in North America often struggled to win major victories—legal, cultural, or otherwise.

But all that changed in December 2012, when four women in Western Canada—three First Nations women and one non-Native ally—held a teach-in to protest legislation they said would weaken environmental laws that protect lands Natives hold sacred.
The activists entitled their demonstration “Idle No More,” and the movement exploded on social media; within days, flash mobs performing traditional spiritual dances sprung up in city centers and shopping malls across the country. Taking cues from Occupy Wall Street’s organic structure, a series of marches, rallies, and direct-action peaceful protests that blocked highways and railways quickly followed, making headlines in Canada and abroad.

Idle No More’s success set off a firestorm of solidarity protests among indigenous groups in the United States, who in turn used the energy to draw attention to their own local fights—virtually all which involved some sort of spiritual claim. In Hawaii, protesters inculcated the same tactics—and sometimes even the same slogans—into an ongoing effort to halt the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) atop Mauna Kea, a volcano Native Hawaiians consider sacred. In Arizona, members of the Apache nation began occupying an area known as Oak Flat, vowing to fend off the proposed development of a copper mine on land they call holy. And when environmentalists pushed back against the creation of the Keystone XL pipeline, organizations such as the Cowboy and Indian Alliance bolstered the existing climate change movement with Native activists in both Canada and the United States.

“As Idle No More raised our consciousness,” Gonzales, who is of the Chemehuevi nation, said. “When people are chaining themselves to bulldozers, that is prayer.”

Meanwhile, something new happened: social media allowed indigenous people across the country to show support for their fellow activists with a few simple clicks, adding hashtags and memes to their own Facebook and Twitter profiles. The digital connections helped elevate their respective causes, but also forged real-world relationships between activists in different tribes.

By the time Standing Rock rolled around, a spiritual network of indigenous people was already in full effect.

“Many of the people I met at Standing Rock I’ve been friends with on Facebook for years,” said Case, who has been a key organizer in Native Hawaiian activist circles.

Case noted that she and several of the Standing Rock protesters had been “sending prayers” back and forth over social media for some time. These connections inspired Native Americans such as Caleen Sisk of California’s Winnemem Wintu nation to join her in an occupation of Mauna Kea in Hawaii. Years later, Case returned the favor by assisting Sisk in her effort to restore California waterways once frequented by millions of local salmon.

“We prayed on each others’ mountains and made commitments to one another,” Case said, speaking over the phone just minutes after finishing a ceremonial raft ride down the river. “They have prayed for us—they’ve come out physically to Mauna Kea. So now it’s our turn.”

“The most important word here is alliances,” she said.

Asked about the movement’s religious elements, Gonzales insisted spirituality isn’t a cursory side-effect but a crucial, driving force behind the recent surge of Native environmental activism.
Virtually all of the protests she has attended, she said, featured some form of prayer or sacred ritual.

“All of us are protesting because we are part of this sacred [connection] to the earth,” Gonzales said. “We are all the mountains, we are all the birds—it sounds corny, but it’s true.”

It would be a mistake to characterize the new wave of indigenous activism as emanating from a uniform, codified theology. All of the activists ThinkProgress interviewed insisted they spoke only for themselves when discussing faith, explaining that each tribe harbors its own unique spiritual traditions, practices, and customs forged over the course of centuries, if not millennia.

But for all their differences, the various indigenous populations share a common theological belief typical of what Joshua Lanakila Mangauil, a Native Hawaiian activist, called “earth-based” cultures: that the environment, at least in parts, is sacred in and of itself.

“Earth-based cultures are tied to places,” Mangauil, whose current Facebook profile picture reads “Solidarity with Standing Rock,” said. “There is no separation from our spirituality and our environment—they are one and the same.”

“Other [religious groups] have these debates over whether or not God exists—but I know my god exists,” he added, referencing Mauna Kea, which towers above his island home. “It’s the mountain—I can see it.”

Religion has long been a part of Native American protest movements, as has its connection to the environmentalist struggle. But religious scholars say they’re also seeing something unusual this year: demonstrators are actively creating new religious expressions. Greg Johnson, a Hawaiian religion expert and an associate professor of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder, said these indigenous protests are increasingly led by young, creative organizers who are “generating” religion through their activism.

“The kids of today’s generation know a new set of chants, a new set of prayers because of those who came before them,” Johnson said. He noted that Native Hawaiian schoolchildren are already singing songs written in the protest camps of Mauna Kea just a year before. “In this moment of crisis, the religious tradition is catalyzed, activated, but most of all articulated—this is when it happens.”

While this groundswell of religious generation is rooted in old traditions, it sometimes reawakens ancient elements that can challenge elders.

“To introduce another spiritual element—I am a two spirit,” Gonzales said, referencing a Native American term used to describe gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in their communities. Although traditionally celebrated in many tribes, two-spirit people have not always been welcomed by modern indigenous people. Yet when Gonzales and others formed the International Indigenous Youth Council at Standing Rock, the majority of the leadership identified as two-spirit—a designation they link to their faith.
“My sacredness as a human is part of my tradition—myself as a protector, as a sacred protector,” she said. “There are a lot of two-spirits at [the Standing Rock] camp, and that is sacred too… We see that as integral to our activism.”

Faith is a core mobilizing and stabilizing force for the movement, but it’s also central to the legal arguments used by Native groups to defend their land. In addition to other claims, both the Oak Flat and Standing Rock lawsuits contend that the federal government—or the companies it employs—violated the National Historic Preservation Act, which requires agencies to “consult with any Indian tribe… that attaches religious and cultural significance to properties with the area of potential effects.” The Hawaii case is similarly rooted in disputes over sacred land, although the lawsuit currently focuses on state laws, not the federal statutes.

Native groups can also lean on the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, which compels the federal government to “protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise [their] traditional religions…including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.”

But according to Johnson, an expert on sacred land disputes, the law is often not enough to guarantee indigenous groups a win.

“There is very little track record of sacred land victories,” he said. “More likely what they will generate is allegiances, attention—the secondary effects of having made the case for their tradition.”

Indeed, the movement thus far has largely been sustained through protest and agitation. The legal case to protect Standing Rock ultimately fell flat in early September, for instance, when a U.S. District Court judge denied the nation’s request to halt pipeline construction. But the movement proved more powerful than one judge: shortly after the ruling, the Obama administration—under pressure from scores of Native groups and their allies—called on the Dakota Access to stop construction voluntarily, and the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals temporarily halted work on the pipeline shortly thereafter.

Such is the recurring—and increasingly successful—strategy of these protests. Slowly accruing support and attention over time, and leaning on sacred claims, activists whittle away the patience of corporations and government officials until they (ideally) give up.

In Hawaii, construction of the TMT is currently stalled while lawyers debate aspects of the construction process, prompting The Hawaii Island New Knowledge fund to begin investigating alternative sites. In March, the Obama administration moved to place Oak Flat on the National Register of Historic Places, adding another bureaucratic hoop preventing the Resolution Copper company from installing a mine on site. The Lummi Nation in Washington State successfully defeated an effort to build the largest coal port ever in North America near their land earlier this year, and Native groups are also credited with helping stop the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline in 2015.
And in addition to their secular allies in the climate movement, indigenous groups are also attracting partners in non-Native faith traditions. Representatives from the Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, Episcopal Church, and the United Methodist Church have all visited the Standing Rock camp or expressed solidarity with the protesters, as has the Nation of Islam, according to the Religion News Service.

But the fight is far from over. Many of these disputes—including the Dakota Access Pipeline—are not yet resolved, and Native activists are already gearing up for new campaigns. In late September, dozens of tribes in Canada and the United States signed a treaty pledging to combat any further development of Canadian “tar sands,” which they say put their reservations and “sacred waterways” at risk of oil spills.

“If one of us loses, then we all have to work harder,” Case said. “We need to be stronger every day, and I believe the creator believes that’s what we need as well.”

Case said movement members will continue to lean on each other for strength moving forward (“We could use some prayer,” she joked) and that they won’t rest until they make it clear that the environment—earth, sky, and water—is, in a very literal sense, sacred.

“There comes a time when people have a right to say no—and now is that time,” she added. “So we’re saying no, resoundingly, like the thundering sky.”

September 30, 2016

Citing Environmental Risks, Scientists Back Tribes in Dakota Access Fight

Meanwhile, a Reuters investigation finds pipeline spill detection system severely flawed

By Deirdre Fulton, staff writer

Common Dreams

Close to 100 scientists have signed onto a letter decrying "inadequate environmental and cultural impact assessments" for the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), and calling for a halt to construction until such tests have been carried out as requested by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

Lead signatories Stephanie Januchowski-Hartley, Anne Hilborn, Katherine Crocker, and Asia Murphy drew attention to the missive in a letter to the journal Science published Friday.

"The DAPL project is just one of many haphazard approaches to natural resource extraction that overlook broader consequences of oil development," they wrote.
Furthermore, the open letter (pdf) states, "We as scientists are concerned about the potential local and regional impacts from the DAPL, which is symptomatic of the United States' continued dependence on fossil fuels in the face of predicted broad-scale social and ecological impacts from global climate change." Specifically, they cite the Standing Rock Sioux's concerns that the pipeline project threatens biodiversity and clean water.

Underscoring those concerns, a Reuters investigation into the nation's pipeline system published Friday reveals that "sensitive technology designed to pick up possible spills is about as successful as a random member of the public...finding it, despite efforts from pipeline operators."

In fact, according to the Reuters analysis of U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) data, "over the last six years, there have been 466 incidents where a pipeline carrying crude oil or refined products has leaked. Of those, 105, or 22 percent, were detected by an advanced detection system."

Even more troubling, the data "shows the leak detection systems have caught small leaks and missed some of the largest," Reuters reports, with six out of the largest 10 pipeline spills in the U.S. since 2010 going undetected by these systems.

Beyond its potential for local devastation, DAPL will make it nigh impossible for the U.S. to meet its commitments under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming, the scientists said in their letter.

As Bill McKibben said Friday on Democracy Now! of the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies: "They're holding the line against something that threatens not only their reservation, but threatens the whole planet. We do not—we cannot pump more oil. We've got to stop opening up new reserves."


October 3, 2016

Under Hawaii’s Starriest Skies, a Fight Over Sacred Ground

By Dennis Overbye
New York Times

MAUNA KEA, Hawaii — Little lives up here except whispering hopes and a little bug called Wekiu.

Three miles above the Pacific, you are above almost half the oxygen in Earth’s atmosphere and every step hurts. A few minutes in the sun will fry your skin. Brains and fingers go numb. At night, the stars are so close they seem tangled in your hair.
Two years ago, this mountaintop was the scene of a cosmic traffic jam: honking horns, vans and trucks full of astronomers, V.I.P.s, journalists, businesspeople, politicians, protesters and police—all snarled at a roadblock just short of the summit.

Abandoning their cars, some of the visitors started to hike up the hill toward what would have been a groundbreaking for the biggest and most expensive stargazing machinery ever built in the Northern Hemisphere: the Thirty Meter Telescope, 14 years and $1.4 billion in the making.

They were assembling on a plateau just below the summit, when Joshua Mangauil, better known by his Hawaiian name of Lanakila, then 27, barged onto the scene. Resplendent in a tapa cloth, beads, a red loin cloth, his jet black hair in a long Mohawk, he had hiked over the volcano’s cinder cones barefoot.

“Like snakes you are. Vile snakes,” he yelled. “We gave all of our aloha to you guys, and you slithered past us like snakes.”

“For what? For your greed to look into the sky? You guys can’t take care of this place.”

No ground was broken that day or since.

To astronomers, the Thirty Meter Telescope would be a next-generation tool to spy on planets around other stars or to peer into the cores of ancient galaxies, with an eye sharper and more powerful than the Hubble Space Telescope, another landmark in humanity’s quest to understand its origins.

But to its opponents, the telescope would be yet another eyesore despoiling an ancient sacred landscape, a gigantic 18-story colossus joining the 13 telescopes already on Mauna Kea.

Later this month, proponents and opponents of the giant telescope will face off in a hotel room in the nearby city of Hilo for the start of hearings that will lead to a decision on whether the telescope can be legally erected on the mountain.

Over the years, some have portrayed this fight as a struggle between superstition and science. Others view the telescope as another symbol of how Hawaiians have been unfairly treated since Congress annexed the islands—illegally in the eyes of many—in 1898. And still others believe it will bring technology and economic development to an impoverished island.

“This is a very simple case about land use,” Kealoha Pisciotta, a former telescope operator on Mauna Kea who has been one of the leaders of a group fighting telescope development on the mountain for the last decade. “It’s not science versus religion. We’re not the church. You’re not Galileo.”

Hanging in the balance is perhaps the best stargazing site on Earth. “Mauna Kea is the flagship of American and international astronomy,” said Doug Simons, the director of the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope on Mauna Kea. “We are on the precipice of losing this cornerstone of U.S. prestige.”
Big Glass Dreams

The road to the stars once ended in California at Palomar Mountain, whose 200-inch-diameter telescope was long considered the size limit. The bigger a telescope mirror is, the more light it can capture and the fainter and farther it can see — out in space, back in time.

In the 1990s, however, astronomers learned how to build telescopes with thin mirrors that relied on computer-adjusted supports to keep them from sagging or warping.

There was an explosion of telescope building that has culminated, for now, in plans for three giant billion-dollar telescopes: the European Extremely Large Telescope and the Giant Magellan, both in Chile, and the Thirty Meter Telescope.

Not only would they have a Brobdingnagian appetite for light, but they are designed to incorporate a new technology called adaptive optics, which can take the twinkle out of starlight by adjusting telescope mirrors to compensate for atmospheric turbulence.

Richard Ellis, a British astronomer now at the European Southern Observatory in Garching, Germany, recalled being optimistic in 1999 when he arrived at the California Institute of Technology to begin developing what became known as the Thirty Meter Telescope. “The stock market was booming,” he said. “Everything seemed possible.”

Canada, India and Japan eventually joined the project, now officially known as the TMT International Observatory. It has been helped along by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, formed by the founder of Intel, which has contributed advice and $180 million.

From Hawaii’s Mauna Kea, a Universe of Discoveries

Mauna Kea’s telescopes have helped advance important discoveries in humanity’s study of the universe.

The telescope, originally scheduled to be completed by 2024, is modeled on the revolutionary 10-meter-diameter Keck telescopes that Caltech and the University of California operate on Mauna Kea. Like them, it will have with a segmented mirror composed of small, hexagonal pieces of glass fitted together into an expanse wider than a tennis court.

There are only a few places on Earth that are dark, dry and calm enough to be fit for a billion-dollar telescope.

Rising 33,000 feet from the seafloor, Mauna Kea is one of the biggest mountains in the solar system. The dormant ancient volcano has been the center of Polynesian culture — the umbilical cord connecting Earth and sky — seemingly forever.
The mountain is part of so-called “ceded lands” that originally belonged to the Hawaiian Kingdom and are now administered by the state for the benefit of Hawaiians.

On its spare, merciless summit, craters and cinder cones of indefinable age keep company with a variety pack of architectural shapes housing telescopes.

In 1968 the University of Hawaii took out a 65-year lease on 11,000 acres for a dollar a year. Some 500 acres of that are designated as a science preserve. It includes the ice age quarry from which stone tools were being cut a thousand years ago, and hundreds of shrines and burial grounds.

The first telescope went up in 1970. Many rapidly followed.

Places like Mauna Kea are “cradles of knowledge,” said Natalie Batalha, one of the leaders of NASA’s Kepler planet-hunting mission. “I am filled with reverence and humility every time I get to be physically present at a mountaintop observatory.”

But some Hawaiians worried that knowledge was coming at too great a cost.

“All those telescopes got put up with no thought beyond reviving the Hilo economy,” said Michael Bolte, an astronomer from the University of California, Santa Cruz, who serves on the TMT board.

“Not a lot of thought was given to culture issues.”

Some native Hawaiians complained that their beloved mountain had grown “pimples,” and that the telescope development had interfered with cultural and religious practices that are protected by state law.

Construction trash sometimes rolled down the mountain, said Nelson Ho, a photographer and Sierra Club leader who complained to the university. “They wouldn’t listen,” he said. “They just kept playing king of the mountain.”

An audit by the State of Hawaii in 1998 scolded the university for failing to protect the mountain and its natural and cultural resources. An environmental impact study performed by NASA in 2007 similarly concluded that 30 years of astronomy had caused “significant, substantial and adverse” harm to Mauna Kea.

A Step Back for NASA

The tide began to shift in 2001 when NASA announced a plan to add six small telescopes called outriggers to the Keck complex. The outriggers would be used in concert with the big telescopes as interferometers to test ideas for a future space mission dedicated to looking for planets around other stars.
Ms. Pisciotta led a band of environmentalists and cultural practitioners who went to court to stop NASA. The group included the Hawaiian chapter of the Sierra Club and the Royal Order of Kamehameha, devoted to restoring the Kingdom of Hawaii.

Ms. Pisciotta said she had once dreamed of being a cosmologist but lacked the requisite math skills and instead took a night job operating a radio telescope on Mauna Kea. She became disenchanted when a family shrine disappeared from the summit and the plans for the outriggers impinged on a cinder cone.

“Cinder cones are burial sites. It’s time to not let this go on,” she said. The group prepared for court by reading popular books about trials.

In 2007, Hawaii’s third district court found the management plan for the outriggers was flawed and revoked the building permit.

“NASA packed up and left,” Ms. Pisciotta said.

**Encountering Aloha**

The prospective builders of the TMT knew they had their work cut out for them.

In 2007, the Moore Foundation hired Peter Adler, a consultant and sociologist, to look into the consequences of putting the telescope in Hawaii.

“Should TMT decide to pursue a Mauna Kea site,” his report warned, “it will inherit the anger, fear and great mistrust generated through previous telescope planning and siting failures and an accumulated disbelief that any additional projects, especially a physically imposing one like the TMT, can be done properly.”

The astronomers picked a telescope site that was less anthropologically sensitive, on a plateau below the summit with no monuments or other obvious structures on it. They agreed to pay $1 million a year, a fifth of which would go to the state’s Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the rest to stewardship of the mountain.

Quietly, they also pledged another $2 million a year toward science and technology education and work force development on the island of Hawaii. The Moore Foundation also put some $2 million into the Imiloa Astronomy Center, a museum and planetarium run by the University of Hawaii.

Dr. Bolte, a mild-mannered U.C.S.C. professor with a soothing lilt to his voice, became one of the most visible promoters of the project in community meetings.

He recalled going to a meeting in Hilo once where tensions were very high. Afterward, he said, he was afraid to go out to his car.
Sure enough, a crowd rushed him when he got there. “What kind of astronomy do you do?” they asked eagerly.

“The aloha spirit really exists,” Dr. Bolte said.

“Exploring the universe is a wonderful thing humans do,” he added. Nevertheless, “there was a core we never won over.”

“In retrospect, we might have underestimated the strength of the sovereignty movement.”

*The Hawaiian Renaissance*

In the years since the first telescopes went up on Mauna Kea, Hawaiian people and culture had experienced a resurgence of pride known as the Hawaiian Renaissance.

In 1976, a band of Hawaiians sailed the *outrigger canoe Hokulea* from Hawaii to Tahiti. The feat showed how ancient Polynesians could have purposefully explored and colonized the Pacific, navigating the seas using only the sun, stars, ocean swells and wind.

“And that was the first spark of shutting up everybody who said that we were inferior, that we were not intelligent,” Mr. Mangauil, the protester, said.

In 1978, the state recognized Hawaiian, which once had been banned from schools, as an official language.

With rising pride came — at least among some more vocal native Hawaiians — questions about whether the *occupation and annexation of Hawaii* by the United States in the 1890s was legal.

Telescopes on a sacred mountain constitute a form of “colonial violence,” in the words of J. Kehaulani Kauanui, an anthropologist at Wesleyan University.

Or as Robert Kirshner, a Harvard professor who is now also chief science officer at the Moore Foundation, put it, “The question in that case become not so much whether you did the environmental impact statement right, but whose island is it?”

Having cut their teeth fighting the outrigger project, Ms. Pisciotta’s group, known informally as the Mauna Kea Hui, was prepared when the TMT Corporation formally selected the mountain for its site in 2009.

Many Hawaiians welcomed the telescope project. At a permit hearing, Wallace Ishibashi Jr., whose family had an ancestral connection to Mauna Kea, compared the Thirty Meter’s mission to the search for aumakua, the ancestral origins of the universe.

“Hawaiians,” he said, “have always been a creative and adaptive people.”
Ms. Pisciotta and her friends argued among other things that an 18-story observatory, which would be the biggest structure on the whole island of Hawaii, did not fit in a conservation district.

In a series of hearings in 2010 and 2011, the state land board approved a permit for the telescope but then stipulated that no construction could begin until a so-called contested case hearing, in which interested parties could present their arguments, was held.

**The Walk of Fame**

The state won that hearing, and a groundbreaking ceremony was scheduled for Oct. 7, 2014.

The groundbreaking was never intended to be a public event, said Bob McClaren, associate director of the University of Hawaii’s Institute for Astronomy, which is responsible for scientific activities on the mountain.

“I thought it was reasonable to restrict access to those who were invited,” he said.

Mr. Mangauil, who makes his living teaching hula dancing and Hawaiian culture, said later that he had wanted only to make the astronomers feel uncomfortable to be on the mountain and to get protesters’ signs in view of the television cameras.

In an interview, he said he had nothing against science or astronomy, but did not want it on his mountain.

“Our connection to the mountain is like, that’s our elder, the mother of our resources,” he said. “We’re talking about the wau akua, the realm of where the gods live.”

There are no shrines on the very summit, he pointed out, which should be a lesson: Not even the most holy people are supposed to go there.

Unable to get to the groundbreaking, the Hawaiians formed their own blockade. Tempers flared.

“We were seeing the native Hawaiian movement flexing its muscles,” Dr. Bolte said.

Seeing people hiking up the mountain past the port-o-potties, Mr. Mangauil stormed after them and wound up on the hood of a ranger truck, even more angry.

**Guarding the Mountain**

Lanakila’s barefoot run set the tone for two years of unrest and demonstrations.

Protesters calling themselves Guardians of the Mountain set up a permanent vigil across the road from the Mauna Kea visitor center, stopping telescope construction crews and equipment from going up. Dozens were arrested.
Gov. David Ige has tried to appease both sides. While saying that “we have in many ways failed the mountain,” he said the Thirty Meter Telescope should go forward, but at least three other telescopes would have to come down.

Astronomers and business leaders grew frustrated that the state was not doing enough to keep the road open for construction trucks and workers.

“The result of the faulty law enforcement surrounding Mauna Kea is fostering tension, aggression, racism and business uncertainty,” business organizations and the Hawaii Chamber of Commerce wrote to the governor. “Ambiguity surrounding the rule of law has prompted a poor economic climate.”

Stopping trucks on the steep slope was dangerous, said Dr. Bolte, adding that “people were basically trapped at the summit.”

Dr. Simons, the Canada-France-Hawaii director, grew increasingly worried about the effect of the protests on the astronomers, who became reluctant to be identified as observatory staffers.

“It really tugged at us to see the staff going from being proud to scared in a matter of weeks,” he said.

Meanwhile Ms. Pisciotta’s coalition was plugging through the courts.

On Dec. 2, the Hawaiian Supreme Court revoked the telescope building permit, ruling that the state had violated due process by handing out the permit before the contested case hearing.

“Quite simply, the Board put the cart before the horse when it issued the permit,” the court wrote.

Game of Domes

By mid-December, Clarence Ching, another member of the opposition, stood in a crowd with other Hawaiians and watched trucks carrying equipment retreat from the mountain.

“David had beaten Goliath,” he said. “We were even happy and sad at the same time — sad, for instance, that somebody had to lose — as we had fought hard and long.”

The court’s decision set the stage for a new round of hearings, now scheduled to start in mid-October. The case, presided over by Riki May Amano, a retired judge appointed by the Land Board, is likely to last longer than the first round, which consumed seven days of hearings over a few weeks, partly because there are more parties this time around.

Among them is the pro-telescope Hawaiian group called Perpetuating Unique Educational Opportunities or PUEO, who contend the benefits of the TMT to the community have been undersold.
Whoever wins this fall’s contested case hearing, the decision is sure to be quickly appealed to the Hawaiian Supreme Court.

In an interview, Edward Stone, a Caltech professor and vice president of the Thirty Meter Telescope International Observatory, the group that will build the telescope, set April 2018 as the deadline for beginning construction. Depending on how it goes in Hawaii or elsewhere, the telescope could be ready sometime in the last half of the next decade.

“We need to start building this thing somewhere,” he said.

“We still hope Hawaii will work,” he added. “What we need is a timely permit, and we need access to the mountain once we have a permit.”

But there is no guarantee that even if the astronomers succeed in court they will prevail on the mountain. In an email exchange, J. Douglas Ing, lawyer for the TMT Observatory, said they were “cautiously optimistic” that local agencies would uphold the law, but the astronomers have also been investigating alternative sites in Mexico, Chile, India, China and the Canary Islands.

“It’s wise of the TMT to be exploring other sites,” said Richard Wurdeman, the lawyer for the Mauna Kea Hui.

I asked Ms. Pisciotta what would happen if the giant telescope finally wins.

“It would be really hard for Hawaiian people to swallow that,” she said. “It’s always been our way to lift our prayers up to heaven and hope they hear us.”

Dr. Bolte said he had learned to not make predictions about Hawaii.

In a recent email, he recalled photographing a bunch of short-eared Hawaiian owls. “These are called pueo, and they are said to be the physical form of ancestor spirits,” Dr. Bolte recounted.

Referring to the Hawaiian term for a wise elder, he said, “I had one kupuna tell me it was a great sign for TMT that so many pueo sought me out that trip, and another tell me it was a sign that we should leave the island immediately before a calamity falls on TMT.”

See photos here:


October 3, 2016

Catholic institutions internationally announce divestment from fossil fuels

Independent Catholic News
Today, on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, Catholic institutions and communities from all over the world celebrated the culmination of the month-long Season of Creation with the largest joint announcement of their decision to divest from fossil fuels.

The Catholic communities committing to switch the management of their finances away from fossil fuel extraction include: The Jesuits in English Canada; the Federation of Christian Organisations for the International Voluntary Service (FOCSIV) in Italy; the Presentation Society of Australia and Papua New Guinea; SSM Health in the United States; the Diocese of the Holy Spirit of Umuaramá in the Brazilian state of Paraná; the Missionary Society of St. Columban, based in Hong Kong and with a global presence in 14 countries; and the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco - Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Milan and Naples (Italy).

Commitments range from divesting from coal, as is the case of the US healthcare institution SSM, to redirecting the divested funds into clean, renewable energy investments, as FOCSIV has announced. As for the Brazilian Diocese of Umuaramá, it is both the first diocese and the first Latin American institution to commit to divest from fossil fuels.

The fossil fuel divestment movement was acknowledged during the presentation of Pope Francis's message on the World Day of Prayer for Creation by Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, when he pointed out that Pope Francis suggests that "social pressure--including from boycotting certain products--can force businesses to consider their environmental footprint and patterns of production. The same logic animates the fossil fuel divestment movement."

Major Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican organizations came together between September 1st (World Day of Prayer for Creation) and October 4th to observe the Season of Creation, calling on the 2.2 billion Christians worldwide to pray and take action to care for the Earth.

The urgent need to stop all new fossil fuel infrastructure was highlighted by a recent report which found that the potential carbon emissions from the oil, gas and coal in the world's currently operating fields and mines would increase our planet's temperature beyond 2°C by the end of this century, and even with no coal, the reserves in oil and gas fields alone would cause warming beyond 1.5°C.

The campaign to divest from fossil fuels is the fastest growing divestment campaign in history, according to a report by the University of Oxford. Up to date, nearly 600 institutions worth over $3.4 trillion globally have announced divestment commitments.

Quotes:

"Climate change is already affecting poor and marginalized communities globally, through drought, rising sea levels, famine and extreme weather. We are called to take a stand." Peter Bisson sj, Provincial of the Jesuits in English Canada.
"This announcement is for FOCSIV an important commitment on climate justice: we strongly believe that in order to fight climate change we need to act at the root causes removing financial support at fossil fuel industry and reinvest it in renewable. VIDES, a catholic NGO member of FOCSIV, has positively welcomed the message of Laudato Si’ and Divestment, obtaining the important announcement of the Italian Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco. We will continue in addressing religious institutes: together, as Catholics, we have the moral duty of being the proofs of a concrete commitment to stop the climate crisis and promote environmental justice."

Gianfranco Cattai, President of FOCSIV.

"The Presentation Society of Australia and Papua New Guinea has made the commitment to work towards divestment of investments that are at the expense of the environment, human rights, the public safety and local communities. Presentation Sisters in Australia and Papua New Guinea believe that the healing of the planet will only come about with care for Earth and the whole community of life. We are one planet and one Earth community and we have a common destiny." Sr Marlette Black, pbvm, President of the Presentation Society of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

"As a Mission-based Catholic organization, SSM Health has always been deeply aware of the importance of caring for our natural resources. Our renewed commitment to the environment keeps us consistent in word and deed with the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, our founding congregation, and with the climate change encyclical released by Pope Francis in June 2015."

William P. Thompson, SSM Health President/Chief Executive Officer.

"As Bishop of Umuarama Diocese, in communion with the Catholic Church and attentive to the calls of the Gospel, I clearly understand the message of Pope Francis in Laudato Si’, which calls us to care Common House through initiatives that protect all forms of life. We can not accommodate and continue allowing economic interests that seek exorbitant profits before the well being of people, to destroy biodiversity and ecosystems, nor continue dictating our energy model based on fossil fuels. We know that Brazil has abundant sources of clean and renewable energy that do not harm our common home. Therefore, I believe that the proposal to turn the Diocese of Umuarama into low-carbon is a practical way to achieve what Laudato Si’ calls for."

Dom Frei João Mamede Filho OFMConv, Bishop of the Diocese of Umuarama, Brazil.

"Columbans have a long history of commitment to caring for the Earth as part of our missionary identity. We see our Socially and Environmentally Responsible Investment policy as an important expression of that commitment and therefore are exploring ways to direct our investments towards funds which respond positively to our issue priorities such as renewable energy, community-based microenterprise, and peace initiatives."

Fr. Kevin O’Neill, Columban Superior General.

"All Bishops Conferences of the world called for 'an end to the fossil fuel era' in a powerful statement last year. The divestment announcement of these Catholic institutions simply is an update to their investment policies following the Bishops’ appeal." Tomás Insua, Global Catholic Climate Movement Global Coordinator.
"The diversity and global distribution of the organizations taking part in this joint announcement show the leadership of the Catholic communities in going beyond prayers and taking concrete action in response to the repeated calls of Pope Francis to preserve our common home. We celebrate this announcement and hope that the message it conveys reaches people of all faiths and inspires more Catholic institutions, including the Vatican itself, to take away the harmful influence of the fossil fuel industry’s ambition over our economies and societies, and push for clean and just energy sources for all humanity." **Yossi Cadan, 350.org Senior Divestment Campaigner.**

"For religious people, the aim of divestment is to bankrupt the fossil fuel industry morally, not financially. Hopefully, because of their duty to manage their resources, these companies will invest in renewable forms of energy." **Columban Fr. Sean McDonagh, leading international eco-theologian.**

"As Catholic Christians we know that our participation matters. It matters morally; it matters to God. Divestment from companies that continue to mine fossil fuels is a necessary and significant step toward building a world which is powered by the gifts God gave--like the sun and the wind. We can turn the course of our momentum away from greenhouse gasses and death and toward creativity, clean energy sources, and hope." **Nancy M Rourke, PhD, Associate Professor and Director of Catholic Studies Program at Canisius College.**

Links:
http://catholicclimatemovement.global/

http://brightnow.org.uk/


October 3, 2016

Monterey, Calif., diocese enters 'new era' with sustainable energy program

By Marie Venner
National Catholic Reporter

Energy use has electrified a swell of Catholics this summer in the three-county Monterey, Calif., diocese, where new initiatives inspired by Pope Francis’ environmental encyclical seek not only wholesale changes in their parishes but the community as a whole.

The effort is the result of a partnership between the diocese and the Romero Institute, a non-profit law and policy center focused on social justice issues. Through its Green Power program, the institute is working with faith communities along California’s central coast to set up “Green Power” teams to help them reduce electricity consumption and move toward the use of renewable energy in their church infrastructure. Part of that includes exploration of installing rooftop solar arrays where possible.
A first step in the new project came July 17 at Resurrection Church in Aptos, where Green Power and the Monterey diocese held a training session for 100 Catholics representing parishes through the diocese, which includes Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties.

In a letter a month earlier to his priests and deacons introducing the new environmental push, Monterey Bishop Richard Garcia said the program ushers in “a new era of green community culture where our parishes become a guiding light in sustainable, ecofriendly living.”

“Lowering carbon levels is now imperative to protect the earth,” he wrote.

Garcia said that in his encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home,” Francis acknowledged the reality of human-caused climate change, and that “all life systems are now threatened,” including the poor. Because of that, climate change is an issue of justice, said the bishop.

“This is our common home. We, as people of God and in Jesus’s name, must protect it from ourselves,” Garcia wrote.

In a follow-up letter Aug. 24, Garcia described the climate change initiative as “off to a strong start.” He also introduced a second dimension of the campaign in the diocese officially endorsing the adoption of Community Choice Energy (CCE) in the Monterey Bay region.

CCE, which became law in California in 2002, allows cities and counties a say in their energy provider by selecting the source and price of the electricity. The Monterey Bay area has been prepping to implement the program for three years, said the bishop. He encouraged priests and deacons to “mobilize Catholic support” in their parishes, in the form of advocacy and petition drives, for its passage. City councils and boards of supervisors are expected to be voting through the end of October on whether to join a CCE.

Forming a CCE would cut fossil fuel reliance in half within a year through expanded use of solar and wind energy, with those sources providing as much as 85 percent of electricity generation within 10 years, Garcia said in the letter. Economically, any profits from surplus electricity sold would return to the community through lower energy bills or construction of solar fields and wind farms -- and with them, local jobs. Garcia noted that Sonoma County, a region roughly half the size of the potential Monterey Bay Community Power, has seen $35 million in surpluses in two years.

Earlier in his letter, Garcia said that through Laudato Si’ the pope again “made clear that Earth’s changing climate threatens us all, especially the poor, and is due to human activity. He asked us to move away from fossil fuels and towards cleaner sources of energy, like wind and solar, and to consume less -- so that our earth and all living beings may flourish.”

In Laudato Si’ paragraph 165, Francis said, “We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels -- especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas -- needs to be progressively replaced without delay.”
Scientists say holding global warming at or below 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) -- a target included in the Paris Agreement reached by 195 nations last December -- would require eliminating 80 percent the world’s carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and 100 percent by 2050. So far, average global temperatures have warmed roughly 1 degree above pre-industrial levels.

Meeting the ambitious 1.5 degrees goal, though, will require dramatic action and the development of technologies not currently existing. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates indicate that targeting a 66-percent chance of meeting the 1.5 goal would mean global carbon budgets would be exhausted in little more than five years.

The pope stressed the urgency of the climate issue last November ahead of the Paris climate change summit, saying “We are at the limit. We are at the limit of a suicide, to say a strong word.”

As David Roberts outlined earlier this month at Vox.com, electricity offers perhaps the best route to full decarbonization of the energy sector, and with it to addressing climate change. But the benefits of an “electrify everything” strategy also extend to public health -- less energy from combustion means less pollutants in the air from fossil-fueled cars and power plants.

Spearheading the Monterey diocese’s energy efforts is the Family Life and Social Concerns office, led by Deacon Warren Hoy. The deacon said the diocese is excited by the new initiative and partnership with the Romero Institute, which is on the steering committee of the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

“We’re happy to see the parishes moving toward solar power to provide clean energy for themselves and perhaps others in need,” Hoy said.

The Tani family, parishioners at Holy Cross Church in Santa Cruz, were among those attending the mid-July Green Power training program. For the last four years, Julie Tani has taught students at Good Shepherd Catholic School, in Santa Cruz, about the intrinsic value of living things through the school’s “Life Lab” gardens.

“I want them to know that it's our job to take care of God's creation. We plant seeds, tend the garden, harvest produce, prepare food, eat, and compost the left-overs. We observe how we and the natural world are interconnected,” she said.

Her husband, Hiro, said he’s happy to see the diocese partner with the Romero Institute and hopes the project takes off, especially in identifying alternative sources of energy for its many buildings. He previously wrote the diocese expressing his desire to see it go solar. While that will be explored through this new endeavor, it’s unclear if another of his requests may materialize.

“I said that priests and nuns should be driving electric cars or hybrids,” he said.

[Marie Venner is chair of the National Academies’ Transportation Research Board subcommittee on Climate Change, Energy, and Sustainability and former co-chair of the Risk and Resilience...
Planning and Analysis subcommittee. She is also on the Steering Committee of the Global Catholic Climate Movement.]


October 4, 2016

Why We Are Singing for Water—In Front of Men With Guns and Surveillance Helicopters

We were water beings from the beginning. The river was our Grandmother and supplied everything we needed to survive.

By Linda Hogan
Yes! Magazine

We are singing for water and for the protectors of Earth’s waters. We sing for water. Long-legged birds stand at the edges of lakes and rivers to watch for fish, their nests hidden in the rushes. A doe crosses land and stands guard as her little one drinks. All our brother and sister animals follow their worn paths to needed waters. Trees and plants subsist with the rain, snow, and groundwater in a place where living Earth supported large herds of bison for thousands of years.

As for us, we were water beings from the beginning. We rained from the broken waters of our mothers to enter this world. We drank from our mothers to thrive. Water is our life-blood, and like all creations on this blue planet, we were born to its currents and passages. So we sing for those who pray to protect the wide, long Missouri River on its elemental journey.

Near the Cannonball River, a place of chokecherries, Indiangrass, and other plants, thousands of people are camped. They know that by legal treaty rights the Missouri River and the land of this region belong to the Standing Rock Sioux. Water flows beneath the skin of this Earth body, and vast clear aquifers lie deeper in the near ground, with rivers and tributaries above. The “Plains” may be the wrong word to use for places existing in the midst of all the ground water and watersheds that support life here: animals, birds, food and medicine plants, expanses of wildflowers in the spring and then the harsh, cold seasons of winter. The tall grasses live because of waters from snow and rain.

My own nation, the Chicaza, lived with the Mississippi River throughout much of our long history. We called that wide rush of water The Long Person. She was our Grandmother and supplied everything we needed to survive. With great sorrow, we were removed from our homeland in 1837. We left in order to avoid future genocide. The U.S. government planned to place all of the tribes into Indian Territory and build a wall around it, opening the rest of the
country to settlers. Large numbers of Native peoples were chased toward what is now Oklahoma, but many of the Plains nations managed to remain, avoid capture, and try to return to their beloved homelands.

While many Northern Plains nations escaped life in Oklahoma, continuing actions by the federal government resulted in a shrinking land base for the Dakota and Lakota, including the Dawes Act of 1889, which opened most land for settlers throughout the country. The Fort Laramie Treaty is the only treaty that remains unbroken by the United States. Now it is a corporation breaking the heart of the people, ignoring the treaty rights and the water guaranteed to the Sioux by that 1868 treaty. The state government of North Dakota also has not upheld the treaty and backs the corporation, Energy Transfer Partners/Sunoco.

Most Native peoples and others are hoping the Standing Rock Sioux Nation will hold steady to all their treaty rights to the Missouri River, that the land and water will remain healthy and intact, and that the Dakota Access pipeline will never pass beneath the river nor cross the land in any way.

Thousands of water protectors have arrived to show their solidarity. The chiefs and leaders of over 300 tribal nations have appeared to speak of their own concern for the water and land. Others have sent water, money, and supplies.

Along these waterways, many negotiations decreased the land base, but the river system has grown even more important as trail and trade, especially for survival and subsistence for people who refused to give up their land for any hundred million dollars offered by the United States.

Other states are also affected by work on the Bakken crude pipeline. Citizens in Iowa have had their homes condemned by the Texas company that began fracking the Bakken fields. Fracking makes the land more vulnerable and more likely to shift and move, affecting tectonic plates. Water is removed and injected back into Earth with secret chemicals, their exact toxic ingredients protected by patents. This makes for a vulnerable Earth. The lawsuits in Iowa have at least slowed operations.

Bakken crude comes from one of the most dangerous work sites now in operation. Working men have been charred to death by explosions and fires, electrocuted. Native women near these “man camps” have been subject to abuse, rape, and sometimes have disappeared, often into the sex trafficking business, sometimes murdered.

Standing Rock, this part of the Plains, is the world of well-known leader and holy man Sitting Bull. It is land crossed during the time of the Fort Laramie Treaty, signed in what is now Wyoming. In my mind’s eye as I’ve studied the history, I see the many leaders of nations crossing this land to participate in negotiations with the American government. Wearing beautifully made regalia, most traveled on horseback or with wagons, the chiefs and the women
ambassadors of nations who thought the Fort Laramie Treaty would be a resolution to their problems. Even those who had earlier disputes came together with one another in kinship, camping together, sharing meals, and creating new relationships.

Now the chiefs of many tribal nations and other representatives have arrived again, this time to join in common protection for the water of this Earth and in solidarity with the Standing Rock and Lakota. This is still the land of the Standing Rock Sioux and other Lakota Nations, still held together by the words and memory of Sitting Bull, who loved and protected his people. No company or state has the right to take a thin, dirty business through it, a pipeline certain to break, destroying the water and contaminating the future.

But the Dakota Access corporation sent its private, aggressive militia to declare its own war on the people. With that amount of harassment, the water protectors could certainly be in danger. We already saw on the news that, after being told where the burial sites and sacred lands were, the bulldozers went to those areas and tore through the earth, the opposite of what was expected. What drives such hostility is hard to imagine.

The planes and helicopters have been flying over the vulnerable past and future of the land. What look like SWAT teams and men with assault rifles are set loose to aim the weapons of their anger or use attack dogs on the people who are only protecting the water, or were chopping wood or cooking for the others when the armed men arrived.

It stays with me. What drives this hatred is impossible for me to understand.

I think of the pilots and these men and I wonder, do they go home at times to happiness, to their own families? Do they carefully tend gardens or gently touch their loved ones? Do they protect their children from bullies? Do those with such fury on their faces think that the others are human beings like themselves? Do they realize that flying over the lands of the First People causes fear? Forever I will think of one picture, quickly removed from a website, showing a man point an assault rifle too near a crying girl, maybe 8 years old, her hair neatly French braided, her clothing impeccable.

I am a Chickasaw woman no longer on the waters of the Mississippi, but my daughters and grandchildren are Oglala Lakota. We know how many tribes in the South became extinct centuries even before the fur trappers and gold seekers journeyed to these Northern Plains. We’ve all survived massacres and hunger from the loss of our food sources, from freezing winters, even before the time of Custer’s wars in this region.

Photographs from space reveal that Earth is a water planet. No living thing survives without water. It is for that reason space explorers search for planets that may contain this element; it is a sign of life.
Most First People have chants or songs about the sacred nature of water. Water is even used for baptism in Christian religions. I hear that even the waters have their distinct songs as they journey toward the oceans.

We live on a single globe of water, all of it one entity. It is alive, this elemental force, this yearning sacred creation, longing to reach an ocean. This is our body, and perhaps we are a part of its soul. It is always moving away, traveling and then returning, in its glorious circle. And we know that when we sing for water, we sing for ourselves.

At this time, we need to pray and sing for water in other locations as well. To name only a few, the San Juan River and its Animas tributary is still too polluted for use by the Navajo after the great wall of pollution from the Gold King Mine spill. The Menominee are fighting a mining site at their water’s source. California tribes have had water taken by bottling companies and their sacred springs have dried. The Amazon and other rivers in South America are under duress from mining, oil, deforestation, and mega-dam builders.

http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/to-the-standing-rock-sioux-who-are-singing-for-water-20161004

October 4, 2016

Can Americans find common ground on climate change?

Americans’ views on climate change diverge sharply depending on their political affiliations, says a new Pew Research poll. But two areas of consensus are emerging.

By Ellen Powell, Staff
Christian Science Monitor

Climate change is still very much a political issue, finds a new poll by the Pew Research Center. But the seeds of consensus are present, too – and they may get to the heart of what Americans value.

The poll found that people’s political orientations have a substantial influence on their perceptions of climate issues. Liberal Democrats express the most trust in climate scientists and are most likely to say that human or political action can prevent climate catastrophe. Conservative Republicans tend to be far more skeptical toward climate scientists, and tend to say that individual acts can make only a limited difference.

At the same time, there is emerging bipartisan US agreement on two key areas: the role of scientists in policy-making and support for renewable energy sources. These areas of consensus may reflect individuals’ values and ideals – and a change in the way that climate science “speaks” to those values.
“The most important thing I’ve learned ... is that facts are not enough,” Katharine Hayhoe, associate professor of political science at Texas Tech University and the co-author of "A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions," tells The Christian Science Monitor in a phone interview. “We need to connect to people’s hearts,” she says.

Such a personal connection often comes through faith, which is “where many of our values come from,” Dr. Hayhoe explains. And connecting with the science in a more personal way may help increase trust in the science.

In fact, the Pew survey found that the more people cared about climate issues, the more likely they were to believe that science presented an accurate picture of the issues. In the “climate-engaged” group, 67 percent said they trusted climate scientists to provide full and accurate information “a lot,” compared with 33 percent of those who cared some about the issues and 9 percent who had little interest in climate change.

Linked to this trust in science, more than 75 percent of Democrats and most Republicans told Pew that scientists should play a “major” role in formulating policy. That may be a shift from previous skepticism – and it’s a move that many scientists would welcome.

“Any time that you can formulate a policy based on data points and facts and not on unquantifiable emotions or opinions, I think that helps to formulate a solid policy,” Benjamin Corb, public affairs director for the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, tells the Monitor in a phone interview. But care must be taken to focus on the facts, he says: “Scientists are people ... it doesn’t matter if it’s a non-scientist or a scientist, if you’re letting your opinions overrule the evidence that’s in front of you, that would be problematic.”

For Hayhoe, policy cannot be based purely on scientific facts. Science does not make value judgments, and policy relies on values to “provide the framework to interpret the data,” she explains. Ultimately, the policy you choose to implement reflects where you want to go: as a community, a state or a nation. “It’s a human question,” she says.

A future-looking value judgment may be informing the emerging consensus around support for renewable energy sources. Some 89 percent of Pew respondents were in favor of more solar farms, while wind turbine farms were viewed favorably by 83 percent. Among traditional energy sources, the highest support went to “More offshore drilling,” at 45 percent.

The poll found that support for renewable energy sources was attributable to three broad sets of motivations: financial, health-related, and environmental. This broad base of motivations, rather than a narrow appeal to personal guilt, may help to increase engagement across the political spectrum. A 2015 study across 24 countries found that these so-called “co-benefits” to environmental action motivated people regardless of whether they believed in man-made climate change.

“It’s much easier to address the things that many people already care about and link these things to environmental action, like creating jobs and the state of their local community, rather than
trying to change their stance on particular environmental issues,” explained co-author Gró Einarsdóttir, a PhD student from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, to Science Nordic.

Increasing private money in clean energy technologies may be a particular spur to this consensus. The investments of individuals such as Elon Musk and Bill Gates suggest that the industry is not only economically viable, but may have huge potential for growth. That’s a change from the perception of renewable energy as a sink for government funds, which was fueled by events like the Solyndra collapse.

Some policymakers are already finding areas of consensus. Senators Jim Inhofe (R) of Oklahoma and Barbara Boxer (D) of California have recently worked together on three environment-related bills: a transportation bill, a water projects bill, and the first update in 40 years to toxic chemicals regulation.

"People wonder how can we possibly bridge the divide," [Boxer] mused as the Senate debated the water bill. "And it is a fact that on certain issues we can't. There is a lesson there. ... We have never, ever taken those differences and made them personal. We respect each other and we don't waste a lot of time arguing."


October 4, 2016

When it comes to the environment, it is in giving that countries will receive

By Tomás Insua
Huffington Post

Even the most optimistic among us would not dispute that our world is currently in a desperate state. From climate change to armed conflict, from pollution to widespread inequality, humanity suffers from innumerable afflictions. While some afflictions are more recent phenomena than others, how we cope with this suffering, and how we go about reducing the pain we inflict on ourselves and others, are dilemmas as old as humankind itself.

Today, on 4th October, the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics are celebrating the life and legacy of a man who has inspired whole movements, lifestyles, films and countless books since his death: St. Francis of Assisi. Indeed, St. Francis is the “the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation” who provided the inspiration for the chosen name of the current pope.

Despite living 800 years ago, St. Francis - famed for his humble devotion to poverty, his harmony with nature and as a writer of prayers of sublime beauty - still has much to teach us, Catholics and non-Catholics, as we confront the complex challenges that currently face our society.
We face no greater challenge today than that posed by climate change. The vast majority of climate scientists tell us that increased concentrations of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere are trapping infrared heat before it escapes into space, leading to a dangerous increase in average temperatures on the Earth’s surface and accompanying changes in the climate.

In concrete terms, this means sweltering record-high temperatures approaching those the likes of which we have not experienced in the last 11,700 years during which humankind has flourished. It means more frequent and intense heatwaves in regions from South Asia to the Middle East. It means deadly floods in Louisiana in the US in September and floods in France in June that caused one billion euros worth of damage. It means melting glaciers and heavy rains in Italy. It means an increased risk of forest fires in Brazil. No demographic group is spared from climate change, though of course it is the poor that suffer most.

Humans are far from blameless in this, and we know it. The combustion of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas is the main driver of this problem, as it emits greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Furthermore, widespread and unsustainable deforestation can cause immense damage not only to biodiversity and displaced indigenous communities but also to the forest’s capacity to absorb carbon dioxide in vast quantities.

Contemplating this situation, it is no wonder that Pope Francis turned back to St. Francis of Assisi for inspiration when he wrote his June 2015 eco-Encyclical Laudato Si’, the title of which, translated as “Praised be”, is taken from the saint’s hymn Canticle of the Creatures.

Like St. Francis’s song of praise to Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Laudato Si’ has since emboldened many others to take action: the Global Catholic Climate Movement, a coalition of 400 Catholic organizations, has led a Laudato Si’ Week campaign as part of which thousands of people learnt more about the Encyclical’s message and pledged to care for Our Common Home in concrete ways. Just today, religious institutions from different continents have pledged to take their investments out of the fossil fuel companies that continue to contribute to climate change.

The ecological crisis we face is so severe, however, that groups of individuals and organizations cannot resolve it alone. Through their policies and pledges, governments must create the conditions for effective climate and environmental action to flourish.

Progress is being made: at the end of September, several major emitters of greenhouse gases reaffirmed their will to be bound by the terms of last December’s historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change by officially ratifying it. Despite worrying statements from countries like Poland who seem to have misunderstood the core messages of Laudato Si’ and continue to invest heavily in coal, globally investment in renewables is rising and the outlook for coal is bleak. The complex nature of the challenge and the limitations of the Paris Agreement mean that much still remains to be done in other fora, however.

Before the end of the year, countries have several opportunities to prove they appreciate the full gravity of the situation. As I write, 191 governments are gathered at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) General Assembly in Montréal in an attempt to curb greenhouse
gas emissions from aircraft. Given that the ICAO General Assembly only meets every three years, it is vital that countries reach an ambitious deal to ensure that, by 2020, carbon-neutral growth is achieved.

When they meet for COP22 in Morocco in November to discuss the finer details of the Paris Agreement, countries must similarly ensure they show the same spirit of ambition that was crucial to the success of Paris itself. Pope Francis was unequivocal about the importance of this next step in a recent seminar entitled “Laudato Si’ and the Path to COP22” at which I and over 40 distinguished scholars and leaders from various sectors discussed these matters with His Holiness. As I have outlined in a paper submitted at that conference, all of us - from countries to individuals to the Catholic Church itself - have a role to play in contributing to a positive outcome at COP22.

Let people of all faiths and none therefore take this, the last day of the month-long Christian Season of Creation during which Christian leaders have asked people around the world to pray for the environment, as an opportunity to reflect on our relationship with the world around us and work in solidarity to preserve what is most precious to us by meeting the challenge posed by climate change. For, to apply the words of St. Francis to a problem that affects us all and that we can only solve together, it truly is in giving that we shall receive.

Tomás Insua is Founding Coordinator of Global Catholic Climate Movement & Fulbright Scholar at Harvard Kennedy School.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tomas-insua/when-it-comes-to-the-envi_b_12326118.html

October 7, 2016

Flint Officials Are No Longer Saying the Water Is Fine

By Monica Davey
New York Times

FLINT, Mich. — All along, through months of complaints from residents of this city about the peculiar colors and odors they said were coming from their faucets, the overriding message from the authorities here was that the water would be just fine.

Yes, there had been a boil order when fecal coliform bacteria turned up in some neighborhoods last year. And yes, the extra chlorine that was pumped in to solve that problem seemed to create another one — increased levels of a different contaminant.

Still, the guidance from Flint officials about the temporary water supply they switched to in 2014 — partly to save money — sounded assuring. In a notice sent to residents in July, city officials declared: “This is not an emergency. If a situation arises where the water is no longer safe to drink, you will be notified within 24 hours.”
The soothing talk has vanished. In recent weeks, testing has shown increased levels of lead in the blood of some Flint children — and health officials pointed to the water as a possible source.

First, the city advised residents to run their water for five minutes before using it, to use only cold water for drinking and cooking, and to install lead-removing water filters. Then county officials issued an emergency advisory recommending that people not drink Flint’s water unless it is tested for lead or filtered.

And last Friday, after corroborating that lead levels had risen in some children, state officials called for the water to be tested at all Flint public schools and for stepped-up efforts to replace lead service lines; they also promised $1 million to provide filters.

Officials met here on Wednesday afternoon, and talks were underway, officials said, for additional solutions that could come as early as Thursday. Gov. Rick Snyder said on Twitter late Wednesday that he planned to make an announcement about the situation on Thursday morning.

Private groups have raced to donate bottled water to schools, where the water fountains are now shut off, as well as filters to families who cannot afford them. Saying “we’re just in a heck of a bind,” Robert J. Pickell, the Genesee County sheriff, began serving bottled water and food that need not be cooked in water to hundreds of inmates in the county jail. Some residents have begun washing their children and pets with bottled water.

And Flint’s mayor, Dayne Walling, who had attended a 2014 event to celebrate the switch to the new water supply, called for returning to the city’s old water supply and urged state officials to provide millions of dollars to help pay for it.

The contaminated water was just the latest blow to Flint, an economically battered city that has struggled for years with factory closings, job losses and population decline.

Along Saginaw Street downtown, where at least one business had an “un-leaded” sign posted by a jug of water, residents had lingering questions: Would filters really do enough to make the water safe? What about unfiltered showers? Could they rely on the water at work and at restaurants? And why had it taken so long for leaders to figure out that there was a problem?

“I don’t think people know what’s going on at all,” said Chris Thornton, 49, who described the first blast of water from his faucets some days as looking like urine, smelling like bleach and tasting of metal. After his wife, Ronda, 50, felt sick to her stomach for months, the Thorntons began buying jugs of bottled water, though the price — on top of an already steep water bill — has been overwhelming.

“As far as my family,” Ronda Thornton said, “we’ve just given up on the city’s water.”

Flint’s water problems are tied inextricably to its fiscal woes. In 1960, nearly 200,000 people lived here. But auto plants closed, and the population has dropped by half. By 2011, Flint’s shrunk tax base and seemingly intractable budget problems prompted Mr. Snyder to appoint an
emergency manager for the city. Over the next four years, the city had four managers overseeing operations. Along the way, the city switched its water supply.

For decades, the city bought water from Detroit, which treated water from Lake Huron, then piped it here, 70 miles to the northwest. But with the costs mounting, Flint’s leaders decided they could save millions by joining a new regional authority that would draw and treat its own water from Lake Huron.

There was one complication: Flint needed an alternative water supply from April 2014 until the new regional system is ready, probably next year. In the interim, Flint switched to using water from the Flint River, which state officials say had been a backup source in the past.

Ask residents about the Flint River, and many of them roll their eyes. They say it was once as a dumping ground for car parts, grocery carts and refrigerators. There have been significant improvements and intensive restoration campaigns in recent years, though a Flint River Fest set for Friday has been postponed, organizers said, given the “current drinking water crisis.”

Even now, state officials say that treated Flint River water is safe and capable of meeting state and federal standards. Officials say the problem may be that some of the aging pipes and service lines that carry water into Flint’s homes and businesses contain lead and are being corroded by water. The water Flint used to receive from Detroit was treated with chemicals intended to prevent such corrosion.

For months, questions about lead and other risks multiplied. “Everyone kept saying: ‘It’s safe! It’s safe! It’s safe!’ ” recalled Melissa Mays, a Flint resident who says she was sickened by the water and has helped organize residents over the issue.

Then in September, a researcher from Virginia Tech released findings from the water in hundreds of Flint homes showing elevated lead levels. Blood tests released by a local pediatrician — and corroborated last week by state officials analyzing their own testing — showed an increase in lead levels in children in some neighborhoods since 2014, when the city began drawing water from the river.

“We all have a concern about Flint’s drinking water in terms of what we’re seeing in terms of lead,” Mr. Snyder said last week.

Mr. Walling said that the move to river water occurred when an emergency manager controlled the city, though the City Council did vote for the city’s plans for a new, regional water system. He acknowledged supporting the move in a state of the city address, but said that he had not been given sufficient information about the safety risks.

“I had to work with what I knew at the time,” Mr. Walling, who is up for election next month, said in an interview.

But for many residents, the authorities failed the city by taking so long to react. “Anytime you have to weigh money against the health and welfare of people, it always has to be the health and
welfare you go with,” said the Rev. Alfred Harris, a local pastor who has stopped conducting baptisms at his church because of concerns about the water. “We’ve been talking about this for the last 14 months, and they did not give a sincere ear to any of us. Shame on you!”

LeeAnne Walters said her son, Gavin, 4, who has immune system issues, had suffered direct consequences. After the switch to river water, which sometimes looked brown in their house, Gavin dropped to 27 pounds, far below the weight of his twin brother, she said. He sometimes seemed unable to pronounce words he knew, she said, and then test results showed an elevated lead level in his blood.

“He is going to deal with the side effects of this for the rest of his life,” Ms. Walters said. “I don’t think there’s a word angry enough to describe my anger. I trusted the city, and I helped the city poison my kid. Who thought this could happen in the United States?”


October 10, 2016

Katharine Hayhoe, a Climate Explainer Who Stays Above the Storm

By John Schwartz
New York Times

LUBBOCK, Tex. — A member of Katharine Hayhoe’s church asked her a question after services a couple of weeks ago: “Do you feel our weather is getting more extreme?”

Time was, the question might have been the start of an argument with Dr. Hayhoe, a climate scientist at Texas Tech University here. Instead, it led to a friendly discussion of the kinds of things they had both seen: Because of climate change, the always shifting weather in West Texas was showing greater extremes, including more severe drought and fiercer inundations when storms came.

When she started her work spreading the word about climate change in Texas, very few people in the Lone Star State believed it was happening, and even fewer believed that people were causing it. Since then, acceptance has grown: A 2013 poll by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that seven in 10 Texans agree that climate change is real, though fewer than half said humans were the major cause.

The evidence of changing weather patterns is not just in the news, but all around them: More than half of those in the Texas survey said they had personally experienced the effects of global warming.

Dr. Hayhoe is not a climate pioneer like Al Gore or a street-marching activist like Bill McKibben or a geek icon like Bill Nye. But she has emerged as one of the nation’s most effective communicators on the threat of climate change and the need for action.
She lives and works out here in West Texas, but lately seems to be everywhere, kicking off a series of “Global Weirding” videos, posting on Twitter and Facebook, and speaking anywhere from local churches to international conferences. Last week, she appeared at the White House to discuss climate change with President Obama and the actor Leonardo DiCaprio at the first South by South Lawn ideas festival.

Dr. Hayhoe has come to prominence in part because she is just so darned nice. It would be too easy to chalk that up to her Canadian background — she says it does help explain her commitment to finding consensus — and she has found that she gets her science across more effectively if she can connect with people personally. In a nation seemingly addicted to argument as a blood sport, she conciliates. On a topic so contentious that most participants snarl, she smiles. She is an evangelical Christian, and she does not flinch from using the language of faith and stewardship to discuss the fate of the planet.

“Katharine Hayhoe is a national treasure,” said Anthony Leiserowitz, the director of the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. He said that she combined powerful communications skills, world-class scientific credentials and an ability to relate to conservative religious communities that can be skeptical about the risks of a changing climate.

Gavin Schmidt, a NASA climate scientist, said in an email that Dr. Hayhoe’s faith is an important factor, because “people can accept unwelcome truths much more readily if they come from within, rather than from outside, their community/family/group.”

While some climate warriors treat those who are not inclined to believe them as dupes or fools, she wants to talk. “If you begin a conversation with, ‘You’re an idiot,’ that’s the end of the conversation, too,” she said over tacos at a Tex-Mex restaurant, having ordered in the fluent Spanish she picked up during her parents’ missionary service in Colombia. She is 44, but seems younger — someone who speaks with authority but can punctuate a statement about a surprising scientific fact with a wondering, almost giggly, “Isn’t that crazy?”

Now, in a presidential election race with high stakes for responding to climate change — Donald J. Trump has called global warming a hoax and would reverse deals that President Obama has spearheaded to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while Hillary Clinton has called for continuing along Mr. Obama’s path — there is room for many approaches. Some will rally the troops; she will reach out to the quiet people in the middle, the undecided, who might listen.

She gets her share of abuse; you really don’t want to read the emails she gets, and she spends a fair amount of her time on Twitter blocking people who try to bait her with abusive language. But she still tries to present herself and the science without tumult, and with a measure of optimism.

Dr. Hayhoe did not set out to be a smiling climate crusader. In the scientific circles of her training, she encountered no one who needed to be convinced that what she was studying was valid, any more than a professor of literature would have to argue in favor of the existence of books.
But then she started to realize that many people didn’t agree. She discovered to her shock six months after her marriage to Andrew Farley, a linguistics scholar, that he was among the dubious.

She discussed that moment of realization with her students in class last month. Her husband had only understood her dissertation work to be some arcane combination of chemistry and computation; he did not believe climate change was real.


October 10, 2016

Indigenous groups are way ahead of everyone else at protecting forests

And they are turning the Dakota Access protests into a worldwide environmental movement.

By Alexander Sammon
Mother Jones

By the time three federal government agencies issued their joint statement halting construction of the Dakota Access pipeline on September 9, there were some 5,000 protesters on site in Cannon Ball, North Dakota challenging the project. The groups spread out over a massive campsite on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, where the tribe says the proposed construction of the pipeline threatens their water source and sacred lands.

After hearing about the Standing Rock resistance, Native groups from all over the world came to stand in solidarity with the Sioux, traveling from Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and the Ecuadorian Amazon. The thousands of demonstrators represented some 280 different indigenous tribes, by far the largest Native American protest in recent memory and perhaps one of the largest ever recorded. The project's construction permits are being reconsidered for violation under the National Environmental Policy Act, a process that will run through November 21. But no matter what happens with the pipeline, many of these demonstrators see the events at Standing Rock as a springboard for a larger indigenous solidarity movement.

It's not simply an issue of indigenous land rights—many groups who showed up at Standing Rock are hoping to mount a larger unified effort to combat climate change. According to Leo Cerda, Ecuador field coordinator of the group Amazon Watch and member of the Kichwa tribe, the plight of indigenous land rights in the face of corporate resource extraction is a global phenomenon. Cerda, who hails from the Ecuadorean Amazon, traveled with a group of four all the way to North Dakota to show solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux. "The indigenous struggle against governments and corporations is the same all over the world," Cerda told Mother Jones. "We have been among the only people doing anything to stop climate change," he added.

In Bolivia and Brazil, non-indigenous lands were deforested at nearly three times the rate of their indigenous counterparts.
A new study by the World Resources Institute, a resource management NGO, lends credence to that claim. Analyzing deforestation rates in Amazonian regions of Bolivia, Brazil, and Colombia over the course of 12 years, the WRI found that legally recognized indigenous forestlands experienced significantly lower rates of forest loss. In Bolivia and Brazil, non-indigenous lands were deforested at nearly three times the rate of their indigenous counterparts; in Colombia, the rate was double.

The study also found that indigenous forestlands in these three countries would provide between $25 and $34 billion in carbon sequestration over the next 20 years. The report urged for indigenously-held forestlands to become a central tenet of climate change mitigation strategies, a course of action conspicuously absent from Bolivia, Brazil, and Colombia’s Nationally Determined Contributions to the UN’s new climate deal.

Still, indigenous land protectors are not waiting around for legislative assistance. Instead, they are putting to use protest methods practiced at Standing Rock. Last Wednesday, CONFENIAE, a regional organization of 1,500 indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon, was surrounded and forcibly evacuated by 200 police and riot cops in relation to its role in blocking 29 proposed oil plots. According to Cerda, members of Amazon Watch are using police relation tactics learned in North Dakota to hold their ground and establish their rights. "We were surprised that the same sorts of rights violations by police happen in the so-called free world," he said of his time in North Dakota. Currently, Cerda's group is creating a camp of its own to protest land expropriation in the name of increased oil extraction in Ecuador.

The six-week governmental review process that will determine the fate of the Dakota Access Pipeline is slated to begin on October 11. Though there have been no early indications as to how that process might turn out, one thing is certain—indigenous groups worldwide will be watching.

http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2016/10/how-dakota-access-pipeline-protests-launched-global-movement

October 10, 2016

Ranchers Tote Guns as Tribes Dig In for Long Pipeline Fight

By Jack Healy
New York Times

As others built winter shelters over the weekend, she worked in the camp’s supply area, sifting through thousands of donated sleeping bags, parkas and boots.

Fighting for Water

Nine indigenous groups gathered in New York City to show solidarity with the Standing Rock protest in North Dakota. They are also urging the city to rename Columbus Day “Indigenous Peoples Day.”
A man stopped by and asked if there was a spare toothbrush. There were 4,000.

“This is my home now,” Ms. Henderson said.

It has been a month since the United States government made an unprecedented intervention in this high-plains battle over the environment, energy development and tribal rights by temporarily blocking the 1,170-mile Dakota Access pipeline from crossing under the Missouri River.

Tribal and environmental activists say that the pipeline would threaten water supplies for the Standing Rock Sioux and millions of others downstream, and that its route would destroy tribal burial grounds and sacred cultural lands. The pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners, says it has followed federal and state rules and claims that the pipeline would be a safer and cleaner way to move crude oil from fields to refineries.

On Sunday, a federal appeals court removed a major obstacle for the company by rejecting the Standing Rock Sioux’s request for an injunction against the pipeline. The tribe has sued in federal court, arguing that it was not properly consulted about how the pipeline’s route could affect ancestral tribal lands. (The company said Tuesday that it would resume that work.)

The appeals court said crews could resume work on private lands, bringing the pipeline closer to the Army Corps of Engineers land straddling the pipeline’s crucial river crossing.

Protesters Respond to Pipeline Ruling

The U.S. government temporarily halted construction on the Dakota Access pipeline after a federal court denied a Native American tribe’s request for an injunction.

The corps is responsible for deciding whether to grant the pipeline an easement to cross under the river. It has been reviewing its earlier pipeline-related decisions, made under federal environmental laws, and said on Monday that it hoped to reach a conclusion soon.

In a joint statement from the corps and the Interior and Justice Departments, officials again asked the pipeline company to pause construction within 20 miles of Lake Oahe, the dammed section of the Missouri. The agencies and the tribes will meet this week in Phoenix to discuss the need for nationwide reform on how Native Americans are consulted on major infrastructure projects like the pipeline.

“We continue to respect the right to peaceful protest and expect people to obey the law,” the agencies said in the statement.

David Archambault II, the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux, said that he was disappointed by the legal setback but that the tribe would make a “full-court press” to urge President Obama and federal officials not to let the pipeline cross the river.

“We’re hoping he does the right thing by our people at Standing Rock,” Mr. Archambault said.
Even with the government-ordered halt, the pipeline’s progress never really stopped.

Crews kept digging ditches and draping sections of the light-green 30-inch pipe into ranchers’ fields not covered by the federal order. And protesters kept dogging them, driving to construction sites as far as 80 miles from their camps to try to halt work.

On Monday, a holiday that many celebrate as Indigenous Peoples Day instead of Columbus Day, scores of protesters rallied and pitched a tepee beside a section of pipe near the tiny farming town of St. Anthony. Twenty-seven people were arrested. In all, about 130 have been arrested since the large-scale protests began this summer.

Ranchers are becoming edgy. Sheriff’s deputies worried about being identified at protests have taken off their name tags, and some say they have been followed home. Local officials here are increasingly exasperated because Washington has declined or ignored their requests, they say, for emergency funds and federal law enforcement officers.

“The camp is on federal land, and the federal government has not responded to official requests for resources,” said Cody Shulz, the chairman of the Morton County Commission.

Local officials also criticized Washington’s move to intervene and pause construction, saying it had prolonged demonstrations that have drained money and left law enforcement stretched thin.

“It’s made this whole situation more confusing in the long run,” said Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier of Morton County, who has led the law enforcement response to weeks of anti-pipeline demonstrations. “It has dragged it on longer and put an uncertainty on the whole thing.”

Jon Moll, 38, a sheriff’s deputy in Morton County, has been working six- and seven-day weeks since the summer. He has carefully pulled down a protester who locked himself to the bucket of an excavator. Deputy Moll described the tensions of a demonstration last month where, sheriff’s officials say, a protester on horseback charged at deputies.

“Some have no problem with us,” Deputy Moll said as he drove past the camps on Saturday, many people offering a quick wave at his sport utility vehicle. “You have people that despise your existence.”

Officers like Deputy Moll say they have been trying to keep tense face-offs in the rolling plains from spiraling into violence. Sheriff Kirchmeier says demonstrators have charged onto private property and attacked pipeline contractors. Demonstrators say security guards for the pipeline unleashed guard dogs on them during a confrontation.

Winter may be coming, but so are new supporters. A group of Comanche teenagers and their parents drove to a camp from Oklahoma over the weekend to march up a rural highway to land that the pipeline would cross. A group of 400 indigenous grandmothers is making plans to come. In South Dakota, people are raising money for 1,000 Oglala Lakota Sioux children to travel to the camps.
“Something bigger than us is happening here,” said LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, a tribal historian for the Standing Rock Sioux who helped found the first camp, on her property, in April.

On Sunday morning, she had just come home from buying breakfast supplies in Bismarck, N.D., for the camp. Her trips these days begin with her husband telling her to be safe.

“We watch every day,” she said. “We have a right to live here.”


October 10, 2016

Urgent action needed to prevent cholera becoming 'the real disaster' in Haiti

Christian Aid

Cholera could kill more people in Haiti than Hurricane Matthew, without urgent action to control the disease and ensure families have safe drinking water, Christian Aid warned today.

“I am worried that if it is not controlled as soon as possible, cholera will be the real disaster,” said Prospery Raymond, Country Manager for Haiti, speaking after visiting the worst-hit south of Haiti.

“There is a risk that more people could die from the disease than from the hurricane.”

Hurricane Matthew hit on Wednesday 5th October and left at least 400 people dead, an estimated 750,000 people needing aid and more than 25,000 houses badly damaged.

“There is a lot of water around but it is not drinkable because animals have died in it, and so on. The risk of contamination is really high. We need to help families get clean drinking water,” added Mr Raymond.

Christian Aid is working with Norwegian Church Aid to get water purifying tablets to 1,500 families (around 9,000 people) in Haiti, said Mr Raymond.

The thousands of people forced out of their houses by Hurricane Matthew are also desperate for building materials so they can repair their properties and go home, he added.

They are currently sheltering in churches, schools and the houses that withstood the storm. The ground is too saturated for tents.

“People want to repair their homes quickly so they can return home. They are desperate for corrugated iron, clips, wood and hammers,” said Mr Raymond.
“We will provide the materials to 1,000 families, and help from an engineer if they want it, and they will fix their houses.”

He argued the Haitian government should now control and subsidise the prices of such materials, to help as many people as possible to repair their homes, where repair is even possible.

Mr Raymond also appealed to people in the UK to support Christian Aid’s Haiti appeal.

“We would like to help many more families to be able to return home and would be so grateful for support from people in the UK,” he said. “It will also help children return to school, which they can’t do while schools are used for shelter.”

During his visit to the worst-hit part of Haiti, Mr Raymond also found that all the houses built there by Christian Aid partners following the 2010 earthquake had survived the hurricane and were each being used as shelter for between two and five families.

“The houses we built are saving lives, because they are sheltering other people,” he said.

Mr Raymond, who is himself from the south of Haiti, said that despite their struggle and dangers they face, people still have hope.

“The situation is really critical and people are living in difficult circumstances but they have faith in the future and they are happy with the help they are receiving,” he said.

“Even if they know they are living in the path of hurricanes, they continue to believe in a brighter future for their children.”


October 10, 2016

Court Rejects Dakota Access Injunction, But Standing Rock Sioux Vow ’This is Not The End’

‘This ruling puts 17 million people who rely on the Missouri River at serious risk’

By Nika Knight, staff writer
Common Dreams

A U.S. federal court of appeals ruled against the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe late Sunday evening and denied its request for an emergency injunction against the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline.
The ruling allows Energy Transfer Partners—the Dallas-based company funding the project—to move forward with construction of the pipeline on all privately owned land up to the Missouri River," NBC notes. Construction was temporarily halted in late August while the case was considered by the court.

The ruling was handed down the evening before Columbus Day, which celebrates the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas—an event that heralded centuries of genocide, many Indigenous people have argued. A growing movement seeks to instate the holiday Indigenous Peoples' Day in its stead.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has vowed to continue its battle against the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the timing of the ruling helped prompt widespread calls for solidarity and support.

"This ruling puts 17 million people who rely on the Missouri River at serious risk," said Dave Archambault II, chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. "And, already, the Dakota Access Pipeline has led to the desecration of our sacred sites when the company bulldozed over the burials of our Lakota and Dakota ancestors. This is not the end of this fight. We will continue to explore all lawful options to protect our people, our water, our land, and our sacred places."

As Native News Online explains: "The 1,168-mile pipeline crosses through the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's ancestral lands and within a half mile of the reservation boundary. Construction crews have already destroyed and desecrated confirmed sacred and historic sites, including burials and cultural artifacts. The original pipeline route crossed the Missouri River just north of Bismarck, the capital of North Dakota. The route was later shifted downstream, to the tribe's doorstep, out of concerns for the city's drinking water supply."

While the two-page ruling found that the tribe had not met the requirements for emergency injunctive relief, the court did note that the National Historic Preservation Act may require additional consultation. In fact, "the court's ruling acknowledged that it was 'not the final word,' noting that the final decision lies with the Corps of Engineers," as NBC reports. "While it said the tribe hadn't met the strict requirements of the act to force a halt to construction, the three-judge panel said it "can only hope that the spirit" of the [National Historic Preservation] act 'may yet prevail.'"

Indeed, a necessary easement is still awaiting Army Corps of Engineers approval, "a decision the Corps counsel predicts is likely weeks away [...] where the tribe alleges historic sites are at risk," the court's ruling observes. It is this easement that the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies hope will be denied based on the National Historic Preservation Act.

"That note, Archambault said, is the court's signal 'to not proceed' with the project," NBC writes: "It seems they are coming to the same conclusion as the federal government in acknowledging there is something wrong with the approvals for the pipeline," he said. "We see this as an encouraging sign."

"We are troubled by the court’s decision," added Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, "but as water protectors and land defenders, our resolve to
stop this Bakken frack-oil pipeline will not be diminished. We will continue to support the tribe's efforts to hold the U.S. federal government accountable for rubber stamping this dirty oil project. Meanwhile, our hearts and minds go to the pipeline fighters who will continue to use prayer and peaceful civil disobedience to disrupt business-as-usual and stop this black snake from being completed. This fight is far from over."

The Obama administration had previously requested that Energy Transfer Partners voluntarily halt construction so that the tribe's concerns could be addressed, but the company, undeterred, has refused to stop building the pipeline.

Meanwhile, the growing protest camp of Indigenous water protectors and allies from around the world continues to fight against the pipeline and peacefully occupy construction sites—despite riot police being deployed against them—in an effort to put a stop to the project.


October 10, 2016

After Court Lifts Injunction, Government Once Again Calls for Voluntary Halt to Dakota Access

As arrests of water protectors continued on Monday, joint letter from three agencies says that Standing Rock Sioux objections should be considered

By Jon Queally, staff writer
Common Dreams

Repeating a previous request last month, federal agencies on Monday asked the company building the Dakota Access Pipeline to voluntarily halt construction so that objections raised by the Standing Rock Sioux and other tribes can be properly considered.

A joint statement issued by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the Department of the Interior, and the Justice Department asked for the pause in work less than 24 hours after a federal court lifted an injunction against the controversial oil pipeline that opponents say threatens regional water supplies and infringes on tribal sovereignty.

According to Reuters, the joint statement said the Army Corp is still reviewing concerns raised by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and other tribal nations about the pipeline's path.

On Monday, protests against the pipeline continued with numerous arrests, including that of actress Shailene Woodley who live-streamed her arrest on Facebook live.

Despite Sunday's court ruling, pipeline opponents vowed to continue, and intensify, their resistance the project.
"Our hearts and minds go to the pipeline fighters," said Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. "[We] will continue to use prayer and peaceful civil disobedience to disrupt business-as-usual and stop this black snake from being completed. This fight is far from over."


October 10, 2016

Caring for Creation makes the Christian case for climate action

The new book by Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas is a marriage of science and faith

By John Abraham
The Guardian

Most of you are aware of a growing movement amongst persons of faith to bring more action on dealing with climate change. The argument is powerful for the faithful – the Earth is God’s gift to humanity. We should care for it accordingly.

From within this movement, there are huge voices, widely respected by both the scientific and faith communities. Perhaps the best known is Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, a top climate scientist who is also an evangelist Christian. There are other persons and organizations who work similarly to connect these two world viewpoints in a powerful yet common-sense way.

Recently a book has been published by a faith-science duo. That duo is Paul Douglas, respected meteorologist, entrepreneur, Republican, and Christian, and his writing partner Mitch Hescox who leads the Evangelical Environmental Network (the largest evangelical group devoted to creation care). Their book, entitled Caring for Creation, provides a masterful balance of science, faith, and personal journey.

The style of the book is one I have not seen before. It is a side-by-side presentation of first science, then faith, then science, and back to faith. Interspersed within the main text are enlightening anecdotes mainly from weather forecasters across the country which show an informed lived experience of experts watching the climate change before their very eyes. Importantly the authors provide a list of concrete things that we all can do, starting right now to make a meaningful impact in reducing global warming.

Within this book there is real science. Not just about what is happening now, but the history of climate science, how we’ve known since the 1800s that human emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide can warm the atmosphere. We also hear from Douglas about observed changes to the weather we all experience. This isn’t a problem for far-off times or far-away places. This is an issue that is being manifested now.
Hescox articulates a message grounded in the proposition that the creation is a gift from God and there is a real responsibility to care for it. Not only for others distant in time and space that may suffer, but for our own good. In fact, he argues persuasively that caring for this creation can help strengthen one’s faith.

Hescox also argues from a pro-life position. Caring for creation is the ultimate pro-life stance. Squandering resources and gifts will not only cause real harm to people and our economy, but it will endanger the lives of many of the most vulnerable.

Douglas provided a great summary:

*I am a scientist but I believe in absolutes – I believe in more than I can observe, measure and test. The book of Genesis tells us that God made us in his self image. He gave us big, beautiful brains and the ability to think, reason, solve problems, make smart decisions, and improve our lives. He also gave us the good sense not to foul our nest.*

Both of these intertwined stories of faith and science are woven together in a way that is easily accessible for non-scientists and people who are not of faith. We don’t need to be climate scientists or religious experts to get a lot out of the authors’ perspective.

There are a few quotes from the book that do a great job of encapsulating the central themes which I will share.

With respect to the science, Douglas reminds us that “no matter where you look – the oceans or atmosphere – the Earth is warming.” He later adds, this means we “embrace the reality of today and see the world, not as we think it should be, but as it really is – the world we’ve influenced by releasing a trillion tons of carbon in the geological blink of an eye.”

Hescox states that, “It is almost incredulous that we meet God in creation but we haven’t made the connection that caring for creation nurtures our relationship with him.”

He later includes this excellent statement from Jonathan Koomey from Stanford. “What is conservative after all but one who conserves, one who is committed to protecting and holding close the things by which we live.”

And perhaps the best statement, which so clearly encapsulates this book and the movement, is provided in the text by Dr. Hayhoe. She states, “Christian values demand we take action. Climate change disproportionally affects the poor and vulnerable – the very people that Christians are called to care for and love.”

I would only add this addendum. Climate change affects us all, wealthy or impoverished, Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern, young or old, peach or olive or brown skinned. Taking actions can be motivated just by pure selfishness, wanting to maintain a high standard of living, or by selflessness, or by faith. It doesn’t matter what the motivation is but with groups such as scientists and evangelists working together, the possibility is limitless.
October 12, 2016

Standing Rock: A New Moment for Native-American Rights

By Sierra Crane-Murdoch
The New Yorker

The last time Native Americans gathered and the nation noticed was in 1973. That February, after members of the Oglala Sioux tribe failed to impeach their chairman on charges of corruption, they, with leaders of the American Indian Movement, occupied the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. It was a final act in the movement’s years-long campaign to compel the federal government to honor tribal treaty rights. Already, Native Americans had occupied Alcatraz Island, in a largely symbolic attempt to reclaim it, and Mt. Rushmore, which had been part of the Great Sioux Reservation until Congress redrew its borders. But at Wounded Knee the movement found its symbolic apex: the U.S. Marshals surrounded the occupiers, evoking the start of the massacre that had killed more than a hundred and fifty Lakota people in 1890. Over months, the standoff escalated. Officers manned roadblocks in armored personnel carriers, and neighboring states lent their National Guards. Both sides traded gunfire. The first man shot was a marshal, who survived but was paralyzed from the waist down. The second was a Cherokee man, who died. The third was Lawrence Lamont, an Oglala Lakota, whose death was the beginning of the end of the occupation.

There are echoes of Wounded Knee in the conflict that has sprung up near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, in North Dakota. Since midsummer, thousands of Native Americans have gathered at the confluence of the Missouri and Cannonball Rivers to protest the construction of the Dakota Access oil pipeline, which would cut just north of the reservation border, crossing sacred sites and imperilling Standing Rock’s water supply in the event of a rupture. In July, the tribe filed a lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers, the agency that approved the project, arguing that it had failed to consult with the tribe as required by federal law. While the suit has played out in court, the protesters have said that they will stay until the pipeline is stopped, through winter if they must.

Federal officials have kept a careful distance, but what they have not lent in physical force the state has zealously supplied. In August, Governor Jack Dalrymple declared a state of emergency in North Dakota, warning executives at the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners, that his administration could no longer “protect their workers adequately.” Roadblocks were erected north of the protest encampment, and sheriff’s deputies escorted school buses through the area. On September 3rd, the conflict reached its highest pitch. Protesters attempted to obstruct E.T.P.’s bulldozers, and in response the company sent in private security officers, who confronted them with pepper spray and dogs. Five days later, Dalrymple deployed the North Dakota National Guard. “You’ve got a tinder box here, sir,” Chris Berg, a local TV news anchor, told him in an interview.
I arrived at the Standing Rock encampment the following evening with Lissa Yellowbird-Chase, a member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation in North Dakota, who had been attending the protests nearly every weekend since mid-August. Tents and tepees sprawled along the banks of the Cannonball River; Yellowbird-Chase’s uncle, who joined us, joked that they reminded him of “powwows in the old days, when we came by travois”—horse-drawn sleds once used by the Plains Indians. Earlier that day, the protesters had won their first major victory. After a judge ruled against the Standing Rock Sioux, the Obama Administration intervened, announcing that the pipeline would not be permitted onto the federal land beneath the Missouri River until the tribe was properly consulted. In the coming months, the Corps will reassess the impacts of the pipeline and meet with tribal leaders regarding this and other infrastructure projects. The Administration also requested that E.T.P. pause work on private land within twenty miles east and west of the river, but this was only temporary: on October 9th, a federal appeals court again ruled against the Standing Rock Sioux, allowing construction on private land to continue. (The next day, the Administration renewed its stop-work request.)

Yellowbird-Chase set up camp by a grove of cottonwoods, for relief from the late-summer heat, and, beneath a tarp, hung a tin can containing cedar leaves and coals from a neighbor’s fire to cleanse the site with smoke. The next morning, we set off for the main part of the encampment. I wondered whether the pause in construction would prompt people to leave, but it became clear, as we approached a mass of tent canopies, that the protest was still growing. Men and women unloaded donations from the trunks of cars—boxes of squash, bags of warm clothes—and passed them with cheerful efficiency down a line of volunteers. Others chopped firewood, hauled trash, peeled vegetables, and fed horses. I unloaded some donations and then joined Yellowbird-Chase for lunch. (It was important, she said, that “we eat with the people.”) As we stood in line, friends and strangers stopped to chat. Many would greet us like this throughout the day, including an elderly white man who was handing out red feathers and who explained, timidly, that he’d dreamed of the protests before he’d come and, in this dream, had handed out red feathers. “That’s cool,” Yellowbird-Chase said, and stuck one in her hair.

Over the weekend, the encampment continued to swell with new visitors. Aztec dancers came from Minneapolis, then delegations from the Round Valley Indian Tribes in California, the Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, and the Blackfeet Nation in Montana. They entered through a corridor lined with the flags of hundreds of other tribes who had offered support. These arrivals, which happened every day, signified as much a coming together of old enemies as of old friends. Weeks earlier, the Crow, who aided the U.S. Cavalry in its nineteenth-century battles against the Sioux, had come with blankets, coolers of meat, and a horse trailer full of cordwood.

The shared history that brought these tribes together is, of course, more recent than the massacre at Wounded Knee. In “Custer Died for Your Sins,” a manifesto of the Native American-rights movement from 1969, the Sioux historian Vine Deloria, Jr., observed that, although “people often feel guilty about their ancestors killing all those Indians years ago,” the twentieth century had in fact “seen a more devious but hardly less successful war waged against Indian communities.” Deloria was referring to a host of injustices: the lack of funding for tribal education, which forced parents to send their children to government-run boarding schools; the termination of federal recognition for scores of tribes, which caused the loss of services promised by treaty; and a disregard for the sovereignty of tribes, manifest in the building of infrastructure...
on Indian land without honest consultation or consent. In Deloria’s time, that infrastructure was
dams, which flooded forests and farmland on many reservations, including Standing Rock.
Today, as Dave Archambault II, the tribe’s chairman, suggested in an editorial for the Times, that
infrastructure is pipelines. “Tribes have always paid the price for America’s prosperity,” he
wrote.

Most days, protesters march or caravan to nearby construction sites to dance, sing, and engage in
prayerful ceremonies. When I was there, though, they stayed home, buoyed and exhausted by the
turn of events. In the catharsis of the encampment, it would have been easy to forget the anxiety
present just to the north, were it not for the surveillance helicopters circling daily overhead. As
one hovered low over the encampment one evening, Yellowbird-Chase said wryly, “They’re
making sure we’ve had our three meals today.” Some found these intrusions funny, as if the state
were a petulant little brother, taking his games too seriously. I, and others, found them dissonant
and unsettling. One morning, I ventured out to the pipeline route, on dirt roads through open
pasture, and came across eight vehicles, six of them law enforcement. Another belonged to a
local rancher, who told me, “When you see cars full of people and no license plate and bats in
the back, you fear for your family.” I asked whether he was willing to stay and talk longer. “No,”
he said. “It’s too dangerous.”

When people compare Standing Rock with Wounded Knee, they note that, at the height of the
1973 occupation, there were several hundred protesters; now there are several thousand, owing
in part to social media. But there is another important distinction, which is that the movement has
largely committed itself to nonviolence. At least ninety people have been arrested so far for acts
of civil disobedience—trespassing on construction sites and locking themselves to bulldozers—
but none were carrying weapons or behaving violently. In the confrontation on September 3rd,
six protesters were bitten by dogs, and one security officer was pinned against his truck, then let
go without injury. (The rancher I met, who said he witnessed the skirmish, claimed that he had
seen Native Americans armed with tomahawks.) The protesters have taken to calling themselves
“protectors,” a semantic distinction that can sound a little hokey until you recall the historical
stereotypes of savagery that they are laboring against.

On September 25th, protesters returned to the construction site to plant corn and willow trees in
the pathway of the pipeline. Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier told the local press that a security guard
was assaulted, sustaining minor injuries, and a protestor was spotted with a gun. (Kirchmeier’s
office did not supply evidence of either claim, and no arrests were made.) Then, on September
28th, in perhaps the most troubling confrontation so far, officers surrounded a group of
protesters, holding loaded rifles. The protesters threw their arms in the air, shouting, “We have
no weapons! We have no weapons!” Both sides retreated unscathed, but it was a deaf and
reckless nod to history on the part of the state. And it made me wonder whether the weapons that
officers have seen are imagined, a way to give form to the fear that the protest inspires—the fear
not of violence but of a people who have survived, who remember things the rest of us often
choose to forget, and who have found each other, again, through this memory.

rights
‘Do it for the water’: Native Americans carry Potomac water on prayerful, 400-mile journey

By Julie Zauzmer
Washington Post

It’s noon on a Thursday, and Reyna Davila-Day would ordinarily be sitting in her AP Human Geography class, memorizing the rivers of the globe.

Instead she’s stumbling in and out of a gully alongside a busy road, ignoring the cars and trucks that whiz past, walking as fast as her 14-year-old legs can carry her. Instead of memorizing the world’s most important rivers, she’s walking one of them: The mighty Potomac, 405 miles from its source in West Virginia to the Chesapeake Bay.

In a 13-day relay, Davila-Day and dozens of fellow participants in a Native American ritual are walking the entire length of the Potomac, praying for its return to unpolluted health. They will speak to the water, sing to the water, and pray for the water.

And now, on a Thursday afternoon half a continent away from her Human Geography class, Davila-Day is carrying the water.

“It’s us showing that the water needs to be cared for, and that we care about the water,” she says, beads clinking against the copper vessel full of a few precious pints of the river. “At school, they ask why I do it. I tell them that the water has a spirit. They’re like, ‘It does?’”

The Potomac River Water Walk began with a water ceremony — a tradition in the Ojibwe tribe — at Fairfax Stone, the 18th-century marker now located in a West Virginia state park that marks the source of the Potomac River. Participants took water from the clear pool at the start of the river and filled the copper vessel. Starting on Oct. 7, a band of Native Americans and supporters began walking that vessel all the way from the river’s clean source to its significantly more polluted end.

“We want the water to have a taste of itself. This is how you began, and this is how we want you to be again,” explained Sharon Day, the organizer of the walk and Reyna’s great-aunt.

The walkers made plans to pass through the District on Saturday — walking right past the White House — and to reach the Chesapeake Bay on Wednesday, Oct. 19. There, they’ll pour the clean water into the polluted bay.

People tend to ask Day if the walkers’ goal is to raise awareness about water pollution. Sure, awareness is nice, she responds — but that’s a paltry goal. The intent of this walk is to speak to the water’s spirit, not to a human audience.
“All the while, we’re speaking to that water. We’re telling the water how much we care about her,” Day said. “We really do support the work of other environmental groups. We believe what’s missing from most of this work is the idea that the water has a spirit, and we as spiritual people need to speak to that spirit.”

That resonated with Beth Brent. On her first walk, she planned to participate for a week and ended up walking for two months. “It’s a prayer. Something about being in prayer every day, it’s powerful,” said Brent, who is the local participant on this walk, as a resident of Harpers Ferry right on the Potomac.

Brent, too, has worked with water cleanup organizations, and found something in the walking that was missing there.

“They keep it in the realm of science and water monitoring. That’s a very colonizing, Western white male way of engaging with nature,” she said, noting that Ojibwe tradition allows only women to carry the water on these walks, with men in supporting roles.

Day trained as a medewin, a spiritual leader for her tribe, and she has participated in traditional Ojibwe walks all over the country. She has walked the length of the Mississippi, the Chippewa, the James, the Ohio and others in the past six years. She squeezes all that walking into the vacation days that she gets off from her job, where she is executive director of a Minnesota nonprofit supporting indigenous Americans living with HIV.

It takes about $10,000 to pay for gas, food and other necessities for pulling off a walk like this one, she said. The funding comes from individual donations and grants from environmental nonprofits. When a supporter lets them stay in their home or pays for a hotel room, they sleep indoors; otherwise they stay in the RV that follows them on the road.

After all those exhausting days of walking, Day has seen the effectiveness of this sort of prayer-on-foot, she says. On an earlier walk, she carried water to Lake Superior, passing through the Penokee Range where mining companies were planning a project that could pollute the local waterways. The Native American walkers prayed for the Penokee — and twice the proposed mine has been blocked, she said.

“Those water spirits are more powerful than any bank, anything that money can buy,” Day said.

She doesn’t view her walks as a form of protest. A child of the ’60s, she protested plenty — against the Vietnam War, in favor of civil rights and feminists and lesbians and American Indians. “I spent my entire life protesting — until I carried that water,” she said. “It’s not a protest. It’s a movement toward something with love. You’re doing it because you love these rivers.”

This walk is no leisurely stroll. Day insists on a fast pace, roughly 15 minutes a mile, so that the group covers almost 30 miles a day. One person walks at a time, while the rest travel in cars and in an RV that constantly scoots ahead, about a mile at a time. At each stop, the RV pulls off the
road and the next walker hops out, ready to seamlessly grab the copper vessel from the previous walker and keep rushing down the road.

The walkers — sometimes as few as two people, almost a dozen on Thursday, anywhere from 50 to 100 over the course of the complete 13-day walk — have perfected their handoff of the copper vessel, like relay racers passing the baton.

“Ni guh izhi chigay nibi onji,” Barb Baker-LaRush says as she grabs the vessel. *I will do it for the water*, the words mean in Ojibwe. They’re written on the back of her shirt in more than 30 languages. She speeds down the shoulder of Route 9, barely wide enough for a person to walk. They’ve recently crossed from West Virginia into Virginia.

She explains her fast pace: “We’ve orphaned this water from the headwaters. We want to get this water as fast as we can back to her relatives.”

Baker-LaRush has raised seven children — four of her own and three of her husband’s — and has brought countless more into the world. At home in Wisconsin, she’s a doula. “When a woman is pregnant, that baby is growing in water,” she says as she totes the vessel past beer cans tossed on the side of the road and cars zooming perilously close. “I feel like this is my life’s work. This is part of my job.”

The two oldest of her 18 grandchildren came along with her. Karley Corbine, who is 11, is already thinking about bringing her own children on a water walk someday. “I just think of how we’re going to, how I’ll walk when I’m older and how clean the waters are going to be when I have kids.”

That’s the sort of attitude Day likes to hear. She remembers that at the end of that walk that took her through the Penokee Range, a child asked her, “Auntie, do you really think this is doing any good?”

The child doubted that the women’s walk could prevent further degradation of the environment. “The mining companies, they’re so strong. They have so much money,” the girl said.

Day responded: “But the water’s more powerful. The water’s more powerful and that’s who we’re speaking to.”

On November 30, 2016, a case will come before the Canadian Supreme Court that will have momentous and potentially global implications. In April 2016 the Canadian Supreme Court, which hears only 5 percent of referred cases, agreed to judge an appeal brought by the Inuit community of Clyde River, Nunavut, against a five-year plan to carry out seismic blasting in Baffin Bay. The people who live in Clyde River, situated on Baffin Island, use the waters and ice of the Bay for hunting, a central component of their culture and primary source of food.

With Greenpeace helping to cover legal costs, this is the first time the Supreme Court has ever taken up a case from the autonomous Inuit territory of Nunavut in the 17 years since it split from the Northwest Territories. To bolster the legal campaign by amplifying the voices of Inuit activists and to respond to Inuit requests for alternatives to fossil fuels, Greenpeace sailed their ship Arctic Sunrise to the Arctic in August. At the formal invitation of the Hamlet Council, Greenpeace activists -- including British actor Emma Thompson -- were allowed to sail the Arctic Sunrise to deliver solar panels to Clyde River in response to the community's stated desire for alternatives to fossil-fuel-driven development and the expense and pollution of diesel. For as Inuit campaigner, Nobel Prize Nominee and author Sheila Watt-Cloutier has legitimately asked in her book The Right to be Cold:

With the sea ice and permafrost of the Arctic rapidly melting, these mining operations are becoming more and more feasible and potentially profitable. It's understandable, given the poverty, lack of food security and increasing difficulty of maintaining our traditional hunting culture, that the lure of resource-related jobs would be so great ... [But] all over the world, Indigenous peoples have suffered the devastating effects of these industries on their lands. Given the wealth of evidence about the dangers of the extraction industries, we Inuit should be asking ourselves, "Why would it be any different for us? How will this industry, which is so counter to our own culture of stewardship of the land, be any different in the Arctic than it has been in other parts of the world?"

The Greenpeace vessel -- with current mayor of Clyde River, James Qillaq, former mayor Jerry Natanine and his daughter Clara aboard to help document changes to sea ice, observe wildlife and inform the other activists on board of the key issues -- set sail from St. Johns, Newfoundland, on the evening of August 4. At the invitation of Greenpeace I was onboard the Sunrise to document and report on the trip.

As we slowly emerged out of the protective harbor, long, slow swells set the ship rolling; the rounded hull is designed to rise up over thick ice, using the ship's mass to drop down and crack open safe passage. However, there's a drawback: the Arctic Sunrise is notoriously prone to pitching and lurching her way through even moderate seas.

Astern, the sun set over Newfoundland as we left one of the first European colonial settlements in North America, the port of St. Johns, named after John Cabot who sailed into the bay in 1497 on the feast day of Saint John the Baptist. Redolent with that imperial history, staring silently out to sea silhouetted atop the dark bulk of Signal Hill was Cabot's Tower, built in 1898 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of his fateful landing on the island.
The clouds were a luminescent series of glowing oranges, reds and purples as the sun sank below the receding promontory, turning the heaving ocean crimson. With each turn of the propeller, the jaws of the bay narrowed behind us. Over the bow, the horizon stretched into curved infinity. In the distance, blowholes spewed water from the heads of giant underwater mammals.

Our first whale sightings electrified the ship’s complement of activists and crew. The life of whales is part of the reason we were heading far above the Arctic Circle to Clyde River. With a surface area comparable to Western Europe, the 37,000 Inuit living in communities across Nunavut share the high Arctic with several species of whale, as well as narwhals, walruses, seals, polar bears, caribou, fish and birds, all of which the Inuit hunt, eat or otherwise use.

Situated between Baffin Island and the southwest coast of Greenland, Baffin Bay is a sensitive ecosystem with an unusually high number of different species of Arctic marine mammals. Until the last century, the only humans to regularly cross through the area were Inuit communities, who have traversed and lived in the region for 4,000 years. Now, however, the area and its Indigenous inhabitants are facing the threat of seismic blasting to survey for oil and gas deposits.

New Threats From Seismic Blasting

For former mayor Natanine (and his generation), the decision to oppose drilling for oil and gas was something he initially did not consider until he spoke with Elders about the consequences of seismic testing carried out in the 1970s:

Our community here of Clyde River experienced seismic blasting in our area. My father's generation and his brothers were the ones who experienced and saw firsthand what it did to seals. When they were hunting seals, because [the seals] were deaf they could almost go right up to the seals and puss was coming out of [their ears]. At one point I was talking to my father, talking to my uncles trying to figure out what's going to happen with seismic blasting ... because I was in support of it, thinking it's going to bring all the resources and we'll be able to build our infrastructure from it.

It took those conversations and the experience of the older generation to start Natanine on the journey to activism and opposition to testing and oil drilling:

My father and my uncle, they both said, "You know we have to stop this, we have to do everything we can to stop this because of the impacts it's going to have on seals." Seals are the mainstay, everyday food and that really got to me because as a new generation after them my dream was fancy lights and casinos and whatever. They changed my heart and I started researching what seismic testing is, what it does and how it affects everything around it. It's a destruction machine, that's what it is; it's a destruction machine. They want to destroy, get the animals moved away so that the humans will move away and not be in their way to drill for oil.

Mounted on a specialized ship, seismic blasting (or "seismic testing," as the industry calls the practice) uses underwater air guns to send high power air blasts through the water and into the subsurface rock. When the signal bounces back to an array of detectors trailing six to 10 kilometers behind the survey ship, geologists analyze it to detect differences in density that
would indicate the location of a potential oil or gas deposit. "Testing" is a prelude to drilling. According to a survey carried out by the US Geological Survey (USGS) in 2008, the Arctic as a whole contains a substantial amount of oil and gas: 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil, 30 percent of undiscovered gas and 20 percent of undiscovered natural gas liquids, with significant deposits, as well as minerals, in and around the Inuit territory of Nunavut (see the Greenpeace-commissioned Center for Sustainable Economy's Beyond Fossil Fuels report for details).

Despite growing resistance to drilling in the Canadian Arctic and elsewhere across the world, the current low price of oil and other technical constraints, Brad Hayes, president of geoscience consulting firm Petrel Robertson is confident that energy companies will make progress in the far north because reserves "are simply of too high a quality to be ignored.... They're not low-cost places to get at, because of their remoteness and what you need to do to plug in facilities, but once you have facilities and pipelines and so on, then you have an enormous resource of very high-quality oil and gas."

**The Canadian Government and Fossil Fuel Exploitation**

No real consultation took place to find out what residents of Clyde River thought about the proposed blasting. There was a meeting in 2014 before the National Energy Board's approval that was open to the public, but according to Dr. Shari Gearheard, a climate scientist and researcher for the National Snow and Ice Data Center who has been living in Clyde River for the last 16 years, the message was, "We're here to tell you what's going to happen."

The slide presentation was not in Inuktitut, drawings were not to scale and according to Natanine, any questions raised about the plan were summarily dismissed. When asked about potential impacts on marine life, company representatives were unable to provide answers. Despite oil industry assertions that seismic blasting is safe for underwater life, it's hard to square with the common-sense idea that animals that depend on sound for every aspect of their life activities could remain unaffected by high-volume sound inundating their domain every 10 seconds for months on end, with decibel levels comparable to .5 kilos of exploding TNT. Michael Stocker, director of the nonprofit advocacy group Ocean Conservation Research in Lagunitas, California, notes, "Most animals in the ocean use sound the way animals on land use eyesight.... And when we talk about saturating their environment with noise, it's going to have some impact, regardless of whether we know what that impact is."

The National Energy Board says it plans to have one person spot whales from the bridge of the seismic vessel and call off blasting if a mammal is spotted within 500 meters. However, Stocker says, "Having somebody sitting on a watch stand looking for whales at 1,000 meters is a token gesture that's fairly meaningless." I would have to agree: Aside from the fact that whales spend most of their time underwater, having now spent many hours unsuccessfully looking for whales in the Arctic through often dense and shifting fog that regularly limits visibility to a few meters, it's hard to imagine such a system being effective even during periods of high visibility.

A day's travel north by ship from Clyde River is the other-worldly stunning beauty of Sam Ford Fiord, where cliffs soar a vertical mile above the opal blue waters and we see abundant narwhals. Ninety percent of the global population of narwhals is found in the Canadian Arctic and Baffin
Bay. One of only two surviving species of toothed whales in the Monodontidae family and highly specialized Arctic predators, these astonishingly odd-looking marine mammals sport a single giant tusk and are a staple of Inuit diet. The narwhals are thought to be particularly sensitive to noise.

In a NOAA study carried out in 2004, US government scientists found the dominant signal reaching sound detectors placed near the Mid-Atlantic Ridge on the floor of the Atlantic was from air guns operated 3,000 km away, off the coast of Nova Scotia, western Africa and northeast of Brazil.

Even the since-renamed Minerals Management Service, the corrupt US government agency that mismanaged the calamitous Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010 and failed to adequately regulate oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, registered "potentially adverse" impacts on sea life. As documented in a Greenpeace-commissioned report on seismic testing by Dr. Oliver Boisseau, a senior research scientist for Marine Conservation Research, "It is clear that noise from seismic activity has an impact on whales as it can damage their hearing, ability to communicate and also displace animals, affecting diving behavior, feeding and migration patterns. There are increasing indications that this could cause serious injury, and may also disrupt reproductive success and increase the risk of strandings and ice entrapments."

**The Legal Fight to Stop Blasting**

Knowledgeable and determined, Natanine has been tirelessly leading the legal fight against the blasting, explaining to other Inuit the dangers to their hunting grounds and the food they rely on to feed themselves. Organized by Natanine and others, Clyde River took its challenge to the National Energy Board’s decision to grant blasting permission against the wishes of the community to the Canadian court of appeal. The judge, Justice Eleanor Dawson ruled against Clyde River in August 2015, writing that consultation had been adequate and whether the community agreed with the National Energy Board decision or not was irrelevant. Undeterred, Natanine pledged to keep fighting. "We are going to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court of Canada," he said, and that is exactly where the case is now headed on November 30.

With the ongoing legal issues, seismic blasting has been successfully postponed three times. In the intervening two years, a lot has changed in the political and legal landscape of Canada, and some Inuits' understandably intense distrust and outright hatred for Greenpeace -- dating back to the organization's anti-sealing campaigns of the late 1970s that devastated the Inuit economy -- has also shifted. Greenpeace issued an apology for past mistakes and the negative impact they had on Inuit livelihoods that was printed in Inuit media in 2014 and vowed a very different approach. Natanine was eventually convinced to give the organization another chance to help, not harm, Inuit. As Natanine explains it: "At first, I thought, I hate those fuckers.... But, you know, they're just human. They didn't know what they were doing. And now, to acknowledge they were wrong and that they had this negative impact on us, it touched me inside. I thought I would just forever hate them."

**Renewable Energy and the Arctic**
In their joint statement on the Arctic released in March, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US President Barack Obama write about how they will act "with partners" to implement "innovative renewable energy and efficiency alternatives to diesel and advance community climate change adaptation." They add, "We will do this through closer coordination among Indigenous, state, provincial, and territorial governments and the development of innovative options for housing and infrastructure."

Yet it took Greenpeace, at the request of the Clyde River Hamlet Council, to bring solar power to Clyde River to help them offset their use of diesel. Nunavut's government spends 20 percent of its annual budget on energy, primarily diesel for electricity production, heating and transportation. Electricity and heating cost more in Nunavut than anywhere else in Canada, which helps to explain why the government of Nunavut recently voted to change the law to promote renewable energy production through net metering. In recognition of this and the desire to retain their culture while utilizing 21st century technology to reject fossil fuel-based development, Inuit in Clyde River now have a partially solar-powered community hall.

While solar cannot be a complete answer to electricity generation in the Arctic, it will help offset the financial, environmental and health costs of diesel and can begin to chart a different developmental pathway. If solar panels can be successfully installed and maintained in a remote community in the far northern reaches of land on the planet, it naturally raises the question: What's stopping so many other communities from using the wind and sun for power generation?

Echoing Watt-Cloutier, Natanine said that the real question facilitated by the production of renewable energy is about self-determination and social power -- not electrical power:

These companies are not in it to help us to gain that [independence] and we know that from experience and looking at other parts of the world. Oil and gas is not a good answer for us to gain independence, and as Inuit we want to get back to independence where we don't have to depend on anyone: that's what we have to work for. Get away from fossil fuels where the companies and governments will control us, to a point where we can have our own power. Maybe through solar power and through wind power or other renewable resources, and that's where we want to get to. We want to be able to control our own lives again.

Of course, if Canada were serious about genuinely addressing the issues of poverty, racism, lack of infrastructure, health issues, inequality and the impact of decades of neocolonial government policies for the 37,000 Inuit, it would be very easy. Given the hundreds of billions of dollars made through tar sands extraction and mining by Canadian companies around the world and with such a low population, it would be entirely possible to eradicate poverty in the whole of Nunavut. From data compiled by Idle No More, in which reparations for historical crimes and land theft is taken into account, the Canadian government is in debt to Indigenous peoples to the tune of trillions of dollars.

After years of struggle and three years of postponement of seismic blasting, the people of Clyde River will have their day in court in Ottawa on November 30. A location to write into the calendars of anyone concerned with Inuit justice as the place to be. A second case based on similar arguments is being brought by the Chippewa of the Thames First Nation and will also be
heard by the Supreme Court on November 30. The Chippewas are fighting against the National Energy Board-approved decision to back Enbridge's expansion and reversal of its 830 km oil pipeline Line 9B, built in 1975, that runs from Sarnia, Ontario to Montreal, Quebec across their land.

Whichever way those decisions turn, they will reverberate across the whole of Canada. Furthermore, the Canadian Supreme Court is cited more than any other as precedent by courts around the world. Therefore, the decision holds implications for Indigenous peoples across the globe fighting to control their land and resist the further expansion of fossil fuel production. Further bolstering the Inuit legal case, on May 10 the Canadian government reversed its earlier stance and officially signed UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).

Whether they live up to that commitment will depend on how much pressure can be brought to bear on the National Energy Board, the Canadian government and Prime Minister Trudeau to live up to their climate change rhetoric and documented support of Indigenous rights. We will find out whether British Columbia Grand Chief Edward John was speaking in good faith when, in response to the signing of UNDRIP he commented, "Indigenous governments are not some inferior form of authority.... They are the original form of authority over their lands, resources and territories."

For more on this topic, please read the first article in this series, "On Melting Ice: Inuit Struggle Against Oil and Gas in the Arctic."

See photos here:

October 23, 2016

83 arrested at Standing Rock yesterday, Dakota Access Pipeline wants war. Native drones shot down!

By Navajo
Daily Kos

Last night on October 22, 2016, Dallas Goldtooth reported, via Facebook Live about the 83 arrests that happened yesterday near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation where American Indian Nations are resisting the construction of a four-state oil pipeline being constructed under the Missouri River, the water source for 17 million people. My detailed news timeline on Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) v. The Water Protectors can be read here if you need it.

Goldtooth, (Mdewakanton Dakota and Diné) the Keep it in the Ground Organizer for the Indigenous Environmental Network is the frontline’s go-to reporter for the Water Protectors in North Dakota. I transcribed [emphasis mine] his impromptu video update:
Hey family, this is Dallas [Goldtooth], uh, you know who I am. I'm in the Bay Area in California right now at the Bioneers Conference which is large conference of people who are socially conscious and wanna protect the planet, basically, and here to just raise awareness about the fight against Dakota Access but also raise awareness about the on-going Indigenous resistance against extractive development and colonization, but that stuff doesn't matter.

I wanna give an update from what I know, 'cause I'm here. I carry a struggle that I'm not at the camp right now. And so, I've been wanting to give good, clear information as much as possible about what's happening.

And today, was one of the largest arrests, days of arrests so far, that we've seen. I wanna kina’ tell folks what happened as it was reported to me. And our organization is working to put out a press release, as soon as possible.

But, the main thing is that over 80 people, right now the confirmed amount from the sheriff, the Morgan County Sheriff's office, is that 83 people were arrested today, in a mass arrest situation.

Um, that did not need to happen, and it was a clear case of just overtly militarized law enforcement just over stepping their boundaries and instigating something that did not need to be instigated. [...]

Various people on the ground reported night-before-last on Facebook that:

- Four semi-trucks worth of pipe were being delivered to the burial sites that were desecrated on Labor Day.
- Photos show them parked ON the desecrated grave sites with trucks. Cranes, pipes, and equipment are being delivered.
- Helicopters are overhead. [The ‘copters are constant, keeping the camps awake at night.]
- At least one new blockade is set up, facilitated by the national guard, north of camp, on highway 1806, just south of Fort Rice.
- Bi-plane is now circling.

These are all shots over the bow to incite our people to gather and force us to protect our ancestral burial sites.

DAPL did this once already: The Dakota Access Pipeline guards unleash attack dogs on our American Indian water protectors. In short, on Labor Day weekend, DAPL stopped construction 25 miles away, deliberately moved heavy construction equipment to a newly reported grave site and bulldozed the surface evidence before it could be assessed by the state. Our tribes noticed and objected! They moved in without weapons urging them to stop. Can you imagine how upset our people were to see bulldozers plowing through sacred evidence that could halt this construction? DAPL was prepared for the outrage. DAPL pepper sprayed some of the Water Protectors and some were bitten by attack dogs.

Yesterday’s DAPL action was a reprise of the Labor Day incitement. From an article FIVE years ago: Oil Executive: Military-Style ‘Psy Ops’ Experience Applied
Last week’s oil industry conference at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Houston was supposed to be an industry confab just like any other — a series of panel discussions, light refreshments and an exchange of ideas. [...] 

But things took an unexpected twist.

CNBC has obtained audiotapes of the event, on which one presenter can be heard recommending that his colleagues download a copy of the Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual. (Click below to hear the audio.) That’s because, he said, the opposition facing the industry is an “insurgency.”

Another told attendees that his company has several former military psychological operations, or “psy ops” specialists on staff, applying their skills in Pennsylvania.

Audio clips at the link. DAPL knows what they’re doing, inciting the public and expecting dramatic pushback. And influencing the police, state and federal governments to battle the public with them to protect the pipeline and corporate interests. DAPL wants war.

Unfortunately for that goal, we are being peaceful and representing with prayer.

Back to Goldtooth’s video update:

...and just causing a lot of trauma for our Water Protectors on the ground. And, there was an action earlier this morning, there’s folks that locked down at construction, to stop construction, [unintelligible] that occurred that were successful, that endeavor, but they weren't able to, we didn't have that many photos of it because police moved in pretty quick and shut off access to that site.

Meanwhile, over 300 Water Protectors did a walk of prayer and from what I understand, they were not on the easement itself but were on the land and doing a walk of prayer.

And the police, along, it was law enforcement, Dakota Access security, as well as the National Guard. So far, the National Guard has only stayed at the check point for traffic. They took that barricade down, they took out that checkpoint and they have since put up a new one. A military, a police barricade checkpoint for traffic on highway 1806.

But, this is the first time, really, that the National Guard was engaged in an operation to arrest people. They were helping corral folks, they were, um, pursuing Water Protectors who were on the land. So, at least 10 people were pepper sprayed as they were being pushed back towards the road.

As the group, the 300 people were out there praying, they were directed, they were given a clear instruction that if they stayed they would be arrested and they can move back, so the people said, okay, we’ll start moving. So they started moving back towards the road.
But this group had women and children, it had women in it, it had children in it, it had pregnant women, it had some elders, there was some children there. Again. This was a prayer march, a prayer walk, that was not near, it was not near people locking down on equipment, it was a prayer walk.

And as they were making their way back to the road, the police started aggravating the situation, the groups split into two.

There was larger group with a lot of journalists, a lot of people with media and press in that group. And, that group was all arrested. They were corralled, the police circled them up and started picking them off, one by one.

There was the second group that had some of our youth, from our Indigenous Youth Council in the camp there. Um, one of the Water Protectors is a young woman, there's a video on my page, that I shared it, where she was giving a testimony about her experience and in that testimony she was talking about how police were aggressively poking with the batons to push them back.

There was a ten-year-old child in that group. [Who was separated from his family] They were trying to say, hey, let the ten-year-old child go. Um, in that process, protecting a ten-year-old child from the aggressive police, this young woman's arm was struck with the baton, with a potential fracture in it. Protecting a ten-year-old child!

Uh, they ended up going, the child ended up going but they, a lot of the folks in that group ended up getting arrested, Um. You know... [deep breath out]

This is time a lot of folks are sharing information, like there is a general callout, and ongoing callout for people to come to camp, to Stand with Standing Rock. This is a general call to action for people.

I wanted to add something to this, is that, what we are in need of is (1) People that are willing to get arrested. (2) People that have training, a special focus on those that have actual training or have been in action experience, that know the ins and outs of civil, peaceful, civil disobedience and non-violent direct action.

There's a general callout for people who might have building skills to help us with the winter camp, which is no where near, which is separate from the action space.

And, to also understand that if you're going, it's your duty to listen to local leadership. Listen to the local Indigenous leadership and follow directions. Follow what's going on.

And, um, the other thing I want to end with is and I'm gonna end it here. Dakota Access isn't the only fight. It's not. I mean, it's the big fight right now, it's the big focus. And it can be one of the most monumental victories in our generation. Because not only will it demonstrate the power of Indigenous resistance and the power of self-determination and sovereignty, but it's also a moment for us to decide our future relationship with fossil fuels.
Dude, this is gonna, you have no idea, this could potentially strike, such, it's gonna be such a powerful moment for the climate justice movement but for us as a society. Or we're gonna, we're, demonstrating that people power is gonna decide the future of our society. And decide what just transition and climate justice looks like.

But, that's not the only fight, we have a number of front line Indigenous struggles happening all across this planet and it has to be understood that we are doing this in solidarity with each and every one of them. And this is a coordinating effort.

It is no mistake that there is a fight against the same old pipeline down in Florida, or against an [L&G?] liquid natural gas pipeline in the Klamath River basin up in Oregon or there's a struggle against oil port terminals and coal port terminals up in the Pacific Northwest. Or the fight against pipelines up in BC, or the East Coast, the AIM pipeline, that's actually on the verge of being built, I know it's called AIM, it's kina weird, right? There's a pipeline that's going underneath fricking New York City and actually going right near a nuclear power plant!

And people are standing up and resisting. So the movement against Dakota Access is not just a movement happening in South Dakota or Iowa. It's a movement that we're all a part of and a movement to keep fossil fuels in the ground. It's a bigger picture here. And each and everyone of us is a part of it. You're a part of it. I'm a part of it. And were doing this for the land, the water, the air, our future generations.

Um, and it just pisses me off, just to see, to see, [heavy, exasperated sigh] the response and the ridiculous, absurd escalation by law enforcement in North Dakota, by law enforcement in Iowa, by law enforcement and by our elected leaders in, in, and the fact that this shit was not even... like, that, our elected leaders... everyone's focused on the election, but there's BEEN NO DISCUSSION ABOUT DAKOTA ACCESS, NO DISCUSSION ABOUT CLIMATE POLICY, NO DISCUSSION... what the…? lookit.

President Obama himself has stated that the greatest single threat to our society and to this planet is climate change. And yet the current, top running Democrat, the candidate for the Democratic Party has not, has refused to actually address that issue. That's crazy and I [cellphone starts buzzing] I should reject that call... It's ridiculous! So if you...I'm just gonna explain it there. I'm gonna be all angry Indian now. [typical Dallas chuckle]

It's absolutely essential for us to talk about climate change and talk about the greater picture here. It's much bigger than one pipeline. This about the future of all of us. So, not to be all dramatic, but it is.

I'll talk to you guys later, I just wanted to give an update.

And look forward to the ongoing resistance, it's not just the resistance that happened today, there's much more beautiful movements that's happening tomorrow and the day after.

So, hope you guys have a good day, much love to you. I've not read any of the comments, I just wanna give this update about what happened today.
We still have Water Protectors in jail. We have our legal teams on the ground helping support, you know, continue to fund the movement, fund the pipeline fights, you know.

And also, the biggest way you can help is look at home, research what resistance is happening in your homelands. Whether you're, you know, fighting against the, the, freeway to go through your sacred mountain, uh, south mountain, the south of Phoenix, or whether you're on the East Coast, West Coast for wherever it be, you best believe there's a resistance there, and plug into it.

Support your local fights as well. Talk to you guys later.

Our people are still in custody, one man is missing five women from his family.

The frightening thing about Natives dealing with the police is detailed in this recent post by Meteor Blades: American Indians killed by cops at highest rate in the nation, but they're invisible in the media.

Kit O'Connell from Mint Press News reported that police have beaten, harassed, and strip-searched activists: North Dakota Police ‘Out Of Control’ In Crackdown On Dakota Access Pipeline Protests.

As reports of police abuse at Dakota Access Pipeline protests accumulate, a civil liberties NGO warns that activists’ constitutional rights are under attack.

“In Standing Rock, the cops are out of control,” warned Cooper Brinson, staff attorney at Civil Liberties Defense Center, in a report published on Thursday.

Citing reports of humiliation, beatings by police, and unnecessary strip-searches of arrestees, Brinson wrote:

“The actions of police against the land and water protectors at Standing Rock are depraved, abusive, and disgraceful. They are exceedingly disrespectful and radically humiliating to the people who have occupied this land since time immemorial.”

This is on top of the strip search of Dave Archambault II, tribal chair of the Standing Rock Sioux, and Dr. Sara Jumping Eagle, a pediatrician and member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and Actress Shailene Woodley.

Now, regarding the photo at the top of this story, Winona LaDuke had this to say:

It makes me so sad. I want to feel like what we have been fighting for over the past hundred years is our dignity and that we as Indigenous people will be accorded full human rights. This is not the case in Morton County. The endless aggression, strip searching and attempts to humiliate our people are a continuation of 160 years of this. Morton County and North Dakota live in a colonial/military/pre-civil rights, old boy, paradigm. This is evidenced throughout North Dakota in the destruction of land and the desecration and oppression of native people and women. I pray for healing for my people and our land.
October 23, 2016

How Far Will North Dakota Go to Get This Pipeline?

The militarized response is escalating, Dakota Access construction is accelerating. To be clear: North Dakota is acting as trustee for the company, using what it considers the powers of state to make this project so.

By Mark Trahant
Yes! Magazine

CANNON BALL, N.D. | A peaceful protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline ended in the arrests of 83 people in North Dakota on Saturday morning amid a chaotic scene in which police in riot gear used pepper spray to break up and subdue a group of 200 to 300 protesters.

It is the highest number of people arrested in a single day in North Dakota during the last several months of protest actions against the oil pipeline, bringing the total number of arrests up to 222.

Though the protesters behaved non-violently and cooperated with the police, North Dakota law enforcement officials described Saturday’s events as a riot. —Rapid City Journal article

A line of trucks and commercial vehicles on North Dakota’s Highway 6 Saturday was a speeding train. One vehicle after another. Traveling too fast and too close. Then, still on track, the entire train turned left and began racing down a rural dirt road.

It was clear why: This is where the Dakota Access Pipeline is being constructed.

Fresh dirt marks where the pipeline has been and where it’s supposed to go. Construction is on a speedy timetable. As the company has testified in court it wants the 1,170 mile, $3.8 billion project up and running by January 1, 2017.

Yet the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and several hundred people camped nearby are determined to slow down that train, protect the waters of the Missouri River, and ultimately, help the country begin the most important conversation of this era about energy, climate and survival.
So the machinery of the state of North Dakota has been engaged to stay on schedule. To be clear: North Dakota is acting as the trustee for the company, using what it considers the powers of state, to make this project so.

How far will North Dakota go? Look at where it has been.

The state has been an ally instead of a referee. Helping to craft a regulatory approach that avoided regulation. There is this crazy notion that the company did everything it was supposed to do—so leave them alone. Yah. Because the plan was to avoid pesky regulation. It’s so much more efficient to be governed by official winks instead of an Environmental Impact Statement.

Even now the Dakota Access pipeline figures the state, with allies in D.C., will give in and sign the final paperwork. As the Energy Transfer Partners attorney told the court: “The status quo is that we’re in the middle of building a pipeline.” So, according to Oil and Gas 360, “the next step will be for ETP to acquire easements to drill the pipeline under Lake Oahe. In the most probable scenario, the Corps will grant permits while District Court litigation will continue. ETP would ‘likely get notice on easement status by the end of October and would take 60 days to drill under the lake with a full crew and no major disruptions.’”

In other words: No worries. The state’s machinery is supposed to make it so.

How far will North Dakota go?

They’ve already tried intimidation, humiliation, and the number of arrests are increasing. Pick on protectors, elders, journalists, famous people, anyone who could make the state appear potent. The latest tactic is to toss around the word “riot” as if saying it often enough will change its definition. “Authorities arrest 83 protesters during a riot Saturday,” Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier posted on Facebook. “Today’s situation clearly illustrates what we have been saying for weeks, that this protest is not peaceful or lawful. It was obvious to our officers who responded that the protesters engaged in escalated unlawful tactics and behavior during this event. This protest was intentionally coordinated and planned by agitators.”

What’s extraordinary about that statement is the sheriff’s own pictures show a peaceful protest. As Mel Brooks once wrote in Young Frankenstein: “A riot is an ugly thing.” This was not.

But the key phrase in the sheriff’s words is fuel for the state’s machinery, the words “… or lawful.” That is the important phrase because the state would like a protest that lets the status quo continue building a pipeline. The idea of civil disobedience is that there are unjust laws (or in this case, rigged laws) and there are people willing go to jail to highlight that injustice. The state lost its moral claim when it moved the pipeline route away from its own capital city to near the Standing Rock Nation.

Again, the question is, how far will North Dakota go?

Is the state ready to arrest hundreds? Thousands? Tens of thousands? And then what? The illogical conclusion to that question is too terrible to think about.
Yesterday a call went out from the camps for more people. People who, as Dallas Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network said, are willing to get arrested. People who will interrupt their lives so that this pipeline will go no further. It’s a call to a higher law than the one that’s codified by North Dakota. And for every water protector arrested, there will always be someone else ready to be next.

How far will North Dakota go? The military-style law enforcement base at Fort Rice sends its message: Whatever it takes. Status quo must have its pipeline. That’s frightening. Except, there is an antidote to those fears. It’s found among the people at the Standing Rock camps who continue to use prayer as their status quo.

http://www.yesmagazine.org/how-far-will-north-dakota-go-to-get-this-pipeline-20161023

October 24, 2016

Planning to Travel to Standing Rock? Now Is The Time

By Sarah Sunshine Manning
Indian Country Today

“Non-violent direct action has been vilified in the media, but it’s a major way that things have gotten done in this country,” said Marty Aranaydo, Mvskoke of Oakland, California.

Speaking from the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota, Aranaydo, who is Tohono O’odham, Akimel O’odham, and Phillipino, emphasized, “that organizing is the power, and direct action is the muscle.”

Aranaydo is right. Everything from women’s suffrage, civil rights, Native American rights, LGBTQ rights, (the list really is too long to continue) were accomplished as a result of non-violent direct action – that is, taking direct action to stop injustice and bring greater attention to matters.

On October 18, water protectors called for reinforcements as the Dakota Access construction is quickly closing in on the Missouri River in North Dakota.

Water protectors, skilled in non-violent direct action, should plan to make their way to Standing Rock as quickly as you can get here.

This massive call-to-action is endorsed by more than 10 groups, including the Indigenous Peoples Power Project (IP3), The Ruckus Society, the Indigenous Environmental Network, Honor The Earth, the Oceti Sakowin Camp, the Sacred Stone Camp, West Coast Women Warriors Media Cooperative, Ancestral Pride, Digital Smoke Signals, Greenpeace USA, and The Other98.
“If we’re going to beat the pipeline, we’re going to need more people,” Nick Tilsen, Oglala Lakota, and co-founder of the Indigenous Peoples Power Project, told me.

An informational video was released in accompaniment with the joint-statement made by the groups with the title, “Warriors Wanted.”

“We’re asking for reinforcements to come stand with us, to pray, and to protect,” Tilsen said. “Of all the times to take action, the time is now.”

On October 22, water protectors in the camps reported that Dakota Access construction was just a few miles from the camp, and approximately 5 miles from the Missouri River.

This amplified call comes on the heels of the October 9 denial of the federal injunction to halt the Dakota Access pipeline construction. After the federal injunction was lifted, Dakota Access construction immediately began working its way toward the Missouri River. The next day, hundreds of water protectors gathered at the site of Dakota Access construction. North Dakota police arrived quickly to the site with armored vehicles and assault rifles, ultimately making a total of 29 arrests.

Over the weekend, police arrested more than 100 water protectors.

In a joint statement released earlier this month, the Departments of Justice, Army, and Interior, once again, called on Energy Transfer Partners to voluntarily stop construction of the Dakota Access pipeline near the Missouri River in North Dakota. Energy Transfer Partners did not stop.

“Not surprisingly, Energy Transfer Partners has ignored the Obama Administration’s call to voluntarily halt construction and continues to desecrate our sacred places,” Dave Archambault, II, Standing Rock Sioux Chairman, said. “They have proven time and time again that they are more interested in money than the health and well-being of the 17 million people who get their drinking water from the Missouri River. They have bulldozed over the burials of our Lakota and Dakota ancestors and have no regard for the sanctity of these places.”

While the tribe continues to pursue all legal avenues to stop construction, organizers in the camps maintain their commitment to peaceful and prayerful non-violent direct action, which has been a major cornerstone of the months-long demonstration along the route of the pipeline.

Actions have ranged from prayer walks, to runs, rallies, marches, protests, the creation of campaign multi-media, social media campaigns, banner and sign-making, building and maintaining the resistance camps, holding space as a large group. Lock-downs to machinery in order halt construction have also been utilized.

IP3, an organization on the ground in Standing Rock, is conducting regular non-violent direct action trainings in the camps. The organization has so far trained hundreds of water protectors.
Thomas Lopez, Jr., Chicano, of Denver, Colorado, was among the many trained by IP3 in non-violent direct action earlier in September. Lopez attests not only to the value of non-violent action, but also to the value of focus and prayer.

“The entire training experience was so insightful, not just as I looked into myself, but also tried to understand things from the eyes of the oppressor,” Lopez said. “I’m not here fighting just for me, but my nieces and nephews. Thanks to this training, I realized that when engaging in non-violent direct action, I can go straight to prayer. This reminded me of who I am, and what I am here for. I remembered that prayer, peace, and love can take us farther than anything.”

Cy Wagoner, Dine’ of Shonto, Arizona, who is among the IP3 trainers who have facilitated trainings at the Oceti Sakowin Camp, said “there’s a lot of misconceptions about non-violent direct action.

“When done properly, it builds power and community, and it creates change. This is how movements are born,” he said.

While some direct-action, such as locking down to machinery, can prompt arrest, not all direct action necessitates arrest. Acts of civil disobedience, or peacefully disobeying the law without causing harm to others, is cause for arrest. You are breaking the law by choice, and for a purpose. Think lunch counter sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement, think Rosa Parks refusing to sit in the back of the bus, and today, think water protectors locking down to DAPL machinery to stop the pipeline.

In another Facebook video posted by Mark K. Tilsen, Oglala Lakota from Porcupine, South Dakota, Tilsen delivered a poignant message to allies across the globe:

“I’m asking you to come to Standing Rock,” he said. “Follow local leadership, but you will be given autonomy to choose your actions, and how you choose to creatively stop the Dakota Access Pipeline. Please. Come to Standing Rock.”

Mark Tilsen has been stationed at the Oceti Sakowin camp for the past two months, also assisting in non-violent direct action trainings.

“We need help. We need bodies on the ground,” said Tilsen. “We need people here who are dedicated and willing. This is not a tourist action. This is not a party. We’re here to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline. Thank you.”

Since early August, nearly 200 arrests have been made in North Dakota as water protectors have placed their bodies on the line, defending water and sacred sites from the pipeline. Water protectors continue to strategize actions daily to halt construction, but they are calling for your help.

“The threat to water is imminent, and we are calling for boots on the ground,” the 11 groups said in their call-to-action statement. “The Oceti Sakowin Camp and Sacred Stone Camp are seeking brave and dedicated water warriors to build winter camps, accept leadership from indigenous
community members, and organize semi-autonomously to attack the weak points on the Black Snake.”

If you are among the millions who stand with Standing Rock, consider making your way there immediately, or at minimum, intensify support in whatever means you are capable. And as tensions heighten, it is increasingly that much more important that water protectors come focused and composed, bearing in mind that North Dakota law enforcement and pro-DAPL media eagerly await the moment that just one person slips into any semblance of hostility and/or violence. Yes, your help is needed, but just as you must come courageously, you must come responsibly.

Stop the Dakota Access pipeline. Water is life.

Sarah Sunshine Manning (Shoshone-Paiute, Chippewa-Cree) is a mother, educator, activist, and an advocate for youth. Follow her at @SarahSunshineM.

See videos with this article here:


October 27, 2016

Indigenous Youth Travel from Standing Rock to Clinton Headquarters to Demand Answers on Dakota Access Pipeline

Greenpeace Press Release

Brooklyn, New York - Today young people from Oceti Sakowin, the Seven Council Fires, and the Standing Rock Sioux Nation traveled to Hillary Clinton’s campaign headquarters in New York City to demand that she speak out against the Dakota Access pipeline. The Clinton campaign has thus far remained silent about the 1,100-mile pipeline that threatens sacred Indigenous land and water supply. The water protectors urged solidarity actions at local Clinton campaign offices across the country. The group also visited Trump tower to urge the Republican candidate to weigh in.

Commenting on today’s action and the need for Hillary Clinton to be vocal against the Dakota Access pipeline, the young people said:

"We made treaties and agreements. A violation of a native treaty is a violation of federal law. By refusing to stand against DAPL, Hillary is putting our environment, wildlife, culture, and land at risk. -- William Brownnotter, 16

"As a young person I want to know what the next four years are going to entail. Is Hillary going to be focused on protecting our land? I want to know if my younger family is going to be safe.
Our present situation is in dire need of a leader that still remembers that our kids are here. We want to protect the future for the young ones that come after us. I'm here to support my family." -  
- Garrett Hairychin, 23

"We are coming directly to Hillary at her headquarters because as the future president, she is going to have to work for us, and we want her to uphold the treaties and her promise to protect unci maka (Mother Earth)." -- Gracey Claymore, 19

"Young people need to speak up and not be scared of adult leaders. We are left to take care of what they mess up." -- Marilyn Fox, 18

_There are 4 of the Oceti Sakowin youth runners in this youth delegation. The youth runners ran to deliver a message about climate change, to raise awareness of DAPL, and to pray for the water._

"When we stepped out onto the pavement we opened up the door to a ceremony that we didn't even know we are going to be a part of. Even though we didn't run to NY, this trip is still part of that journey." -- Danny Grassrope, 24

"We are here to tell Hillary how badly we need to protect the water. We didn't come all the way to NY for nothing. We didn't run all the way to Omaha or DC for nothing. We want to ask Hillary if she wants to see her great-grandkids line up for water rations.” -- Adam Palaniuk Killsalive, 18 who is one of the Ocheti Sakowin Runners

"With the land and the water, we don't speak their language. But we understand enough to know that they are hurting, and need our protection.” -- Danny Grassrope, 24

Voicing the organization’s support for the youth delegation, Greenpeace Spokesperson Lilian Molina said:

“Now is the time for Hillary Clinton to prove her commitment to both strong climate action and Indigenous sovereignty. Silence is not acceptable. Waiting is not acceptable. We are grateful for the young people who have traveled so far to say enough is enough. If you claim to be a climate champion, that means respecting Indigenous sovereignty, rejecting new pipelines, and keeping dangerous fossil fuels in the ground.”

A large and growing community, led by indigenous groups, has come together in rejecting the Dakota Access pipeline. Thousands of people have gathered at a series of encampments on the lands of the Standing Rock Sioux in direct opposition to the pipeline’s construction. Hundreds have been pepper sprayed and arrested in the process. American Indians from over 300 tribes have joined in solidarity, as have 21 city and county governments. Prominent politicians and members of Clinton’s own Democratic Party have also rejected the pipeline, including Senator Bernie Sanders, Senator Elizabeth Warren, and Representative Raul Grijalva.

The Dakota Access pipeline is a direct violation of the sovereign rights and culture of the Standing Rock Sioux, placing serious risk to the nation’s water supply, violating federal trust responsibilities guaranteed through treaties with the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota tribes, and
desecrating burial and other historical sites. The fast-track process of approval disregarded key U.S. legislation, including the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. And no proper Environmental Impact Statement, with substantive tribal consultation, was performed. On the basis of any single one of these conditions, construction must be halted. Indigenous communities, NGOs, and allies across the country demand an end to the Clinton campaign’s silence on the issue.

The formal demand letter can be found here: http://standwithstandingrock.net/statement-youth-standing-rock-tribe-future-president/

Contact:
Greenpeace
Washington DC: (202) 462-1177
San Francisco: (415) 255-9221


October 27, 2016

Armed With Riot Gear, Militarized Police Begin Forcibly Clearing DAPL Protest Camp

'We will be peaceful, we will be prayerful, we will not retreat'

By Deirdre Fulton, staff writer
Common Dreams

Arrests have begun at the recently erected frontline camp in the path of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), as police and military move in on Indigenous water protectors and their allies in North Dakota.

With law enforcement seemingly interfering with cell signal, it is difficult to get a live feed from the ground. Some social media users were able to post video and updates from the scene:

[See the videos with this article here: http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/10/27/armed-riot-gear-militarized-police-begin-forcibly-clearing-dapl-protest-camp]

According to eyewitness accounts, buses full of law enforcement were traveling toward the frontline camp on Thursday morning.

Earlier:

Indigenous water protectors and their allies are prepared for a crackdown by law enforcement on Thursday, vowing to hold ground they reclaimed through eminent domain last weekend despite
threats by Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) developer Energy Transfer Partners and local officials.

Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners warned on Tuesday that demonstrators occupying land in the pipeline's path—land to which both the corporation and local tribes lay claim—must leave or face prosecution. The new frontline camp sits just north of the main protest camp on federal land near Cannon Ball, a town about 50 miles south of Bismarck.

The Associated Press reported:

Law enforcement officials demanded that the protesters leave the private land on Wednesday, but the protesters refused. It appeared only thick fog and cloudy skies kept a large contingent of law enforcement officers from moving in. Officials have frequently monitored protesters by air.

According to a separate AP report:

Cass County Sheriff Paul Laney told reporters that authorities don't want a confrontation but that the protesters "are not willing to bend."

"We have the resources. We could go down there at any time," he said. "We're trying not to."

Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier said authorities would continue to try for a peaceful resolution but that "we are here to enforce the law as needed."

But the activists have refused to bend. The Bismarck Tribune quoted protest organizer Mekasi Camp-Horinek, of Oklahoma, as calling out, "No surrender, no retreat!" as he walked away from the negotiations with top law enforcement officials on Wednesday afternoon.

The Tribune reported:

Camp-Horinek said he told police the group did not intend to relocate, then warned protesters to expect 300 officers to remove everyone from the camp and take them to jail.

"We will be peaceful, we will be prayerful, we will not retreat," he said.

"We've got to make our bodies a living sacrifice," John Perko, a demonstrator from South Dakota, told the newspaper. "This is the most honorable thing I could be doing right now."

Another member of the movement, Didi Banerji, who lives in Toronto but is originally from the Spirit Lake Sioux reservation in North Dakota, told the AP: "I'm here to die if I have to. I don't want to die but I will."

Meanwhile, also on Wednesday, the Morton County sheriff's office—which the Guardian notes "has been leading the police response to the demonstration and conducted mass arrests over the weekend"—announced that the use of dogs by private security guards against protesters last month was potentially illegal.
The sheriff’s office reportedly determined that "dog handlers were not properly licensed to do security work in the state of North Dakota" and passed the results of its investigation along to the Morton County States Attorney's Office and the North Dakota Private Investigators and Security Board for possible charges.

Private security workers were continuing to monitor water protectors on Wednesday afternoon, Leota Eastman Iron Cloud, a Native American activist from South Dakota who has been at the protests for months, told the Guardian by phone. "We're watching them watching us."


October 28, 2016

Why Dakota Is the New Keystone

By Bill McKibben
New York Times

MIDDLEBURY, Vt. — The Native Americans who have spent the last months in peaceful protest against an oil pipeline along the banks of the Missouri are standing up for tribal rights. They’re also standing up for clean water, environmental justice and a working climate. And it’s time that everyone else joined in.

The shocking images of the National Guard destroying tepees and sweat lodges and arresting elders this week remind us that the battle over the Dakota Access Pipeline is part of the longest-running drama in American history — the United States Army versus Native Americans. In the past, it’s almost always ended horribly, and nothing we can do now will erase a history of massacres, stolen land and broken treaties. But this time, it can end differently.

Those heroes on the Standing Rock reservation, sometimes on horseback, have peacefully stood up to police dogs, pepper spray and the bizarre-looking militarized tanks and SWAT teams that are the stuff of modern policing. (Modern and old-fashioned both: The pictures of German shepherds attacking are all too reminiscent of photos from, say, Birmingham, Ala., in 1963.)

The courage of those protesters managed to move the White House enough that the government called a temporary halt to construction. But the forces that want it finished — Big Oil, and its allies in parts of the labor movement — are strong enough that the respite may be temporary.

In coming weeks, activists will respond to calls from the leaders at Standing Rock by gathering at the offices of banks funding the pipeline, and at the offices of the Army Corps of Engineers, for protest and civil disobedience. Two dozen big banks have lent money to the pipeline project, even though many of them have also adopted elaborate environmental codes. As for the Corps, that’s the agency that helped “expedite” the approval of the pipeline — and must still grant the final few permits.
The vast movement of people across the country who mobilized to block fossil-fuel projects like the Keystone pipeline and Shell’s plans to drill in the Arctic need to gather once more. This time, their message must be broader still.

There are at least two grounds for demanding a full environmental review of this pipeline, instead of the fast-track approvals it has received so far. The first is the obvious environmental racism of the whole project.

Originally, the pipeline was supposed to cross the Missouri just north of Bismarck, until people pointed out that a leak there would threaten the drinking water supply for North Dakota’s second biggest city. The solution, in keeping with American history, was obvious: make the crossing instead just above the Standing Rock reservation, where the poverty rate is nearly three times the national average. This has been like watching the start of another Flint, Mich., except with a chance to stop it.

The second is that this is precisely the kind of project that climate science tells us can no longer be tolerated. In midsummer, the Obama administration promised that henceforth there would be a climate test for new projects before they could be approved. That promise was codified in the Democratic platform approved by Hillary Clinton’s campaign, which says there will be no federal approval for any project that “significantly exacerbates” global warming.

The review of the Dakota pipeline must take both cases into account.

So far, the signs are not good. There has been no word from the White House about how long the current pause will last. Now, the company building the pipeline has pushed the local authorities to remove protesters from land where construction has already desecrated indigenous burial sites, with law enforcement agents using Tasers, batons, mace and “sound cannons.”

From the Clinton campaign, there’s been simply an ugly silence, perhaps rooted in an unwillingness to cross major contributors like the Laborers’ International Union of North America, which has lashed out against the many other, larger unions that oppose the project. But that silence won’t make the issue go away: Sioux protesters erected a tepee in her Brooklyn campaign office on Thursday. If Mrs. Clinton is elected on Nov. 8, this will be the new president’s first test on environmental and human rights.

What’s happening along the Missouri is of historic consequence. That message should reverberate not just on the lonely high plains, but in our biggest cities, too. Native Americans have carried the fight, but they deserve backup from everyone with a conscience; other activists should join the protest at bank headquarters, Army Corps offices and other sites of entrenched power.

The Native Americans are the only people who have inhabited this continent in harmony with nature for centuries. Their traditional wisdom now chimes perfectly with the latest climate science. The only thing missing are the bodies of the rest of us joining in their protest. If we use them wisely, a fresh start is possible.
November 2, 2016

Why understanding Native American religion is important for resolving the Dakota Access Pipeline crisis

By Rosalyn R. LaPier
The Conversation

In recent weeks, protests against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline across North Dakota have escalated. Native American elders, families and children have set up tipis and tents on a campsite near the pipeline’s path in the hope of stopping the pipeline’s construction.

Dave Archambault Jr., the leader of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe that is leading the efforts to stop the pipeline, summed up what is at the heart of the issue. In a brief two-minute statement before the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, he said,

“Oil companies are causing deliberate destruction of our sacred places.”

As a Native American scholar of environmental history and religious studies, I am often asked what Native American leaders mean when they say that certain landscapes are “sacred places” or “sacred sites.”

What makes a mountain, hill or prairie a “sacred” place?

Meaning of sacred spaces

I learned from my grandparents about the sacred areas within Blackfeet tribal territory in Montana and Alberta, which is not far from Lakota tribal territory in the Dakotas.

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My grandparents’ stories revealed that the Blackfeet believe in a universe where supernatural beings exist within the same time and space as humans and our natural world. The deities could
simultaneously exist in both as visible and invisible reality. That is, they could live unseen, but known, within a physical place visible to humans.

One such place for the Blackfeet is Nínaiistáko or Chief Mountain in Glacier National Park. This mountain is the home of Ksiistiskomm or Thunder, a primordial deity. My grandparents spoke of how this mountain is a liminal space, a place between two realms.

Blackfeet tribal citizens can go near this sacred place to perceive the divine, but they cannot go onto the mountain because it is the home of a deity. Elders of the Blackfeet tribe believe that human activity, or changing the physical landscape in these places, disrupts the lives of deities. They view this as sacrilegious and a desecration.

A living text

Sacred places, however, are not always set aside from humanity’s use. Some sacred places are meant for constant human interaction.

Anthropologist Keith Basso argued in his seminal work “Wisdom Sits in Places” that one purpose of sacred places was to perfect the human mind. The Western Apache elders with whom Basso worked told him that when someone repeated the names and stories of their sacred places, they were understood as “repeating the speech of our ancestors.”

For these Apache elders, places were not just names and stories – their landscape itself was a living sacred text. As these elders traveled from place to place speaking the names and stories of their sacred text, they told Basso that their minds became more “resilient,” more “smooth” and able to withstand adversity.

The sacredness of the pipeline site

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Not just Dakota

Historians, anthropologists and religious thinkers continue to learn and write about Native American religious ideas of place. In so doing, they seek to analyze complex religious concepts of transformation and transcendence that these places evoke.

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The intimate connection between landscape and religion is at the center of Native American societies. It is the reason that thousands of Native Americans from across the United States and Indigenous peoples from around the world have traveled to the windswept prairies of North Dakota.

But, despite our 200-plus years of contact, the United States has yet to begin to understand the uniqueness of Native American religions and ties to the land. And until this happens, there will continue to be conflicts over religious ideas of land and landscape, and what makes a place sacred.

Rosalyn R. LaPier is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Women's Studies, Environmental Studies and Native American Religion, Harvard University. Rosalyn R. LaPier receives funding from University of Montana. She is affiliated with Suokio Heritage.

https://theconversation.com/why-understanding-native-american-religion-is-important-for-resolving-the-dakota-access-pipeline-crisis-68032
November 3, 2016

Why understanding Native American religion is key to resolving Dakota Access Pipeline crisis

By Rosalyn R. LaPier, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

In recent weeks, protests against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline across North Dakota have escalated. Native American elders, families and children have set up tipis and tents on a campsite near the pipeline’s path in the hope of stopping the pipeline’s construction.

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But, despite our 200-plus years of contact, the United States has yet to begin to understand the uniqueness of Native American religions and ties to the land. And until this happens, there will continue to be conflicts over religious ideas of land and landscape, and what makes a place sacred.

https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/why-understanding-native-american-religion-key-resolving-dakota-access-pipeline

November 3, 2016

Image Gallery: 500 interfaith clergy and laity answered the call to stand with Standing Rock

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

Cannon Ball, North Dakota - In a historic show of interfaith support and solidarity, more than 500 interfaith clergy and laity answered a call to come to North Dakota to stand in peaceful,
prayerful and lawful solidarity Nov. 3; and to bear witness with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation as they continue to protect the tribe’s sacred land and water supply.

The interfaith group spent more than five hours on site, marching, singing hymns, sharing testimony and calling others to join them in standing with the more than 200 tribes who have committed their support to the Sioux Nation as they protest the route of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Here are some images of the group’s visit:


November 4, 2016

A Prayer for People and Planet: 500 Clergy Hold 'Historic' Mass Gathering for Standing Rock

Roughly a hundred protesters and clergy members shut down the North Dakota state Capitol with a lawn prayer circle

By Lauren McCauley
Common Dreams

In a "historic" show of interfaith solidarity, 500 clergy members prayed along the banks of North Dakota's Cannonball River on Thursday where they "bore witness with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation," which has faced intimidation, violence, and arrests for protecting their sacred land and water supply from the threats of a massive oil pipeline.

According to the Episcopal News Service, "The interfaith group spent more than five hours on site, marching, singing hymns, sharing testimony, and calling others to join them in standing with the more than 200 tribes who have committed their support to the Sioux Nation as they protest the route of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)."

Later, roughly a hundred protesters and clergy members held a prayer circle on the lawn of the North Dakota state Capitol in Bismarck, forcing the police to order a lock-down of the building. "Highway Patrol Lt. Tom Iverson said 14 people were arrested in the Capitol's judicial wing for refusing to leave the building. Iverson said the protesters, who were holding a sit-in and singing prayer hymns, faced disorderly conduct charges," AP reported.

The below video was taken by local news station KRYR-TV:

See video here:

Caro Gonzales, a Native American activist, told reporters that the water protectors had come to the Capitol to deliver a letter to Gov. Jack Dalrymple in support of the tribe and to ask "why he has ordered riot police to engage in police brutality at Standing Rock." Afterwards, a group of roughly 100 protesters marched from the Capitol to the governor's residence, where they were met by "dozens of riot police," Gonzales said.

Throughout the months-long standoff, Dalrymple, a Republican, has routinely sided with the pipeline company. After falsely declaring that the water protectors were risking public safety by engaging in "unlawful acts," he called a state of emergency, which paved the way for an increasingly aggressive and overblown police response to the peaceful protests.

On Wednesday, about 100 police in riot gear fired mace, pepper spray, and rubber bullets at point-blank range at water protectors praying waist-deep in water. The group of roughly 300 protectors had attempted to cross the Cannonball River to pray for the threatened land on the opposite side.

The week prior, more than 140 water protectors were arrested after police conducted a military-style raid of their encampment. Armed with tanks, a sound cannon, an armored truck, and bulldozer, the scene was described as "all-out war...waged on Indigenous protectors."

During the day of prayer Thursday, the clergy members marched to the bridge that was the site of last week's attack and "ceremonially burned a copy of a 600-year-old document," AP reported. Known as the Doctrine of Discovery, "the document from the 1400s sanctioned the taking of land from Indigenous peoples."

"It was very moving to be there in solidarity," said Philadelphia-based Bishop Dwayne Royster. "I wanted to be present as an African-American clergy person to let the people at Standing Rock understand that we as African Americans need them to know that we stand with them in their fight."

Similar acts of solidarity, particularly by people of faith, have grown in recent days. On Wednesday, nine rabbis, rabbinical students, and Jewish community members were arrested in Philadelphia for staging a civil disobedience action at a downtown TD Bank, one of the biggest financiers of the pipeline project. Nearly 300 rabbis have signed a statement in opposition to Dakota Access.

As the pipeline's construction edges closer to the Missouri River, which the Standing Rock Sioux is hoping to protect, with little hope of abatement, pipeline opponents worldwide are planning a mass Day of Action on Nov. 15, asking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the incoming U.S. president "stop the Dakota Access Pipeline—and all those after it."

The call to action reads:

The Army Corps fast-tracked the Dakota Access Pipeline without proper consultation, and as a result, bulldozers are approaching Standing Rock as we speak. But with coordinated, massive demonstrations across the country, we’ll make it clear that this powerful movement will not
allow the Obama administration or the incoming President to sacrifice Indigenous rights, our water, or our climate—they must reject this pipeline.

*Episcopal News Service* photographer Lynette Wilson shared a number of moving photographs from the day of prayer.

See photos here:


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**November 4, 2016**

Here’s what no one understands about the Dakota Access Pipeline crisis

Understanding “sacred” sites.

By Rosalyn R. LaPier

The Washington Post

In recent weeks, protests against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline across North Dakota have escalated. Native American elders, families and children have set up tepees and tents on a campsite near the pipeline’s path in the hope of stopping its construction.

Dave Archambault Jr., the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe that is leading the efforts to stop the pipeline, summed up what is at the heart of the issue. In a two-minute statement before the United Nations’ Human Rights Council in Geneva, he said that “oil companies are causing deliberate destruction of our sacred places.”

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This article originally appeared on The Conversation.

Rosalyn R. LaPier is a visiting assistant professor at Harvard University.


November 5, 2016
The White Horse and the Humvees—Standing Rock Is Offering Us a Choice

Right here, between the barricades on a North Dakota highway, is a pivotal confrontation between two world views, two futures.

By Robin Wall Kimmerer and Kathleen Dean Moore
YES! Magazine

Two lines, facing each other on a North Dakota highway. On one side, concrete barriers protect a row of armored vehicles and helmeted police with assault rifles. On the other, a young man rides a white horse whose legs are stained with blood. A woman, wearing a scarf to protect her lungs from tear gas, wafts sage smoke over a boy to give him strength, wash away hate, and remind him of his sacred purpose.

Here, on a highway stretching across trampled prairie grass, the fundamental contest of our time is playing out.

It’s a confrontation not only between two groups of people, but between two world views. The space between the lines vibrates with tensions of race, historical trauma, broken treaties, money and politics, love and fear. But the underlying issue that charges the air, mixing with the smells of tear gas and sage, is the global contest between two deeply different ideas about the true meaning of land.

On one side is the unquestioned assumption that land is merely a warehouse of lifeless materials that have been given to (some of) us by God or conquest, to use without constraint. On this view, human happiness is best served by whatever economy most efficiently transforms water, soils, minerals, wild lives, and human yearning into corporate wealth. And so it is possible to love the bottom line on a quarterly report so fiercely that you will call out the National Guard to protect it.

On the other side of the concrete barriers is a story that is so ancient it seems revolutionary. On this view, the land is a great and nourishing gift to all beings. The fertile soil, the fresh water, the clear air, the creatures, swift or rooted: they require gratitude and veneration. These gifts are not commodities, like scrap iron and sneakers. The land is sacred, a living breathing entity, for whom we must care, as she cares for us. And so it is possible to love land and water so fiercely you will live in a tent in a North Dakota winter to protect them.

It may turn out that the cracks in that stretch of two-lane highway mark a giant crack in time, when one set of assumptions about reality snaps and is replaced by another. This, like all times of paradigm shift, is an unsettled time, a time of shouting and police truncheons, as privileged people defend the assumptions that have served them royally.

What are they so afraid of out there in North Dakota, that they arrest journalists, set dogs on women and children, send prayerful protectors to jail and align para-military force against indigenous people on their own homelands?
Maybe they are afraid of the truth-telling power of the people at Standing Rock and their busloads of allies, who are making clear that we live in an era of profound error that we mistakenly believe is the only way we can live, an era of insanity that we believe is the only way we can think. But once people accept with heart and mind that land is our teacher, our mother, our garden, our pharmacy, our church, our cradle and our grave, it becomes unthinkable to destroy it. This vision threatens the industrial worldview more than anything else.

Indigenous people are saying, there are honorable and enduring lifeways that beckon to people who are weary of destruction.

Everyone can join the people of Standing Rock and say No. No more wrecked land. No more oil spills. No more poisoned wells. We don’t have to surrender the well-being of communities to the profit of a few. We can say Yes. Yes, we are all in this together. Yes, we can all stand on moral ground. Yes, we can all be protectors of the water and protectors of the silently watching future. The blockade on the highway is an invitation to remember and reclaim who we might be — just and joyous humans on a bountiful Earth. Right here, between the barricades, we are offered a choice.

On the highway, a warrior steps around the concrete barrier, offering a sage bundle that trails white smoke. Approaching a figure in riot gear, he extends the blessing to the officer, letting the smoke wash over him. To give him strength. To wash away hate. To remind him of his purpose.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, citizen Potawatomi Nation, is director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment and Distinguished Teaching Professor at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Her most recent book is Braiding Sweetgrass.

Kathleen Dean Moore, the author of Great Tide Rising: Toward Clarity and Moral Courage in a Time of Planetary Change and co-editor of Moral Ground, is Oregon State University Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Emerita.

http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/the-humvees-and-the-white-horse2014two-futures-20161105

November 5, 2016

The Standing Rock victory you didn’t hear about

The day 40 to 50 Native water protectors kept 250 militarized police from attacking camp.

By Desiree Kane
Nation of Change

Last week, the world watched in horror as a massive militarized police force attacked prayerful indigenous water protectors fighting for the water of 18 million people. Over and over, people
were brutalized, pulled out of sweat lodges while in ceremony wearing only their underwear. Medics and journalists were arrested alongside water protectors. Cars were searched and impounded, personal possessions were taken by police.

Everyone by now has seen the videos of the assault last Thursday. Here at Standing Rock, the age-old story of government forces raising arms against Native people is being repeated in real time through social media.

But lost in that day, in the horrific stories of degradation, is a small story of victory, of how 40 to 50 Native people stood against more than 250 police on a bridge on County Road 134 in rural North Dakota.

Word-of-mouth announcements went out to the Oceti Sakowin camp that there was going to be a police raid of the front-line camp that had been set up in the way of the pipeline. A raid means people are in imminent danger, and that is widely understood here. Over Labor Day, campers were attacked by dogs and pepper sprayed by Dakota Access security. And since then, we’ve seen increased militarization. It has been apparent that the government, specifically Morton County Sheriff’s office, is the security force protecting the pipeline, so no one doubted that this time the police would be the ones to desecrate bodies and lifeways.

My original plan was to take County Road 134 to photograph the pipeline being forced into the earth.

Instead, I found a blockade of wood logs and hay bales set up in an area where water divided the back country road. No one there was armed with anything other than prayer. It was a strategic juncture because police vehicles couldn’t cross the narrow embankments on their way to the raid. If they were stopped at this bridge from the east, they could only come from the north.

In the morning, police did come, and from both sides. When I arrived, this blockade had already stopped an LRAD—a sonic weapon often called “sound cannon,” which can cause permanent hearing loss—from making it to the camp. Even as police numbers grew, eventually well beyond 200, the water protectors held their ground, fearless.

Then the dancing began.

People began dancing to a hand drum, entranced by the power of prayer. A single elder, a veteran, repeatedly walked out and yelled: “Send one unarmed like I am out here to negotiate. Please. We are protecting the water for our children and yours. Send one out here to negotiate. Let’s talk! Please!”

He was met with no negotiation.

But the water protectors held the bridge. For hours and hours, police advanced and retreated.

This was an unforgettable moment unfolding. With the dancing going on and the veteran trying to negotiate out front, a young woman stepped up and began moving her body to the beat of the
drum. She was power incarnate. Her arms were wide open, her pink fingernail polish glistening. She was crying. Just waiting to be pepper sprayed, she wore a painter’s mask, one which would have done nothing much for protection.

That standoff’s foundation was ceremony and song, the truest essence of religious freedom.

This is what colonial violence looks like: 250 police—some of them snipers, some with guns drawn on the crowd—in a standoff with 40 to 50 unarmed indigenous people who just want to be allowed to live.

The untold story of this day was that those troops never made it from the east to join the others in raiding the camp, dehumanizing the friends and families of those on that bridge. There were 250 fewer officers able to show up to brutalize people and pervert prayer ceremonies on October 27. History rarely teaches us about when Natives win against the state. And that’s how injustice flourishes: in the shadows.

So let me be clear. On October 27, when a colonial force armed with military weapons faced off on a bridge against veterans armed with only prayer, the Natives won.

http://www.nationofchange.org/2016/11/05/the-standing-rock-victory-you-didnt-hear-about/

November 5, 2016

"This is a good day!" News from Standing Rock (and Hoquiam!)

By SeattleTammy
Daily Kos

There has been a lot of Standing Rock news happening late Friday, and I don't see it being posted here. Let me know if someone else has covered this.

It's really, really good news!
Kandi Mossett (@mhawea) posted a FaceBook Live video earlier today. She took it down, and has posted an update to clarify the news items.

Watch this video for the good news!
She explains so many of the various new articles, and what our actions should be.

How the Army Corps will halt future constructions for 60 days, and perhaps these delays will cost the Dakota Access too much to continue.
How the implications of a re-route are also financially harmful to the project, and that was an important statement from President Obama.

How there is still a fight ahead.
We have to stay on target, we have to contact the DC office of the Corps and demand a full Environmental Impact Statement.
"There could be further delays"
All delays are good delays.
Activists Say Dakota Access Pipeline Could Be Put on Hold for 30 Days
"It's the first glimmer of hope, of good news, that we've had out here for weeks—months."

Mother Jones is first in reporting:
The company has not yet received an easement permit to dig under the river. According to Kandi Mossett, an organizer with the Indigenous Environmental Network, and others at yesterday's meeting, Henderson said he would wait at least 30 days until granting such an easement. If the Corps' Washington, DC, office grants the easement, Henderson reportedly said he would not sign it for 30 days.

In her video statement, Mossett said any discussion of rerouting the pipeline away from Native American land could stop the project. "A reroute, to this company, effectively kills the project because they won't be able to afford it. It will make it obsolete," she said. The 1,172-mile pipeline, set to run between North Dakota and Illinois, was planned to be completed by the end of this year.

Recounting the latest meeting between the Standing Rock Sioux and the Army Corps of Engineers, Mossett was visibly excited. "The feeling is like, oh my god, are we gonna win?"

Public Servants or Corporate Security?: An Open Letter to Law Enforcement and National Guard in ND
Winona LaDuke, Col. Ann Wright (Ret.), and Zoltan Grossman

So you joined law enforcement or the National Guard because you wanted to uphold the law, protect innocent civilians against the bad guys, and help your community in times of need. Instead, they’re having you blockade unarmed people who are trying to hold a prayer vigil, chasing them with armored vehicles and ATVs, raiding their tipis and sweat lodges at gunpoint, and shooting them (and their horses) with pepper spray, concussion grenades, tasers, and rubber bullets. You thought you’d be the cop on the beat or the citizen soldier, and they’ve made you into the cavalry riding in with Custer.

Two Police Officers Turn In Badges In Support Of Standing Rock Water Protectors

Earlier today it was reported by Redhawk at Standing Rock in North Dakota that two police officers have turned in their badges in support of the water protectors.

“There have been at least 2 reports of police officers turning in their badges acknowledging that this battle is not what they signed up for. You can see it in some of them, that they do not support the police actions. We must keep reminding them they are welcome to put down their weapons and badge and take a stand against this pipeline as well. Some are waking up.”

-Redhawk

Army Corp of Engineers Ordered Police to Arrest Standing Rock Water Protectors, via Earth Island Journal

On Wednesday, the US Army Corp of Engineers sent a letter instructing police to clear the Water Protectors.
Update: this letter has been rescinded.

The US army corps of engineers ordered North Dakota police to arrest Native American protesters and destroy a bridge that activists built over a creek...

Morton County sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier, who has faced criticisms for his department’s treatment of protesters, said he was pleased the army corps authorized police to take action.

“This simple message gave a clear-cut order to execute a plan to remove unlawful actors and prevent further unlawful actions,” he said in a statement. Terrorism charges have been dropped against Water Protectors.

How to Contact the People Who Sent Militarized Police to Standing Rock

Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt Hosting Standing Rock Benefit

No DAPL Day of Action Nov 15 Join a near-by action, or start your own.

I have a personal connection to this. In Grays Harbor, we have been fighting three proposed Crude Oil Terminals, to be serviced by mile and a half long unit trains of Bakken Crude hauling DOT-111s.
(Earlier diary by delonix, Remote Washington Shore Awash in Participants)

Bill Graham’s (delonix) song as sang by Donna Albert at GH 2016 Pride Festival

We've killed two of the three terminals, and are now in the comment period for the first Substantial Shorelines permit that needs issuing.
We would very much appreciate your sending a comment to Brian Shay, City Administrator, Hoquiam. You can personalize this letter at our website, Citizens for a Clean Harbor.
We have until November 19th to stop this first domino of permits.
Turn the page for more...

We are honored to work with the Quinault Indian Nation to protect our Shared Waters, Shared Values.

The Quinault Indian Nation has released a press release: Standing with Standing Rock.

Quinault president speaks against oil terminal projects
Fawn Sharp explains why —and how — Hoquiam City Council could halt planned oil terminal projects

Tribal rights are being taken into consideration on these fossil fuel fights at long last.

Yesterday, the County Commissioners in Mosier, OR denied the second Siding Track proposed to run through the town, which “almost blew up last year”.
There were many reasons to deny this project, and the violation of (Yakama Nation) tribal treaty rights is the most salient.

I met Kandi at a Oil/Coal Conference hosted at Evergreen University a few years back. She has been an inspiration and a great activist leader.

At our Draft Environmental Impact Statement hearing last October, Joelle read the first half of a letter Kandi sent and I read the second half.

Robinson, Joelle

"Hi. My name is Joelle Robinson and I'm from Seattle. I am here as my own concerned citizen, but I'm reading today on behalf of Candy Monsette (sic), who is a member of Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation in North Dakota. And she is with the Native Energy and Climate Campaign and also the Indigenous Environmental Network. This is a public comment on the DEIS for Westway and Imperium. In my home town of New Town, North Dakota, life has changed forever because of fracking and the lust for oil. The horrible thing is that it's changed for the worst. This is no modern day (inaudible). This oil booming, as in fracking, has become devastating for us and no amount of money can ever give us back what has been lost. Many in our own communities have died because of accidents. With the hundreds of tracks that are taking over the roads, our land is being sterilized, our water poisoned, and our air tainted imperatively. Our culture has taken a back seat to strangers populating the land, many with our contentions. Rape of both men and women is on the rise, along with things we've never dealt with before such as sex trafficking of young teenagers. Heroine abuse runs rampant as the big city drug cartels move in and our once quiet town of 1500 is now a dangerous and scary place to be, let alone to raise a child. My daughter is 15 months old and my heart aches that I do not even want her to be at home for fear of what she would be exposed to. Murder is not a word we came across in our town before the oil boom. Now we will just wait for the next and the next as many have been murdered -- yes, murdered in our little communities --

I can finish the sentence and then hand it to my colleague?

MR. KEILLOR: Yeah, we'll have to have you wrap up immediately, and we'll get to the next speaker.

In our little communities much of it is associated with drugs and the gangs that follow the money."

"about how this perception can adversely affect values.

Damike(sic), Tammy Continuing with Candy(sic)’s letter.

Our own people are becoming addicts and need treatment but they continue to be arrested and sent to jail while the two perpetrators of the crimes keep slipping away, only to bring more drugs, guns, and crime. I can’t even begin to describe to you the heaviness in my heart, having buried my brother’s beautiful 28-year-old step-daughter just a few weeks ago who could not stop
using heroine, which destroyed her body so much we had to have a closed casket. We found my little cousin’s body in the lake this spring. He disappeared last fall after last being seen with two known MS-13 gang members. His death was ruled an accidental drowning and the case was open and shut. Just this past week two armed robberies occurred at two separate downtown businesses on our little main street. Take these words that have been read here today and quadruple the horrors and maybe then you might be able to begin to get a sense of what’s happening to us in our communities on Fort Berthold in North Dakota as a direct result of our country’s addiction to fossil fuels and fracking. It’s sick and it’s sad, and I would never in my life wish this kind of horror on anyone else, if you have a choice to do what you can do now to help us stop this kind of devastation from spreading. We need help. Will you help us? Do not support fracking. The social and environmental impacts from it are negatively life altering, and those impacts are spreading across this country like a disease. Please, from one compassionate human being to another, help us and do not support fracking. (Speaking Indian). Thank you."

emphasis mine:

Yes, WA Dept of Ecology actually wrote (Speaking Indian).


November 7, 2016

Larger faith community comes to Standing Rock in solidarity

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

In silence they processed. In a circle they prayed. With Standing Rock they stood.

More than 500 clergy and people of faith across religious denominations joined the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and its supporters in their stand against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The gathering Nov. 3, described as "a day of protective witness in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and with the water protectors," brought the interfaith group to the main Oceti Sakowin camp on tribal land in south-central North Dakota that has served as the base for the pipeline resistance.

Among them were Mercy Srs. Kathleen Erickson and Aine O'Connor, and Mike Poulain, a member of the Sisters of Mercy justice team in Omaha. The three spoke to NCR following the conclusion of the prayerful witness.

The role of the faith community at Standing Rock, O'Connor said, was "to decry the injustice that is happening to the Native American peoples here."
The demonstration against the Dakota Access Pipeline began in April, and has since brought more than 200 Native American tribes together, in what has been called the largest such gathering in modern times. Support has also come from other corners, including numerous environmental organizations, to the Oceti Sakowin camp near the mouth of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers.

The Standing Rock Sioux have filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the pipeline will cross land viewed as sacred, including burial sites, and is protected by existing treaties, and also pose a threat to the tribe's primary water source. The proposed path would take the pipeline underneath Lake Oahe and the Missouri River a half mile upstream of the tribe's reservation boundary. The tribe and supports have noted an earlier route had the pipeline passing near Bismarck, but was rejected early in the planning to protect municipal water supplies.

If completed, the 1,172-mile Dakota Access Pipeline would carry daily as much as 570,000 barrels of crude oil from western North Dakota to Illinois, where it would meet with an already operational pipeline. Energy Transfer Partners, the Dallas-based company constructing the pipeline, says it provides a safer, cheaper and more environmentally responsible way of transporting the oil than by rail or truck.

Beyond environmental and treaty concerns, the faith community was alarmed by treatment of the Water Protectors (the pipeline opponents' preferred term) by local law enforcement, which in recent weeks has used pepper spray and rubber bullets in confrontations and has made more than 100 arrests.

"Our duty as people of faith and clergy could not be clearer: to stand on the side of the oppressed and to pray for God's mercy in these challenging times," said the Rev. John Floberg, an Episcopal priest who organized the gathering and has served the Standing Rock reservation for two decades.

The solidarity witness began shortly after dawn in the Oceti Sakowin camp, where the 524 clergy and laity from 20 faith backgrounds met with the elders of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. There, they gathered around the camp's continuously burning sacred fire. Several spoke against the Doctrine of Discovery, the term for a series of 15th-century papal bulls that gave Christian explorers authority to claim lands they encountered. A copy of the doctrine was given to the elders, who then proceeded to burn it.

After a traditional Native American smudging ceremony, in which smoke from burning various plants was fanned toward them to purify the body and drive out negative energy, the faith contingent processed in silence onto Highway 1806. They set up their prayer service near the Backwater Bridge — where local law enforcement erected a barrier following a clash between the two sides on Oct. 27 that resulted in 141 arrests after police attempted to break up a camp on private property in the pipeline's path.

The spot placed the faith community — Episcopalians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Unitarians, but only a few Catholics, including peace activist Fr. John Dear — near the pipeline's construction but also in the midst of sites the Standing Rock Sioux consider sacred, O'Connor said.
"We were not only standing with the people in that place, but we were standing on holy ground, where the burials, the tradition have been very important to the people," she said.

The service continued for nearly five hours, and included numerous speakers and songs, along with the formation of a Niobrara Circle, where participants offer peace to the person to their left and continue to do so until everyone exchanges peace with all.

Erickson, who grew up in North Dakota, said she felt compelled to participate because of her concern for the environmental threats the pipeline presents, but also with the racism toward Native Americans.

"It reminds us of taking of land or spoiling of land in places like Honduras and other countries, where indigenous people just do not have a voice that we of privilege have always had and taken for granted," she told NCR.

The situation has reminded the Sisters of Mercy of challenges indigenous peoples have faced elsewhere, such as in Peru with mining industries and in Australia with companies engaged in fracking, O'Connor added.

"We hear the cries of the peoples on Earth, but it's not just a cry from being oppressed, but an incredible cry of strength," she said, adding that these instances raise questions of justice as to why corporate interests appear to receive precedence over the needs of the people.

Pope Francis has regularly decried efforts to restrict or remove indigenous communities from lands they hold sacred and central to their culture. In his encyclical "Laudato Sí, on Care for Our Common Home," he stated:

They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best.

One of the goals of the prayer witnesses was to raise awareness, not only of their actions that day, but to bring the conversation back to their respective communities.

For much of the morning, the faith group was circled by a helicopter and a couple of planes, Poulin said. Along with two dozen or so police officers camped on the other side of the bridge, he said he saw police cars parked on most hills in the distance. The scene reminded Erickson of the militarized natured of the U.S.-Mexico border.

"It was kind of surprising to see just how many police were there," Poulin said. He added that organizers had contacted local law enforcement ahead of time to stress their intention was a "peaceful, prayerful, lawful demonstration" and they did not plan to attempt to cross the contested bridge.
The location of the prayer service was symbolic, O'Connor said, in that it served as a public witness "to reinforce what the water protectors have continually maintained, that they have been there as water protectors, not protestors. It was being done nonviolently."

The arrival of religious men and women came a day after a confrontation near the Cannonball River. Videos and photos on social media showed the use of pepper spray and tear gas on protestors standing in the river during a prayer ceremony; there were also reports of police firing rubber bullets at them.

A letter signed by many of the clergy and laity that came to Standing Rock urged President Barack Obama to investigate the Morton County Sheriff's Department regarding allegations of inhibited free speech, wrongful arrest, excessive use of violence and harassment of the Native Americans.

The letter also requested the Army Corps of Engineers to deny the construction permit for the pipeline, citing the danger it poses to drinking water, as well as the climate, and that it violates the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty.

Acknowledging the issues raised by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, the U.S. government on Sept. 9 suspended construction of the pipeline on federal lands near or under Lake Oahe. The order came shortly after a federal D.C. district court declined the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's request for an injunction to halt the project while their lawsuit proceeds.

Obama on Tuesday said during an interview with Now This news that the Army Corps is exploring alternative routes for the pipeline.

"We're monitoring this closely. I think as a general rule, my view is that there is a way for us to accommodate sacred lands of Native Americans," the president said.

As for the conflicts between the water protectors and law enforcement, Obama said "it is a challenging situation … There's an obligation for protestors to be peaceful, and there's an obligation for authorities to show restraint."

His response drew uproar from those supporting Standing Rock on social media, urging the president not only to intervene to prevent further violent encounters, but also to stop the pipeline altogether.

The religious demonstration is the latest show of support for Standing Rock. Earlier in the week millions of people "checked in" on Facebook to the camp as a way to show unity with the cause but also after reports came that local law enforcement were monitoring Facebook to track activists. The Morton County Sheriff's Department called the report "absolutely false."

The New York Times editorial board joined on Thursday with those calling for the pipeline's rerouting, and also raised questions about its overall worth.
In addition, GreenFaith has organized an interfaith letter addressed to U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch, North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple and Energy Transfer CEO Kelcy Warren stating their opposition, "in the strongest terms possible," to the pipeline on both spiritual and environmental grounds, as well as the treatment of the Sioux community and other demonstrators. It calls for the protection of sacred lands and also the pipeline project to be abandoned.

A coalition of activist groups have planned national day of solidarity actions for Nov. 15, many to be held at Army Corps offices, in an effort to demand either Obama or the incoming president to reject the Dakota Access Pipeline.

"We'll continue to fight until native sovereignty is honored, indigenous rights are protected, and our communities, water, and climate matter more than fossil fuel profits," organizers said a statement.


November 7, 2016

Taking a Stand at Standing Rock

By Rev. John Dear
Common Dreams

Like millions of other concerned people, I’ve followed the standoff at the Standing Rock Sioux Nation in North Dakota for months. The good people of Standing Rock—including the Dakota, the Lakota and the Sioux—have stood their ground since April to block the evil 1,170 mile, $3.7 billion Dakota Access Oil Pipeline which will dig beneath the three-mile-wide Missouri River, potentially poisoning the water for hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people, and desecrating the sacred land of Indigenous people. They’ve built several large camps and a permanent campaign that has gained the support of 200 other tribes.

Thousands have made the journey to the Standing Rock to stand in solidarity. The Obama administration has told the Army Corps not to issue the permit for drilling under the river but the preparations continue. Hundreds of unarmed peaceful people have been arrested in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. State police and brutal pipeline security guards have attacked the nonviolent people with dogs, mace, tear gas and rubber bullets and consistently lied to the media, blaming the peaceful people for their violence.

Through it all, the Native American people have stood and walked in a steadfast spirit of prayer and nonviolence. Before our eyes, they have demonstrated that rare kind of satyagraha reached by Mahatma Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the finest nonviolent movements in history. In doing so, they have exposed for all the world to see the centuries old
racist war on Native Americans and the equally centuries old war on the earth itself, as well as the power of creative nonviolence when wielded properly.

Last week, a national call to clergy went out. Clergy were summoned to drop everything and get to Standing Rock for a day of prayer and repentance, and a march from the main camp to the bridge where the police and pipeline security officials block the road to the notorious pipeline construction site.

And so I went. Over six hundred women and men priests and ministers from various Christian denominations made the journey, along with hundreds of other activists. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Looking out from the plane over the barren prairies of North Dakota, I was startled by the massive bright blue Missouri River. It is much bigger than I realized. From the air, it was so clear to see that, indeed, “Water Is Life,” as the Standing Rock saying teaches. Our plane was packed with church folk and young activists, and so was the Bismarck airport. There was excitement and hope in the air. Solidarity seemed alive and well.

As I drove south under the big blue sky across the rolling brown prairies to the village of Cannon Ball near the Standing Rock camp, the orange sun began to set and the sacred landscape radiated beauty, energy and life. I walked into the packed gymnasium for the evening orientation and nonviolence training, and found a hushed standing room only crowd listening attentively to Father John, the local Episcopal priest who has served here for 25 years, as he explained the scenario for the next day. Several Standing Rock leaders spoke before food and refreshments were offered. It was clear from the get-go that nonviolence was the order of the day.

They call themselves “protectors” not protesters, “pray-ers not disrupters, “peacemakers” not “troublemakers.” It’s that creative nonviolence that has attracted the interest and sympathy of people around the country and the world.

The next morning, I drove to the Oceti Sakowin camp as the sun rose over the mysterious North Dakota landscape. From the hills above the camp, it looked like a sea of tents with the striking exception of the scores of large white teepees sprinkled throughout the camp. It was a sight to behold. The Cannon Ball River ran along one side of the camp and large brown rolling hills circled the entire area in the distance. Here, for the past months, thousands of people have maintained a nonviolent satyagraha campaign to protect the land, the water, and the dignity of the Standing Rock people.

At 7 am, as I approached the main gathering place for worship, I noticed the large billboard with the camp rules: “We are protectors. We are peaceful and prayerful. We are nonviolent. ISMS have no place here. We respect the locals. We do not carry weapons. We keep each other accountable.”

There, around the Sacred Fire, several dozen Native women offered morning prayers and then set off for the daily walk to bless the water. Over the next two hours, hundreds of clergy, mainly women and men Episcopal priests, arrived and greeted one another. Over the course of the day,
we exchanged stories, shared our feelings and plotted strategies for future solidarity. I was happy to see friends Ann Wright of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, Rev. Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus, and Bill McKibben of 350.org.

At 9am, Father John began a liturgy of prayer and repentance, where we formally denounced the ancient “Doctrine of Discovery,” the church document from the 1490s which empowered European authorities to steal the land and resources of indigenous peoples. After silence and prayers, it was burned in the Sacred Fire. Then the march began.

We set out from the camp, by now a thousand of us, well over half in various clerical church attire, with black robes, white collars, and colorful stoles. Most of us carried bright posters that read “Clergy Stand with Standing Rock.”

We walked slowly, mindfully, peacefully down the main road, over the hill, and down toward the bridge, where the police have barricaded the road to prevent people from approaching the actual drilling and construction site of the pipeline. We sang as we walked—“Amazing Grace,” “This Little Light of mine,” “We Are Marching in the Light of God.” It was one of the greatest, most peaceful marches I have ever experienced in a lifetime of marching for justice and peace.

When we reached the bridge, we gathered together for songs and speeches. A wonderful African American woman minister led us in “The Water Is Wide.” A group of Jewish women sang an inspiring prayer in Hebrew. A young Quaker activist read her congregation’s statement of solidarity. Another Native elder and minister prayed for the pipeline workers, police and security guards, and the coming day when they would join our circle and together we could celebrate creation and the Creator.

In my speech, I thanked the Standing Rock people for their steadfast resistance and exemplary nonviolence, and reflected on Jesus’ connection between nonviolence and oneness with the earth. I recalled his teaching in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the meek; they shall inherit the earth,” and noted that meekness is the biblical word for nonviolence.

Long ago, Jesus connected nonviolence with oneness with the earth, I said. We have forgotten that connection, rejected nonviolence as a way of life, supported the culture of violence, and now are faced with the consequences of systemic violence—the destructive pipeline and catastrophic climate change. But the Standing Rock people are calling us back, I continued. They urge us not just to reject the pipeline, honor their land, and protect our water, but to reclaim our common nonviolence and shared oneness with the earth. They are showing us the way forward, and it’s time for more and more of us to follow their lead.

More songs, speeches and prayers followed, and then everyone exchanged the sign of peace. Bag lunches were offered and people sat down on the tall brown grass to eat, talk and rest after the day’s march.

Later that afternoon, a hundred clergy drove north to Bismarck for another protest at the State Capitol. Fourteen were arrested inside during a sit in, calling for an end to the pipeline and for respect for the native lands and water.
But I stayed back and spent the rest of the day walking through the main camp, meeting and listening to hundreds of people. It was a powerful experience, to encounter so many people who were coming together in this difficult but beautiful campaign.

One young Standing Rock couple with two little children showed me their video from the demonstration the day before, when police and pipeline security officials sprayed the people with tear gas and shot them with rubber bullets. Others told me about the military-style raid on another camp the previous week, which led to the removal of everyone’s meager possessions and the arrest of 140 protectors. The pictures could be from our military maneuvers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Palestine, Libya and Pakistan. More, this war against the indigenous people and North Dakota landscape is not new: for one thing, hundreds of nuclear weapons have been planted in this sacred ground, ready for take off and global destruction.

One Native elder, who was also an ordained UCC minister, reflected with me on the possible outcomes that lay ahead, including the Obama administration’s effort to move the pipeline many miles north. In the medic tent, one young Native physician’s assistant told me stories of previous demonstrations, their care for the marchers and their basic mission—“to keep people alive.”

I visited the artist collective, various kitchens, tents where extra clothes were being collected and given away as needed, and the media tent. In another tent, I came upon the daily nonviolent direct action training, required of every newcomer on the day of their arrival. Some 150 people were being trained in the basics of nonviolence. It was the Civil Rights movement all over again.

Right now, everyone is digging in for the long, cold winter. But as I stood and watched a group building the geodesic dome in the center of the camp, it was clear: they may be cold, but they are on fire.

The next day, I read an editorial in the New York Times calling for the pipeline to be moved far away from Standing Rock. It said in part:

A pipeline may well be the most profitable and efficient way to move a half-million barrels of crude oil a day across the Plains. But in a time of oil gluts and plummeting oil prices, is it worth it? Is it worth the degradation of the environment, the danger to the water, the insult to the heritage of the Sioux?

The law-enforcement response to the largely peaceful Standing Rock impasse has led to grim clashes at protest camps between hundreds of civilians and officers in riot gear. The confrontation cannot help summoning a wretched history. Not far from Standing Rock, in the Black Hills of South Dakota, sacred land was stolen from the Sioux, plundered for gold and other minerals, and then carved into four monumental presidential heads: an American shrine built from a brazen act of defacement.

The Sioux know as well as any of America’s native peoples that justice is a shifting concept, that treaties, laws and promises can wilt under the implacable pressure for mineral extraction. But without relitigating the history of the North American conquest, perhaps the protesters can achieve their aim to stop or reroute the pipeline.
Perhaps. If the Standing Rock campaign is able to stop or reroute the pipeline, it will do so because of their steadfast nonviolence and the strong movement that has grown up around them. But like every grassroots movement of nonviolence, they need help and are asking for it. Everyone can get involved to help build this movement, support their nonviolence, and reach that good outcome and transformation.

As we continue our solidarity with Standing Rock, we are being summoned to take a new stand in our own lives, to give ourselves to the growing grassroots global movement to stop the destruction of our common sacred land, the poisoning of our shared water and the oppression of the indigenous peoples. One immediate next step is to get involved in the Nov. 15th National Day of Action. Another would be to join the group I work with, www.campaignnonviolence.org.

Rev. John Dear, Nobel Peace Prize nominee, is on the staff of Campaign Nonviolence.org. He is the author of many books, including: Thomas Merton, Peacemaker; Living Peace: A Spirituality of Contemplation and Action; Jesus the Rebel: Bearer of God's Peace and Justice; Transfiguration: A Meditation on Transforming Ourselves and Our World, and his autobiography, A Persistent Peace: One Man's Struggle for a Nonviolent World. See more of his work on his website: www.johndear.org

http://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/11/07/taking-stand-standing-rock

November 8, 2016

At Standing Rock, A Native American Woman Elder Says "This is What I Have Been Waiting for My Entire Life"

By Ann Wright
Common Dreams

This time I have been at Standing Rock, North Dakota at the Oceti Shakowin camp to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) for four days during a whirlwind of national and international attention following two terrible displays of police brutality toward the water protectors.

On October 27, over 100 local and state police and National Guard dressed in riot gear with helmets, face masks, batons and other protective clothing, carrying assault rifles stormed the Front Line North camp. They had other military equipment such as Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Personnel carriers (MRAP) and Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRAD) and a full assortment of tasers, bean bag bullets and clubs/batons. They arrested 141 persons, destroyed the Frontline camp and threw the personal possessions of those arrested in garbage dumpsters. The Morton county sheriff reportedly is investigating the purposeful destruction of personal property.

In another overreaction to the unarmed civilian water protectors, on November 2, police shot tear gas and beanbag bullets at water protectors who were standing in a small tributary to the Missouri River. They were standing in the frigid water to protect a handmade bridge across the
river to sacred burial sites that was being destroyed by the police. Police snipers stood on the
ridge of the burial hill with their feet on sacred burial sites.

On October 3, in solidarity with water protectors, almost 500 religious leaders from all over the
United States arrived to join water protectors in a day of prayer for stopping the Dakota Access
Pipeline. Retired Episcopal Priest John Flogerty had put out a national call for clergy to come to
Standing Rock. He said he was stunned that in less than ten days, 474 leaders answered the call
to stand for protection of Mother Earth. During the two hour interfaith witness, discussion and
prayer near the current digging of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), one could hear the
digging machines destroying the ridge line to the south of Highway 1806.

After the gathering, about 50 of the group drove to Bismarck, the capital of North Dakota, to call
on the Governor of the State to stop the pipeline. 14 clergy sat down in the rotunda of the capitol
in prayer, refused to end their prayers and leave the capitol building when ordered by the police
and were arrested.

Another five people were arrested 30 minutes later when storm troopers were deployed to
intimidate the remainder of the group when they walked across the street toward the sidewalk in
front of the Governor’s ranch style house to kneel in prayer. The women arrestees were
transported 4 hours to a county jail in Fargo, North Dakota when a women’s cell was available in
Bismarck. Two of the men arrested were shocked when they were told that the women arrestees
had been taken to Fargo as they had been placed by themselves in a cell that would
accommodate ten that was filled with feminine hygiene products. The men arrestees also said
that their cash was taken and the jail issued a check for the cash, resulting in their having NO
cash upon release making getting a cab or buying food virtually impossible as taxis and grocery
stores generally don’t cash checks. Instead, those emerging from jail are told to go to a bank to
cash the checks which are located far from the jail and probably closed when arrestees are
released.

On Saturday, November 5, tribal council leaders arranged for a ceremony for horses as the plains
Indians are “descendants from a powerful horse nation.” Tribal leader John Eagle reminded the
approximately 1,000 persons in a large circle at the new Tribal Council Sacred Fire, that in
August 1876, 4,000 horses were taken by U.S. military from the Lakota in what is known as the
Battle of Greasy Grass, and known to the U.S. military as the Battle of the Little Bighorn. He
also mentioned for the non-Sioux that the Sioux word for horse means “my son, my
daughter.” He said that the return of horses to the sacred fire would be a healing for the horses
for their genetic memory of the treatment of their ancestors in the past century as well as a
healing for the native American population for the genetic trauma for their historical treatment of
their ancestors. Healing for many at Standing Rock from their recent violent treatment by police
and North Dakota National Guard, was an important aspect of the ceremony.

Chief John Eagle pointed out that many Native Americans have joined the military and that as
combat veterans, they have double post traumatic stress (PTS), first from their treatment as
Native Americans and second as combat veterans. John emphasized that for native combat
veterans in particular, it is important to use the word “water protectors,” as the terms
“demonstrators and protestors” may trigger a PTSD response from their days in the U.S.
military. He said that he could see PTSD in the eyes of many who went through each of the recent encounters with the police.

As John Eagle explained the purpose of the ceremony, in the distance galloping down the road of flags into the Oceti Sankowin camp came 30 horses and riders. With “peace cries” not war cries, the large 1,000 person circle opened to welcome the horses and riders. They circled the sacred fire many times to the every increasing “peace cries” and the beating of a large drum. He called on each “water protector” to have courage in their hearts to overcome anger and fear and to turn to prayer, as the police and government don’t know how to deal with nonviolence and prayer. Leaders asked that no one take photos of the sacred ceremony once the horses entered the circle.

Another leader said that Native Americans must begin forgiving rather than waiting for an apology for their treatment by the U.S. government. He predicted that the U.S. government will never give an apology and that unless Native Americans forgive the pain the live in, they will live in anger. “Lives are better if one can forgive,” he said. “We must change and we must change our treatment of Mother Earth.”

The son of American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means told of being in the Front line camp and being clubbed by police as he protected an elder woman. He said that he felt that he had seen violence unfold before, that the treatment by police in 2016 was “familiar in our blood.” Means also reminded everyone to help the young water protectors who are having difficulty in coping with their experiences with the police in the past two weeks.

As the ceremony was ending approximately thirty Navajo Hopi youth and adult supporters arrived into the circle after running from Arizona. Greeted by great cries from the 1,000 persons in the circle, a 15 year-old Hopi youth in sobs said, “150 years ago we were forced to run away from our homes but today we have run to help keep your and our homes, in a prayerful spirit, but to show the government that it cannot make us run away again.”

As I walked from the circle, an older Sioux woman told me that she had been at the Front Line camp the day it was destroyed. She had been sitting in prayer when the police stormed in, roughed people up, broke up the camp and arrested her. She said that she has been in the camp for three months and will stay until the camp ends. In tears, she said, “I am now living as my ancestors lived...in nature all day, everyday, in community living, working and praying together. I have been waiting for this gathering all my life.”

**Ann Wright** is a 29 year US Army/Army Reserves veteran who retired as a Colonel and a former US diplomat who resigned in March, 2003 in opposition to the war on Iraq. She served in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia and Mongolia. In December, 2001 she was on the small team that reopened the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. She is the co-author of the book "Dissent: Voices of Conscience." ([www.voicesofconscience.com](http://www.voicesofconscience.com))

Roundtable on the Contribution of FBOs to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

On October 10, 2016, in commemoration of the International Day of Disaster Reduction, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a community-based Buddhist organization, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLIF&LC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), co-organized a roundtable on “The contribution of FBOs to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction” at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland.

See the report:

http://fore.yale.edu/files/20161114_FBO_Rountable_Final.pdf

Native Americans facing excessive force in North Dakota pipeline protests – UN expert

United Nations Human Rights
Office of the High Commissioner

GENEVA – A United Nations human rights expert has accused US security forces of using excessive force against protesters trying to stop an oil pipeline project which runs through land sacred to indigenous people.

Law enforcement officials, private security firms and the North Dakota National Guard have used unjustified force to deal with opponents of the Dakota Access pipeline, according to Maina Kiai, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Some of the 400 people held during the demonstrations had suffered “inhuman and degrading conditions in detention,” Mr. Kiai added.

Protesters say they have faced rubber bullets, teargas, mace, compression grenades and bean-bag rounds while expressing concerns over environmental impact and trying to protect burial grounds and other sacred sites of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

“Tensions have escalated in the past two weeks, with local security forces employing an increasingly militarized response to protests and forcibly moving encampments located near the construction site,” the rights expert said.

“This is a troubling response to people who are taking action to protect natural resources and ancestral territory in the face of profit-seeking activity,” he noted. “The excessive use of State security apparatus to suppress protest against corporate activities that are alleged to violate
human rights is wrong and contrary to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.”

“People feel that their concerns are being ignored, and it is their right to stage peaceful assemblies so that these concerns can be heard. The authorities have an obligation to actively protect that right. The rights of cultural heritage defenders have to be respected and protected,” he added.

The Special Rapporteur acknowledged reports that some protests had turned violent, but emphasized that the response had to be strictly proportionate and not affect peaceful protesters.

“The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is an individual right, and it cannot be taken away indiscriminately or en masse due to the violent actions of a few,” he said. “The use of violence by some protesters should not be used as a justification to nullify the peaceful assembly rights of everyone else.”

The Special Rapporteur said he was concerned at the scale of arrests and the conditions in which people were being held: “Marking people with numbers and detaining them in overcrowded cages, on the bare concrete floor, without being provided with medical care, amounts to inhuman and degrading treatment.”

Mr. Kiai also said an announcement on 8 November by pipeline operator Energy Transfer LLC Corporation, stating that the final phase of construction would start in two weeks, “willfully” ignored an earlier public statement by federal agencies. “I call on the Pipeline Company to pause all construction activity within 20 miles east and west of Lake Oahe,” he said.

Construction of the pipeline has continued despite a call in September by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and other experts for it to be halted.

The 1,172-mile (1,890km) pipeline, designed to carry crude oil to a refinery near Chicago, is being built by Energy Transfer and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Protesters say several sacred sites of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe have already been bulldozed, and construction work is nearing the Missouri River, which is held sacred. In addition, protesters believe the project poses a significant threat to the quality of the drinking water.

Mr. Kiai’s call has been endorsed by the Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz; the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, Karima Bennoune; the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, John Knox; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Michel Forst; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Léo Heller; and the current Chair of the UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, Pavel Sulyandziga.
(*). Read the expert’s statement:

Mr. Maina Kiai (Kenya) took up his functions as the first Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in May 2011. He is appointed in his personal capacity as an independent expert by the UN Human Rights Council. As a Special Rapporteur, Mr. Kiai is part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity. Learn more, log on to:
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November 18, 2016

What Standing Rock Needs Obama to Do Quickly—Before Trump Takes Over

By Tom Goldtooth and Annie Leonard
YES! Magazine

With Donald Trump’s presidency on the horizon, it is now more important than ever for President Obama to stop the $3.7 billion Dakota Access pipeline, which is slated to carry 470,000 barrels of Bakken crude oil per day, with a growth potential of up to 570,000 barrels. It
is the only solution that truly respects the treaty rights of the Standing Rock Sioux, protects the tribe’s sacred areas, defends the water of life, and takes into account the pipeline’s devastating climate impacts.

There is no doubt that Donald Trump poses an urgent threat to our climate, to our environment, and to the integrity of Mother Earth. He will try to fast-track fossil fuel projects across the country, including the Dakota Access pipeline and other transport infrastructure. That makes the final months of President Obama’s term more important than ever. President Obama’s legacy must include sending a resounding message to the world that we will not stand for fossil fuel pipelines that threaten the rights of indigenous peoples and our very existence. To avoid the worst impacts of climate change, it is absolutely imperative to keep the world’s remaining fossil fuels in the ground.

The Army Corps of Engineers announced this week that it was delaying until further analysis and consultation with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe a final easement that would allow the drilling for the pipeline to go under the Missouri River at Lake Oahe. President Obama has previously stated that the Army Corps is exploring options for rerouting the pipeline. Unfortunately, simply rerouting the project does not go far enough. The administration should revoke the permits, pull the easement, and order a full environmental impact statement. There are no safe routes for carrying this fracked and highly volatile oil. Any other proposed alternatives, such as drilling deeper under the Missouri River or double-lining the steel pipe, do not provide a guarantee against the prevention of future leaks and spills.

Already this year, we have seen over 220 significant pipeline spills in the U.S. alone. Pipelines by their very nature are threats to the land, water, and climate. If the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had completed a proper full environmental impact statement assessment, it would have come to the conclusion that this project poses an immediate threat to Native communities in the region, who are already experiencing disproportionate health and environmental impacts from failed federal policies and practices. Additionally, it threatens the drinking water for millions of people downstream on the Missouri River.

Many don’t realize that an early proposal for the Dakota Access pipeline called for the project to cross the Missouri River north of Bismarck, North Dakota, a city that is mostly White. That plan was scrapped because of the potential threat to the city’s water supply. Instead, the company chose to reroute the pipeline to cross just north of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, a sovereign Native nation that had not given its consent for construction of the pipeline. This suggests that people were concerned enough about the threats the pipeline posed to Bismarck water supplies that they used political power to move it downstream; they didn’t care if it impacted the Lakota and Dakota of Standing Rock. This is environmental racism. The United States has an executive order indicating it would not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin in its environmental decision-making processes. This project is a glaring violation of that order.

The Obama administration should pull the plug on this project immediately. Members of the Standing Rock Sioux, along with other Native water protectors and supporters, are under constant attack for peacefully resisting the destruction of their water, land, and sacred sites. We
have seen an over-militarized police presence using tear gas, dogs, rubber bullets, bean bag shotgun rounds, and riot-control sound cannons on water protectors, medics, and journalists. These attacks have come while Energy Transfer Partners ignored the administration’s request for a voluntary halt to construction, instead continuing to build right up to Lake Oahe. Currently, equipment is poised for drilling under the lake.

We have also started to see the financial institutions backing this project begin to waver, noting their concerns about a project that tramples all over indigenous rights as well as the human rights of peaceful supporters. Norway’s biggest bank, DNB, said Nov. 17 that it is divesting its assets in the project after previously announcing that it is also reconsidering the credit it is providing, which amounts to 10 percent of the total funding. Other major players, including Citibank, TD Securities, Wells Fargo, and SunTrust, must be held accountable for continuing to finance the destruction of sacred treaty lands and our climate. If you have money in any of the institutions financing the Dakota Access pipeline, reach out to them to reconsider their decision or consider banking elsewhere. We hold the power to push them to divest and pull their loans.

And there’s more to be done.

President-elect Trump certainly poses a threat to the climate, and we have urgent work to do before he takes over the White House. That starts with urging President Obama to do everything in his power to stop this pipeline. His remarks last month about “letting the process play out” cannot mean kicking this down the road to our next president. We also need to continue to make it undesirable for financial institutions to invest in fossil fuel infrastructure, especially those projects that contribute to human rights violations. We need to mobilize millions of people to ensure the next administration faces up to the reality that the movement for climate justice and the Native nations movement for indigenous peoples’ rights will only continue to grow stronger. If these climate deniers choose to move forward with dangerous fossil fuel projects, we will fight back—peacefully—at every opportunity. Climate change is Mother Earth’s call for a real revolution, an awakening of humanity to reevaluate its relationship to the sacredness of the Earth, the water of life, and nature.

Tom Goldtooth and Annie Leonard wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Tom is executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. Annie is executive director of Greenpeace USA. She is a YES! Magazine contributing editor.

http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/what-standing-rock-needs-obama-to-do-quickly-before-trump-takes-over-20161118

November 18, 2016

Worldviews Clashing at Standing Rock

The standoff at Standing Rock offers a choice between two worldviews: one that can lead to a new economy of shared prosperity and one that will hasten the devastation of the planet.
The struggle to stop construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline marks not only a difference in economic policies but a contest between two radically different orientations to life. The struggle, which pits Native Americans and their allies against a company that constructs oil pipelines, has a profound significance that extends far beyond the plains of Standing Rock. The contest is both ethical and existential, and how it is resolved may well determine the future of human life, whether for harm or for good, on this beautiful but fragile planet.

On one side of the conflict stands Energy Transfer Partners, the corporation that is building the pipeline. If completed, the pipeline will extend 1,200 miles and will transport approximately 500,000 barrels daily of Bakken crude oil from North Dakota to existing pipelines in Illinois, from where it will reach markets in the Midwest, the East Coast, and the South. The pipeline will thus be a vital artery in maintaining an economy powered by fossil fuels. Construction of the pipeline, however, cuts across land sacred to the Standing Rock Sioux tribe—land they claim was recognized as theirs by the US government in a treaty going back to 1851. Moreover, the pipeline does not merely cross sacred land. If construction continues, it would pass beneath the Missouri River, putting at risk the water supply of the Native Americans and millions of other people living downstream who also depend on the river for their water.

So far, environmental assessment of the pipeline’s impact has been called “seriously deficient.” Such a hasty assessment is precarious enough, but even when they have passed rigorous scrutiny, oil pipelines have split, leaked, and even exploded, sometimes seriously enough to pollute the waters they traverse and leave behind a trail of toxic waste. These chemical spills are far from innocuous. For those living close by, the pollution has caused cancer, strange illnesses, permanent disabilities, and premature death. Birth defects and childhood leukemia are also possible dangers caused by exposure.

The pipeline represents a worldview that sees the earth as in essence a source of raw materials to service our economy. From this perspective, humanity’s task is to exploit the earth and bend it to our purposes, primarily the production of commodities to feed the fickle appetites of a consumerist culture. It is a worldview that prioritizes monetary profit over a vibrant planet; that puts immediate gain over the needs of future generations; that commodifies everything it sees and looks with disdain at the very idea of the sacred.

Those who subscribe to this worldview give little heed to population groups outside the citadels of corporate wealth and power. Without concern for the consequences, they would extract and market all the oil they can find for the purpose of enhancing the company’s bottom line. The results of such a worldview appear in the once-fertile lands that are turning into deserts, in the transformation of seasonal rains into irrepressible floods, in the long droughts and brutal heat waves, in the threat to the world’s food supply. The results are also manifest in the movements of people who choose to migrate from their traditional homelands to strange and sometimes hostile countries, preferring a dangerous sea passage to the risks of drought and famine.
Those arrayed against the pipeline—the Native Americans and their allies—hold a different worldview that entails a different set of priorities. This is a worldview that esteems life values over market values. It is a worldview that understands water is the source of life, an irreplaceable substance far more essential than petroleum. It recognizes that, with sufficient funding and political will, we can obtain all the energy we need from the sun and wind and geothermal sources. And it sees the ideal relationship of humankind to the earth to be one of care, stewardship, and reverence rather than reckless exploitation.

The stakes in this struggle are high. Deep ramifications lie just below the surface, beneath the daily skirmishes that erupt between the pipeline staff and the water protectors. Although the Dakota Access Pipeline can be viewed as just one pipeline among a multitude of others, circumstances have turned the project into a symbol for the crossroads at which humanity has finally arrived, the juncture where the road of energy development branches off in two different directions. If we stand up against the demands of Big Oil and reject the pipeline, we can pivot away from the old economy that feeds on the resources of the earth toward a new system that offers untapped promise. We can turn away from the barren moonscapes of destruction, away from the maltreatment of peoples whose lands are stripped from their hands, whose lives are ruined by oil spills and pools of toxic waste. We can stop heating up the planet in ways that imperil the future of humankind. By shifting to a new worldview, we can hasten the emergence of an economy that promotes a shared prosperity within the limits of the biosphere. We can adopt a new outlook on the earth, one that reveres the majesty of its mountains, the splendor of its forests, the sanctity of its natural rhythms.

The choice between these two orientations has grown starker over the past decade, ever since the reality of climate change impinged on public consciousness. The two alternatives have come to a head at Standing Rock. Denial is no longer tenable. Either we go on burning fossil fuels without concern for the impact, or we finally say, “It’s time to change course.” The choice now rests with President Obama. It’s up to him to show courage. It’s up to him to choose wisely, mindfully, and compassionately. And we can let him know what we want. We can send him a petition asking him to reject the Dakota Access Pipeline, to reject it once and for all. Let’s act skillfully, remembering that our future is at stake, that our action now affects generations as yet unborn, both in America and throughout the world.

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi is a Buddhist scholar and translator of Buddhist texts. He is also the founder and chair of Buddhist Global Relief, a charity dedicated to helping communities around the world afflicted by chronic hunger and malnutrition. He can be reached at: venbodhi [at] gmail [dot] com.

http://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/11/18/worldviews-clashing-standing-rock

November 22, 2016

We’re Missing 90 Percent of the Dakota Access Pipeline Story
By Raul Garcia
Earth Justice

Over the past few months, the Dakota Access pipeline and the Standing Rock Sioux tribe that opposes this oil project went from anonymity to full blown national news coverage. Since August, the news media has been reporting on the Native Americans who have gathered in camps in North Dakota to protect sacred land and the Missouri River, the Standing Rock tribe’s sole water source. For months, we have been informed only about the most dramatic developments, but I discovered after a visit to the Sacred Stone camp two weeks ago that public understanding of what this movement is all about is based on misrepresentations. We are missing how peaceful, respectful and solemn this struggle is.

This is unfortunate because what’s happening at the confluence of the Missouri and Cannonball Rivers is a solemn struggle to protect water and culture. As I prepared to make the trip, I read articles about the risks. And I fell for it. When I was flying into Bismarck, North Dakota, with a delegation from GreenLatinos—a group of Latino advocates committed to addressing environmental issues—I was on edge. We had gone to North Dakota to learn how GreenLatinos might be able to help the tribe, yet at first I concentrated on myself. I relentlessly googled “Standing Rock Sioux tribe arrests” and related key terms to figure out where I could or couldn’t go and what I could or couldn’t do.

But all that anxiety quickly evaporated when I reached the camps. I saw that this assembly of indigenous tribes and supporters is among the most serene and peaceful groups of people I have been around. They are not unified by indignity. What unifies the thousands of water protectors who are bracing for the incoming winter is devotion and prayer. In fact, elders and tribal leaders told us repeatedly that tribal camps aren’t protests; these are ceremonies being held at a sacred place. And, they told us, they expect the behavior of their brothers and sisters to reflect that.

Even when we were talking about politics, the sacredness of it all was what tribe members conveyed as important. The respect of the people overcame any thought of animosity, and the solemnity of the place and the need to protect nature inspired peaceful unity. This indigenous vision of sacred air, sacred water and sacred land was striking to me. I live in Washington, D.C., where polarized rhetoric dominates the landscape, and where, since the presidential election season, distasteful attacks are rampant. Visiting the camps and understanding the spirituality driving this struggle against corporate profit was an eye-opening and humbling experience.

Water protectors are constantly looking after one another, helping one another. They may not have a lot, but they are willing to give everything. I learned that not just by seeing how they would offer sweaters or blankets as temperatures dropped into the 20s, but also by listening to their stories. One woman, who is now one of many who prepare meals for the camp for free, told me how she arrived with little besides her eagerness to help cook. She didn’t have a stove, yet with people’s donations she got everything she needed to help the camp in four days.

I have not seen a single news report that elevates this type of story. That’s because peace may be what we value and aspire to as a nation, but peace doesn’t generate clicks. Still, peace is what this historic indigenous gathering is all about.
At a time when we know that fake news stories are rampant, I encourage everyone to verify the authenticity of the news they read. Many news reports give the impression that the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s struggle is chaotic and tumultuous. But that’s not the case. This movement of solidarity is filled with people who, when asked about what they need, say they need us to pray for them. Pray and do what’s right, the elders tell us, noting that they are hopeful about what’s to come.

Even with an unfriendly incoming presidential administration, I believe that if we all stand strong with the Standing Rock Sioux, make our voices heard and reach out to our elected officials in Congress, we can protect the river and the land that so many hold sacred.

http://earthjustice.org/blog/2016-november/we-re-missing-90-percent-of-the-dakota-access-pipeline-story#

November 22, 2016

Four Ways to Look at Standing Rock: An Indigenous Perspective

In the shadow of the Trump election, I found myself explaining to world climate leaders how to see Standing Rock through an indigenous lens.

By Kayla DeVault
YES! Magazine

A couple of weeks ago, as I stood before climate scientists, advocates, and world policy leaders at the COP22 in Morocco, I felt the increased importance of my message as climate denier Donald Trump was voted into office. My perspective as a young Native woman living on the Navajo reservation and studying both renewable energy engineering and Diné studies had earned me an appointment to the NEJAC/EPA Youth Perspectives on Climate Working Group as well as to the SustainUs Youth Delegation attending the November climate talks in Marrakech.

I was there to bring Standing Rock to the world climate talks.

Watching the events at Standing Rock unfurl over the past year, I felt compelled to ask our Navajo leadership to divest from oil, coal, and uranium and instead invest in the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s fight against the Dakota Access pipeline. Eventually they did. Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye announced a formal stance of solidarity and traveled to Cannon Ball, North Dakota, to plant the Navajo Nation flag there. A week later, I stood on the front lines of #NoDAPL while energy company employees hit us with pepper spray and threatened us with attack dogs. I found everything dear to me, suddenly, at the heart of this battle—fought by people from the four corners of the world.

Which brings me to the significance of counting by four. To understand Standing Rock, you must remove the Western lens and adopt a holistic, indigenous perspective of the world.
BUMP bump bump bump. BUMP bump bump bump. The rhythm of the powwow drum, the heartbeat of life, beats in a sequence of fours. It celebrates the ebb and flow of the natural world. The rhythm falters only during the Honor Beats, when a Jingle Dress dancer raises her fan to catch the spirit of the drums. Rarely do so many nations come together in one space for a shared purpose. It is a gathering where commonalities are celebrated, such as the sacredness of the eagle feather and the direness of maintaining balance in the world. Certain concepts—holistic methodologies, the value of ceremony and language, the religious significance of certain landmarks, the beliefs of interconnectedness and interdependence—put indigenous groups in stark contrast with Western thinking.

This similarly has been the exception of Standing Rock.

And, just as the powwow rhythm carries four beats, an overwhelming number of indigenous communities count various elements of their lives in fours. The medicine wheel of Native culture represents the four elements. There are the four elements, which build all life and the four seasons that govern time.

Where I live in the Navajo Nation, the culture is steeped in fours. Dinébikéyah, the land given to the Diné (Navajo) by the Holy People, falls between four sacred mountains. The day is broken into four phases, which correlate to the four stages of life and the four steps that govern life in Navajo philosophy: Nitsakees (Thinking), Nahat’a (Planning), Iina (Living), and Sihasin (Reflection, which provides hope and assurance). Each Navajo has four clans that constitute his or her identity.

The beauty of using fours, to define so many aspects of life, is that we are forced to see the holistic picture. Without this bigger picture, we lose sight of the interconnectedness of humans to nature and to each other. The intricacy of this worldview is captured in the traditional Navajo home, the hooghan or hogan. It represents the entirety of life as a Navajo: its four pillars symbolizing the four sacred mountains. Its doorway faces the east, a fire at the heart. Within the hogan, you are cradled between Mother Earth and Father Sky (visible through the smoke hole in the ceiling). This same smoke hole allows the sun to pass through. It traces a clockwise path on the walls called sha bikego, or “sunwise.” This direction is used in every ceremony and every meeting. When the sun reaches the northern wall, this symbolizes winter; when it strikes the fire, it’s time to plant. The northern star, above the hogan, is the symbolic fire in the sky around which the First Man and First Woman constellations rotate.

Everything in Navajo philosophy is related to the concept of balance, and even groups of fours balance one another. These are pairs rather than opposites, and maintains what Navajos call hózhó, a sort of harmony the universe relies on. The other key concept is k’é, or your relations. These could be your siblings, your clan relatives, your tribe, or even your belonging among all creations on this shared planet.

To me, conversations of hózhó and k’é are crucial to global talks of sustainability. We cannot address how climate change will affect our futures if we do not acknowledge the need for both balance and our fellow beings. The concepts may be of Navajo origin, but they embody the holistic viewpoint of many indigenous communities.
What does this view have to do with the climate? To achieve sustainability in any society, we must ensure the protection of four areas of community well-being:

Environmental: We are all made of water. We all breathe air. We cannot change our dependency on the four elements or the fact that they create us; therefore, we must protect our environment.

Economic: No community can operate without an adequate and fair economy. Furthermore, the diversity and adaptability of an economy are key to its survival.

Social: Our relationships to one another ensure the well-being of us as individuals and as societies. Our communities thrive when we have mutual respect, safety, and room for personal growth.

Cultural: Identity is a critical part of community sustainability, and it is often left out of the greater picture. This is a crucial issue when indigenous communities attempt to assert their sovereign authority and are faced with infringement of their cultural freedoms and rights which, without, would destroy the ability to maintain harmony.

So this is what I had to say to the climate justice world two weeks ago. Standing Rock requires us not to forget that fourth piece: cultural identity.

When we have global conversations about loss and damage, we cannot simply tick off the population counts for displaced people or the dollar figures for economic impact or infrastructure damage. This is watching disorder through a Western lens. Instead, we must analyze the loss and damage done to a way of life, to the sustainability of an entire identity of people. The United Nations may have a definition for poverty, but to be impoverished does not always equate to having no financial leverage. Hardships come in many forms.

Jon Eagle Sr., the tribal historic preservation officer for the standing Rock Sioux, recounts the struggle of his ancestors through his tribe’s winter records. Their lives were extraordinarily difficult, but the definition of what they consider true hardships provides important context. Not surprisingly, the traditional Lakota people define four hardships in life:

To hear an orphan cry, as it was a terrible sound.

To lose a child, an indescribable pain.

To lose your mother.

To not know where your warriors fell.

With this reference point, consider Energy Transfer’s decision to desecrate sacred sites and destroy graves of warriors and other ancestors. It is forcing cultural damage on the Lakota people.
I want to make sure the world’s youth hear an indigenous perspective on sustainability and comprehend how the need to protect our cultural identity and exercise our tribal sovereignty in the DAPL fight impacts our survival as nations.

Because we are still learning how to erase the colonization of our own minds to really see the cultural implications of our so-called “infrastructure projects,” perhaps it is easier to identify straightforward acts of environmental racism, such as placing a refining factory within an impoverished community. Perhaps we can more easily oppose using cheap labor as a country’s leading export or stand up for the rights of a particular sex, gender, or religion.

And perhaps that is why, on Sept. 3, the water protectors who watched Dakota Access workers destroy the graves of their ancestors, continued to pray for and forgive the ignorance of those committing the crimes against them.

“These people in our history, they were our heroes,” explains Jon Eagle Sr. in National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Standing Rock Preservation Leadership Forum, as he described the ancestral burial sites that Energy Transfer destroyed. “I don’t think the mainstream society understands that.” Our cultural lenses prevent many of us from realizing that.

As I told the COP22 audiences, the battle at Standing Rock symbolizes the greater battle we all face: The assurance of cultural well-being and sustainability as a global community while combating the short-term visions and greed of corporations. We must remember the importance of hózhó—balance—and that we, as beings of the Five Fingered Clan, are connected as k’é—relatives. We are made of the same four elements, and we share the same finite resources. As my mother says: “We may be coming from all four directions, but we all come from the same neighborhood—the earth.”

Kayla DeVault wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Kayla is an Anishinaabe and enrolled Shawnee, living on the Navajo reservation. She currently works for the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation as a project civil engineer while studying Diné studies at Diné College. She is a youth ambassador for Generation Indigenous and was a participant in the White House Tribal Youth Gathering.


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November 23, 2016

Where Oil and Politics Mix

By Deborah Sontag
New York Times

After an unusual land deal, a giant spill and a tanker-train explosion, anxiety began to ripple across the North Dakota prairie.
TIoga, N.D. — In late June, as black and gold balloons bobbed above black and gold tables with oil-rig centerpieces, the theme song from “Dallas” warmed up the crowd for the “One Million Barrels, One Million Thanks” celebration.

The mood was giddy. Halliburton served barbecued crawfish from Louisiana. A commemorative firearms dealer hawked a “one-million barrel” shotgun emblazoned with the slogan “Oil Can!” Mrs. North Dakota, in banner and crown, posed for pictures. The Texas Flying Legends performed an airshow backlit by a leaping flare of burning gas. And Gov. Jack Dalrymple was the featured guest.

Traveling through the “economically struggling” nation, Mr. Dalrymple told the crowd, he encountered many people who asked, “Jack, what the heck are you doing out there in North Dakota?” to create the fastest-growing economy, lowest unemployment rate and (according to one survey) happiest population.

“And I enjoy explaining to them, ‘Yes, the oil boom is a big, big help,’” he said.

Outsiders, he explained, simply need to be educated out of their fear of fracking: “There is a way to explain it that really relaxes people, that makes them understand this is not a dangerous thing that we’re doing out here, that it’s really very well managed and very safe and really the key to the future of not only North Dakota but really our entire nation.”

Tioga, population 3,000, welcomed North Dakota’s first well in 1951, more than a half-century before hydraulic fracturing liberated the “tight oil” trapped in the Bakken shale formation. So it was fitting that Tioga ring in the daily production milestone that had ushered the Bakken into the rarefied company of historic oil fields worldwide.

But Tioga also claims another record: what is considered the largest on-land oil spill in recent American history. And only Brenda Jorgenson, 61, who attended “to hear what does not get said,” mentioned that one, sotto voce.

The million-barrel bash was devoid of protesters save for Ms. Jorgenson, a tall, slender grandmother who has two wells at her driveway’s end and three jars in her refrigerator containing blackened water that she said came from her faucet during the fracking process. She did not, however, utter a contrary word.

“I’m not that brave (or stupid) to protest among that,” she said in an email afterward. “I’ve said it before: we’re outgunned, outnumbered and out-suited.”

North Dakotans do not like to make a fuss. Until recently, those few who dared to challenge the brisk pace of oil development, the perceived laxity of government oversight or the despoliation of farmland were treated as killjoys. They were ignored, ridiculed, threatened, and paid settlements in exchange for silence.

But over the past year and some, the dynamic seemed to be shifting.
Satellite photos of western North Dakota at night, aglitter like a metropolis with lighted rigs and burning flares, crystallized its rapid transformation from tight-knit agricultural society to semi-industrialized oil powerhouse. Proposals to drill near historic places generated heated opposition. The giant oil spill in Tioga in September 2013 frightened people, as did the explosion months later of a derailed oil train, which sent black smoke mushrooming over a snowy plain.

Then, this year, North Dakotans learned of discovery after discovery of illegally dumped oil filter socks, the “used condoms” of the oil industry, which contain radiation dislodged from deep underground.

Suddenly a percolating anxiety came uncorked. “The worm is turning,” Timothy Q. Purdon, the United States attorney, said in April.

It was against this backdrop that on a brisk spring day David Schwalbe, a retired rancher, and his wife, Ellen Chaffee, a former university president, walked headlong into the wind on their way to an F.B.I. office in Fargo.

A mile-long oil train was rumbling through downtown. Wordlessly, Mr. Schwalbe tightened his grip on the black binders bearing what he considered evidence, based on an unusual deal involving his family’s land, that Governor Dalrymple had a corrupt relationship with the oil industry.

‘This has David kind of nervous,” Dr. Chaffee confided. “He comes from a very below-the-radar culture.”

A Potential Advantage for the Oil Industry

As a boy in the 1950s, Mr. Schwalbe scampered up and down the steep banks of Corral Creek, which flows from Killdeer Mountain into the Little Missouri River. His family homestead lay in the remote region where Theodore Roosevelt sought solitude in what he called the “desolate, grim beauty” of the Badlands.

Like many in his generation, Mr. Schwalbe took for granted the craggy buttes and rippling grasslands, the cottonwoods and poplars, the mule deer and mountain lions. He never anticipated a day when this singular landscape would be ravaged, in his view, by rigs, pumping units, waste pits and pipelines and when he would become an archetypal North Dakotan of a certain age, disheartened by what others saw as progress.

As he helped his father run cattle 11,000 feet above the Bakken formation, Mr. Schwalbe came to understand that the family ranch would never sustain his parents and their six adult children. After college, he settled in eastern North Dakota, returning home mostly for “brandings, hunting and holidays.”

When their father died, five Schwalbe siblings — David, Dennis, Donnie, Donnette and Dale — sold their shares of the ranch to their brother Delry. All six kept their rights to what lay beneath the surface, however. Just in case.
The Schwalbes were following the lead of Burlington Northern Railroad, which once owned every other tract in the area, the legacy of a federal land grant. The railroad eventually sold the surface but retained the minerals, which were managed by its energy company, Burlington Resources, now a subsidiary of ConocoPhillips.

“We figured they knew something we didn’t,” Mr. Schwalbe said.

Land has long been sliced and diced in North Dakota from generation to generation, with surface ownership severed from the ownership of underlying minerals like coal and oil. Given that mineral rights trump surface rights, this made many residents of western North Dakota feel trampled once the boom began.

In 2006, a land man for Marathon Oil offered to lease the Schwalbe siblings’ 480 acres of minerals for $100 an acre plus royalties on every sixth barrel of oil.

“Within a few years, people were getting 20, 30 times that and every fifth barrel,” Mr. Schwalbe said. But the Schwalbes did not expect “to see any oil come up out of that ground in our lifetime.”

Oil companies were just starting to combine horizontal drilling with hydraulic fracturing to tap into the mother lode of Bakken oil. “We didn’t really know yet about fracking,” he said.

The Schwalbes’ first well was drilled in 2008, their second the next year. Powerless to block the development, Mr. Schwalbe and his wife, nearing retirement, took some comfort in the extra income, the few thousand dollars a month.

Then that was threatened, too.

On June 20, 2011, the Schwalbes received a letter informing them that Burlington Resources intended to forge a 30,883.94-acre oil production unit that would effectively override their lease agreement with Marathon and subsume their mineral property. In the Bakken, such units are typically 1,280 acres.

The Schwalbes were instructed to sign a ratification agreement by August, when a hearing was scheduled on what some started calling “the mega-unit.” The mega-unit would include the Little Missouri State Park, a patchwork of private, state and federal land beloved for its rugged trails.

Initially perplexed by the thick document on their doorstep, the Schwalbes soon grasped a painful point: though they would be ceding control of their mineral property, their consent was not required. Only the owners of 60 percent of the unit’s minerals were needed for ratification, and Burlington, together with the federal government, already met that goal.

“That’s part of why they chose Corral Creek for their scheme,” Dr. Chaffee said. “They didn’t have to deal with a lot of fleas like us, the pesky citizens.”

The proposal had the potential to set an advantageous precedent for the oil industry.
As ConocoPhillips officials explained at the August hearing, they aimed to maximize oil recovery by being freed of the “artificial boundary lines” that require 200-foot setbacks from the borders of each standard production unit. Their plan would allow for 23 more wells; for 73,000 more barrels of oil per well; and for consolidated production that would reduce “surface disturbance,” truck traffic and air pollution. It was a proposal “for the common good,” they said.  

Many of the “pesky citizens” were skeptical. “Basically this whole unit scenario is only good for one person, and that’s Burlington,” Leroy Fettig, a land and mineral owner, said at the hearing.  

In normal units, oil leases expire after a set time if no drilling occurs and owners can then renegotiate on better terms or put them up for bid. But under the proposed unit, Mr. Fettig said, “You wouldn’t have to drill one additional well to hold all the acreage here theoretically for a very long period of time.”  

He worried, too, he said, that Burlington would have unfettered access to a nearly 50-square-mile area and be able to situate well pads, roads and gathering pipelines without having to negotiate easements or rights of way.  

“Mr. Fettig, you’re not an engineer, are you?” a lawyer for Burlington asked him. “You’re not a geologist?”  

“I’m not a lawyer, either,” Mr. Fettig replied.  

Mr. Schwalbe’s lawyers cautioned that he would see a significant drop in his monthly checks, as his royalties would be shared with all the mineral owners in the mega-unit, including ConocoPhillips itself. Down the road, he could recoup that loss, and then some, when wells were developed elsewhere in the unit. But he worried that if, say, oil prices dropped, he would not see that income in his lifetime.  

Before the hearing, Mr. Schwalbe had approached Lynn D. Helms, director of the state’s Department of Mineral Resources, with a compromise: unitize the property in phases to be fairer to the owners of the dozen existing wells.  

“I realize in the overall scope of things, my check is pretty small, but it’s got a Social Security check beat all to hell,” Mr. Schwalbe said at the hearing. “I’m hoping with the help of the commission this can be worked out equitably for everybody.”  

Mr. Helms ultimately executes the policies of the three elected officials — the governor, attorney general and agriculture commissioner, all Republicans — who make up the North Dakota Industrial Commission, which regulates the oil and gas industry. Yet at their monthly meetings, he guides them calmly from vote to vote and rarely encounters dissent. A review by The New York Times of meeting minutes since 2011 found no failed motions concerning oil and gas.  

“You feel as if the meetings are a performance, that everything’s sort of done under the table, with a lot of back-room deals,” said Wayde Schafer, the Sierra Club’s sole employee in North Dakota.
Private citizens were not the only ones concerned about the mega-unit. “Before we get all up in arms about it, we have a few questions about what the proposal is and if it is going to benefit us or not,” a state land official wrote to a state oil official in October 2011. “One of the things that has got us so upset is that they are playing this off as a ‘done deal.’”

It is essentially a done deal, the oil official responded, saying he expected an order at the Nov. 21 commission meeting would “dispose of this case.”

The Nov. 21 vote was postponed.

On Dec. 16, Mr. Schwalbe received a notarized copy of an order signed by Mr. Helms on Dec. 5. Citing “issues in this case of such complexity that additional time is necessary for the commission to render a decision,” it continued the case for 45 days. Mr. Schwalbe breathed a sigh of relief.

On Dec. 20, however, he got a call from his brother Donnie: The commission had taken up the matter after all, voting unanimously to approve the mega-unit.

“We were just dumbfounded,” Mr. Schwalbe said. “It seemed so sneaky. You know how sick a feeling it is when somebody takes your property away and gives it to somebody else? And you don’t even get a chance to be there and protest?”

Mr. Helms’s spokeswoman, Alison Ritter, said, “There’s nothing in that order that says we couldn’t act before the 45 days was up.”

Before the vote, Mr. Helms had recommended approval because, he said, the mega-unit would allow for more efficient drilling with fewer multiwell pads and storage tank batteries and “a much smaller impact on the park.” He also cited “one other major positive” — the recovery of an additional 15 million barrels of oil. During the long discussion that followed, the park was barely mentioned, though Mr. Helms did note that the development called for no tank batteries inside it.

In a statement to The Times, Governor Dalrymple’s office said the commission had acted “solely to preserve the Missouri State Park’s viewscape.”

Under the present development plan, there will be up to 28 wells and, despite what was said before the commission’s vote, three storage tank batteries inside park boundaries, Jesse Hanson, a state parks official, said. He called it “a significant intrusion.”

North Dakota’s small conservation movement has shied away from the confrontational approach that characterizes the antifracking movement elsewhere.

“We all feel we have to issue the apologia that we’re not anti-oil, we just want to see it done responsibly,” Dr. Chaffee said.
The industry, as a result, has not grappled with much opposition. “From a conservation standpoint, I can name most of those people,” said Ron Ness, president of the North Dakota Petroleum Council.

In her split-level house overlooking the majestic White Earth River Valley, Brenda Jorgenson, for one, has been a persistent thorn in the side of industry and state officials.

“ ‘Reluctant landowners’ is the phrase they use for people like us,” her husband, Richard Jorgenson, said, laughing. “Reluctant landowners standing in the way of progress.”

While the Schwalbes were battling the mega-unit, the Jorgensons were trying to get their dirty drinking water tested by the state and then challenging, unsuccessfully, the burial of a waste disposal pit they call a “toxic tomb” on their property. Later, also unsuccessfully, they fought the construction of a high-pressure gas pipeline in their fields.

“We had a human prayer line to block that pipeline,” Ms. Jorgenson said. “It’s like having a ticking bomb in your backyard.”

Ms. Jorgenson maintains photo albums that intermingle pictures of her grandchildren doing snow angels with those of fracking trucks advancing on her home. Relatives ask why she and her husband do not just move. “But that’s just what the oil companies want,” Ms. Jorgenson said. “They see us as the trespassers.”

One company, in fact, sued three activist landowners in 2011, seeking damages for trespassing after the men tried to document what they believed was the cover-up of a saltwater spill.

A judge dismissed the lawsuit, calling it an effort to “shut these people up.”

“It was a great result, which is kind of rare,” said Derrick Braaten, their lawyer.

When Mr. Purdon, the United States attorney, tried to hold oil companies accountable for dead migratory birds, the result was not as satisfactory.

For years, federal wildlife agents had been imploring oil companies to cover their waste pits; migratory birds sometimes dived or fell in, dying preventable deaths. But some companies preferred to absorb the cost of citations rather than invest in netting.

In 2011, Mr. Purdon decided firmer action was needed. In one sweep through the Bakken, Richard Grosz, a special agent for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, collected 28 dead birds from drilling sites. One, found submerged, had a rock tied to its neck: “They had tried to deep-six the evidence,” Mr. Grosz said.

Six oil companies were charged with misdemeanor violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Mr. Purdon said that within hours of the complaints being filed, he received a call from a friend with a message from top-ranking state officials: “If Tim thought he would be a federal judge someday, that’s done.”
Three companies signed plea agreements. The others fought the charges, and not just in court. During a presidential campaign debate, Mitt Romney, whose energy adviser was chief executive of one of those companies, Continental Resources, mocked the prosecution; The Wall Street Journal called Mr. Purdon “dodo prosecutor of the year.”

A federal judge dismissed the cases, saying the bird act was meant to address deliberate killing by hunters and poachers.

Since then, Mr. Grosz said, “we have not gone back out in the oil patch to look for these things. Birds are still being killed. But we’ve quit.”

The mega-unit became a reality on Jan. 1, 2012. Mr. Schwalbe’s first royalty check was reduced by 95 percent.

For many months, Mr. Schwalbe and his wife stewed. Then Dr. Chaffee, apolitical during 15 years as president of state universities, decided to get partisan. She joined the Democratic ticket of State Senator Ryan Taylor, a fresh-faced rancher who faced an uphill battle against Mr. Dalrymple for an office under Republican control for two decades.

Mr. Dalrymple was running his own first race for governor, having ascended to the post in 2010 after his predecessor was elected to the United States Senate.

On the day Mr. Taylor announced Dr. Chaffee’s candidacy for lieutenant governor, Mr. Schwalbe stepped off the sidelines of what his wife called a “near-hermit existence.” His first campaign assignment was to study the opposition’s year-end financial disclosure report.

And there he found what he believed to be an explanation for why the mega-unit “case of such complexity” had gotten simpler after Mr. Helms signed the Dec. 5 continuation order.

On Dec. 5, the Exxon Mobil Corporation PAC contributed $600 to Mr. Dalrymple’s campaign. On Dec. 12, Harold G. Hamm, chief executive of Continental, gave $20,000. On Dec. 17, the Marathon Oil PAC gave $5,000. On Dec. 21, the day after the mega-unit vote, for which he was present, Continental’s Bismarck-based lawyer gave $5,000. On Dec. 27, Denbury Resources contributed $5,000.

All these companies held a working interest or lease ownership in the Corral Creek mega-unit. ConocoPhillips, which stood to profit the most, had contributed $1,000 through its PAC in October.

The governor’s office declined The Times’s requests to interview him, and provided a written statement. It did not verify or deny The Times’s calculation of contributions or respond to specific questions about allegations of conflicts of interest.

Over the campaign, Mr. Dalrymple would collect over $93,000 from those with a direct interest in the mega-unit and a total of about $550,000 from oil-related executives, lawyers and political...
action committees. That represented a quarter of the $2.16 million in contributions over $200 (the bar for disclosure) to Mr. Dalrymple.

Governors in top oil-producing states typically get industry contributions. In North Dakota, though, the governor’s relationship to those contributors’ interests is uniquely direct because he is chairman of the Industrial Commission.

In California, by contrast, the Department of Conservation supervises the industry. In Alaska, it is a commission appointed by the governor. In Texas, it is the elected Railroad Commission.

“North Dakota’s is a hugely defective setup,” said David C. Thompson, a lawyer in Grand Forks. “Our elected officials regulate companies they get contributions from and companies they own stock in. Nobody ever recuses himself; they just vote.”

In mid-2012, Mr. Schwalbe approached Mr. Thompson at a campaign event. The lawyer happened to be researching state corruption laws on behalf of Brad Crabtree, a Democratic candidate for the Public Service Commission, which, in addition to regulating utilities, oversees oil pipeline siting and mine reclamation.

Mr. Crabtree, who went on to lose, had declined to accept contributions from the energy industry and sought to shine a spotlight on “comprehensive, institutionalized conflict” in the way North Dakota’s regulators conducted business.

Mr. Thompson, meanwhile, discovered a Watergate-era bribery statute that made it a felony for public officials to accept “a thing of pecuniary value” from any “actor” with an imminent or pending proceeding before them. No quid pro quo was necessary; the mere possibility that the official’s “performance or nonperformance” of his duties could be affected made it a crime.

Therefore, Mr. Thompson concluded in a legal analysis posted on the blog NorthDecoder.com, Mr. Dalrymple, in the case of the mega-unit, had taken bribes.

That bombshell landed with a fizzle. The state media took no interest, Mr. Taylor said, and, “as a candidate behind in the polls, who would be accused of trying to make sheer political hay,” he declined to use the allegations.

Then Mr. Thompson got a call from Paul Sorum, a founder of North Dakota’s Tea Party running for governor as an independent. “He said, ‘Are you aware of the citizen-initiated grand jury process?’” Mr. Thompson related. “You need 10 percent of voters” in a county to sign a petition.

A week before the election, a petition filed in Dunn County, where the mega-unit is, asked a judge to convene a grand jury to determine whether Mr. Dalrymple could be prosecuted for bribery.

On Election Day, Mr. Taylor lost by nearly 30 points. Even before he had formally announced his candidacy for governor, the State Legislature had eliminated two rural districts, one of them his. “That was a dirty deal,” he said.
A couple of weeks later, a judge dismissed the grand jury petition, finding a few signatures illegitimate.

The conservationists of North Dakota often express nostalgia for the strong stance that former Gov. Arthur A. Link took during a coal-mining boom in the 1970s. He pledged to protect the state for future generations “when the landscape becomes quiet again.”

“When the draglines, the blasting rigs, the power shovels and the huge gondolas cease to rip and roar, and when the last bulldozer has pushed the last spoil pile into place and the last patch of barren earth has been seeded to grass or grain, let those who follow and repopulate the land be able to say, ‘Our grandparents did their job well,’ ” he said.

The current governor is better known for his business acumen than his rhetoric. John Stewart Dalrymple III, 66, is something of a patrician, a rarity in North Dakota. His state biography says he grew up “on the family farm in Casselton,” N.D., but he was born in Minneapolis and attended a private day school there before boarding at St. Paul’s School in New Hampshire and going on to Yale, like his father before him.

The 140-year-old family farm once stretched over 32,000 acres, making it “the largest cultivated farm in the world,” according to North Dakota State University archives. More recently, Dalrymple Farms has been one of the state’s largest recipients of federal commodity subsidies.

Mr. Dalrymple was more of an agribusinessman than the typical North Dakota farmer: “I’m not saying he never greased a combine, but his farm office was in the National Bank building in Casselton and he’d wear a white shirt to work,” said Bill Patrie, a specialist in rural cooperatives who worked with Mr. Dalrymple to establish a farmer-owned pasta co-op.

Mr. Dalrymple served as co-op chairman through eight years in the legislature and a decade as lieutenant governor. While lieutenant governor, he championed the cooperative’s conversion to an investor-owned firm in which he was a major shareholder, and then oversaw its sale to a Canadian conglomerate, making $3.77 million.

“In essence, Jack converted a quasi-public local institution into a personal, one-time profit maker and sold it to a multinational corporation,” Mr. Patrie said, adding, “I believe he used his public office for private gain.”

But Mr. Patrie said the local news media and farmers’ groups did not raise objections.

“We North Dakotans trust our politicians — even when they sell us out,” he said.

Many Democrats were incensed when Edward T. Schafer, a Republican former governor, toured the state in an oil industry-sponsored “Fix the Tax” bus in 2011, arguing that oil taxes should be lowered to prevent the boom from going bust. The effort failed; afterward, Mr. Schafer was named to the board of Continental Resources, and awarded a compensation package, mostly stock, valued at $700,000 that year.
According to Mr. Dalrymple’s 2012 statement of interests, he and his wife own oil stock themselves, including unspecified amounts in at least one company with regular business before his Industrial Commission: Exxon Mobil, a top state producer through its subsidiary XTO.

Because XTO was a working interest owner in the mega-unit, Mr. Schwalbe believed the governor himself could be said to have “owned a piece of the property.”

In early February 2013, Mr. Schwalbe filed a second grand jury petition.

At the same time, state legislators pushed for a higher bar for citizens to convene grand juries so that innocent people would not be subjected to criminal charges, as one legislator put it. They succeeded. And a judge threw out the second citizens’ petition.

Mr. Schwalbe felt defeated, but pockets of resistance were beginning to develop as the boom intensified.

Early this year, an irritated crowd at a Mountrail County Commission meeting confronted Mr. Helms, the director of mineral resources, asking why state officials had approved an oil waste pit in the wellhead protection area for a municipal water supply.

Mr. Helms explained that his inspectors had had the wrong maps, adding, “We strive for perfection, but since we’re human, we have to settle for excellence.”

That came across as cavalier to the Rev. Carolyn Philstrom, a young Lutheran pastor, who shot off a letter to the editor of a local newspaper. “I baptize babies with that water,” she wrote, though she subsequently tempered her outspokenness because it bothered parishioners.

When the illegally dumped oil filter socks were discovered, Rick Schreiber, the director of solid waste for McKenzie County, became the rare official voicing outrage at what he called oil company recklessness and state inaction.

“I’m not here to make friends with the oil patch,” Mr. Schreiber said in February as trucks rolled over the radiation detector he had installed at his landfill. “If I’m the guy that has to beat the hornets’ nest with a stick, I’ll do it.”

This year, the Industrial Commission has gradually taken steps to assert greater authority over the industry.

After applications to drill near a 19th-century battlefield and near the Elkhorn Ranch in Theodore Roosevelt National Park stirred unusually heated public debate, the commission established special procedures including a public comment period for drilling on public, though not private, land near 18 “areas of interest.” The petroleum industry had resisted, cautioning that “radical environmentalists” would exploit the comment period to obstruct development. But conservationists saw the measure as a watered-down version of a proposal that already offered too little, too late.
Next, after more than a dozen mineral owners filed anti-flaring lawsuits, the commission moved to clamp down on a longstanding problem. Some 30 percent of the natural gas produced in the state — compared with less than 1 percent nationwide — was being treated as a byproduct of oil production and burned off.

At a hearing in April, Dr. Lyle Best, a pediatrician, said he lived downwind of tall flares that roared like jetliners and flickered light through his bedroom window.

“Our real annoyance, however, is the understanding that these two flares have burned off over 60 million cubic feet of natural gas in the past six months and are continuously wasting enough energy to heat hundreds of homes at the same time that many people in our country are sleeping on the street, and at least one North Dakotan died of hypothermia this winter,” he said. “This doesn’t even address the issue of carbon dioxide and other pollutants.”

When the commission voted in July to require “gas-capture plans” and impose production restrictions if companies did not meet them, Mr. Dalrymple said, “I hope that what we do today, we are serious about.”

And when QEP Resources petitioned to create its own mega-unit, Mr. Dalrymple dissented from the 2-to-1 vote of approval. In its statement, the governor’s office said the QEP mega-unit, unlike the Corral Creek one, would not have provided a “benefit to conservation efforts.” QEP later dropped its plan.

At the entrance to the mega-unit, on the dirt access road built for the hundreds of trucks that now traverse what used to be pristine pastures, Mr. Schwalbe’s cousin, Candyce Kleemann, sat at the wheel of her pickup, photographs on her dashboard.

“These are the before pictures: before the invasion,” said Ms. Kleemann, who lives and ranches inside the unit. “When we fought the unit, they told us there would be minimal damage or changes. But it’s a different landscape. Look, that’s our new saltwater injection well.”

She pointed to a sign: “Danger: H2S. Poisonous gas.” And to another: “Caution: power lines.” Her own sign, proclaiming her land to be private property, made her snort.

“That one’s useless,” she said. “We’re even more powerless than surface owners in the rest of the oil patch. In this unit, oil can go wherever they want here, put roads and gathering lines wherever they want, bury crud in our ground. The state does not seem to care.”

In 2012, Ms. Kleemann’s husband, Robert, a Dunn County commissioner, complained to the state that the unit development plan was being modified, putting 11 wells within a half-mile of six homes.

When an official responded that the changes appeared necessary for topographical reasons, Mr. Kleemann wrote back, “I do not think you could understand our concerns unless we could put a drilling rig on each side of your house so you could listen to the clang of pipes, the roar of
motors, the constant beep of the horn and be awakened in the morning to the driller giving orders over the bullhorn and you could try to sleep with the constant noise of Jake Brakes.”

State officials were more concerned that ConocoPhillips was not developing the unit as aggressively as promised. Now the pace has picked up, with several dozen wells drilled in 2013 and several dozen more this year.

In April, when the Schwalbes laid out their concerns to two F.B.I. agents in a windowless room in the Fargo federal building, they felt encouraged. The agents seemed apprehensive “because of the individual involved,” Mr. Schwalbe said, but gradually “their interest was piqued.”

“They thanked us for coming forward,” he said afterward, surprised.

In the summer, though, a final meeting with the agents left them disheartened. The investigation remained open, they were told, but prosecutors saw no federal case to be made.

Mr. Schwalbe, who had wagered that “this year is going to be better because people are starting to get mad,” was disappointed by the November elections, too.

His wife’s former running mate, Mr. Taylor, ran again, this time for agriculture commissioner, proposing that oil well setbacks from homes be increased to a quarter-mile from 500 feet and that pipelines be fitted with antispill devices. But he lost, as did a ballot initiative to set aside tax revenues for conservation. With considerable oil industry backing, the agriculture commissioner was re-elected, as was the attorney general, extending the mandate of the current Industrial Commission.

Mr. Schwalbe does not like to visit Corral Creek anymore. The landscape is, in his eyes, scarred, the tranquillity spoiled. His new outspokenness led him into an uncharacteristic public role as spokesman for a new group, North Dakota Rural Voters.

“I never thought I’d be involved in anything like this,” he said. “At my age, I thought we’d just slide through the rest of our lives. But at a certain point, it became a point of pride for me personally and me as a North Dakotan. I don’t like people taking things that don’t belong to them, not my money, not my property, not my state.”

See photos from this article here:


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November 23, 2016

'People Are Going to Die': Father of Wounded DAPL Activist Sophia Wilansky Speaks Out

Is devastating policy brutality against water protectors in North Dakota a harbinger of what's to come when Donald Trump takes office?
Sunday's brutal police assault against peaceful Dakota Access Pipeline activists left one water protector, Sophia Wilansky, at risk of losing an arm, and her distraught father spoke out Tuesday and Wednesday against the shocking show of force and demanded government action.

Wayne Wilansky, a 61-year-old lawyer and yoga teacher from New York City, spoke to a reporter in a Facebook live feed about his daughter's devastating injury, allegedly caused by a concussion grenade.

"This is the wound of someone who's a warrior, who was sent to fight in a war," Wayne said. "It's not supposed to be a war. She's peacefully trying to get people to not destroy the water supply. And they're trying to kill her."

Most of the muscle tissue between Sophia's left elbow and wrist as well as two major arteries were completely destroyed, Wayne said, and doctors pulled shrapnel out of the wound.

The Morton County Sheriff's Department has denied using concussion grenades or any equipment that could cause an injury like Sophia's, despite witness accounts and the shrapnel recovered by surgeons from Sophia's arm.

The police in Morton County, North Dakota are acting with such brutality, Wayne warned, that eventually "people are going to die."

Watch the full interview here:

Wayne's words were echoed on Democracy Now! by Brandi King, a U.S. Army combat veteran and fellow water protector who helped transport Sophia to the hospital.

"[Y]ou don't expect those kind of wounds happening when they're not in combat," King said. "That was just—just felt like it was a combat wound, you know, looked like it was a combat wound. She had shrapnel wounds. She didn't have any burns. Her arm was split open. Her skin, her flesh was ripped off of her arm. Her bones were broke."

A medic with Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council, who was on the scene on Sunday, made similar comparisons in comments to InsideClimate News: "I think of Birmingham, [Alabama], I think of Wounded Knee, it felt like low-grade war," Michael Knudsen said. "If we hadn't been there on Sunday night, people would have probably died. The use of water canons for eight hours on hundreds and hundreds of demonstrators in 22 degrees [F] is enough to kill someone."

Sophia's prognosis was made far worse by the fact that ambulances couldn't breach the police blockade of a main access road, which water protectors were attempting to clear when they were attacked by the Morton County Sheriff's Department, said Wayne.
Because of the blockade, it took over six hours for Sophia to finally reach the hospital in Minneapolis where she is undergoing multiple surgeries now, her father said. The harrowing delay very likely caused additional harm, Wayne added, because "every minute counts" with an injury as severe as Sophia's.

And Sophia's injury was no accident, Wayne said.

"The police did not do this by—it was an intentional act of throwing it directly at her," he said in a statement released by the Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council. "Additionally police were shooting people in face and groin intending to do the most possible damage."

Sophia fears that the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), is going to kill her, requesting that her father stay by her hospital bed to protect her, Wayne said.

ETP head Kelcy Warren also told reporters early last week that he had offered to "reimburse" the government of North Dakota and Morton County for the costs of the militarized police force, but government officials denied receiving such an offer.

Wayne reported the attack on his daughter to the FBI and the Justice Department, he said, adding that the Justice Department is investigating. But in his description to Democracy Now!, the FBI appeared to behave as though they were investigating Sophia, rather than her assailants:

Sophia was [...] waiting to go to surgery. And they're basically keeping us prisoner inside her hospital room, waiting for a warrant, which never came. They didn't tell us what they were there for, for many hours. Eventually, I got to speak to a supervisor and learned that what they were looking for was her clothing. And I did eventually consent. I had taken her clothing back to my hotel room the night before, and I did consent to give them the clothing, eventually, after talking to the supervisors. I have an unwritten agreement, but I put it in writing anyway, that they will give me access to those materials so that I can test them, as well, and that they'll preserve and not destroy that evidence, because I would want to see it, and I would want to have it forensically tested myself.

One FBI agent was wearing a jacket identifying him as a member of the Joint Terrorism Taskforce, the broadcast observed.

And despite the tragic result of the road blockade in Sophia's case, the Morton County Sheriff's Department apparently are now seeking to reinforce it by building a cement wall across the highway, water protectors said Wednesday.

"The police have built a wall between the Standing Rock Sioux reservation and Mandan/Bismarck on a public highway," commented Honor the Earth campaigner Tara Houska on Facebook. "Cutting off direct access to a hospital appears not to [faze] the people responsible for nearly blowing off a young woman's arm a few days ago."

In the wake of what the Indigenous Environmental Network condemned as "crimes against humanity" by the Morton County's Sheriff Department, the global outcry is growing.
A multiracial delegation of over 100 frontline community leaders are traveling to North Dakota and joining the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in their fight; a fundraiser for Sophia's hospital bills has been flooded with donations; and even mainstream outlets such as the editorial board of the New York Times and the hosts of the daytime talk show The View are urging President Barack Obama to take action to reroute the pipeline and protect the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and its supporters.

Yet Obama is swiftly running out of time to act, and observers fear that the brutality of the Morton County Sheriff's Department in North Dakota may be a harbinger of what's to come under the looming Donald Trump administration.

"Standing Rock has for months been a frontline in the fights for indigenous sovereignty and against reckless extraction," argued journalist Kate Aronoff. "It may also now be the frontline of Trump's America."


November 23, 2016

Sheriffs Refuse to Send Troops to Standing Rock as Public Outrage and Costs Mount

North Dakota is stretched thin in its battle to protect the Dakota Access pipeline construction: Costs are nearing $15 million, and police reinforcements are diminishing.

By Jenni Monet
YES! Magazine

Agents with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection will be the latest agency assisting Morton County Sheriff Department deputies to guard Dakota Access pipeline construction as it prepares to drill under the Missouri River. But as tensions mount, along with costs to keep up with militarized attacks on water protectors, there are signs that North Dakota’s resources are stretching thin.

Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier announced the aid of CBP officers Monday following the most violent confrontation yet near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. Dozens of activists were hospitalized after Sunday night’s standoff when police sprayed water on hundreds of people in 26-degree temperatures and fired what has been described as concussion grenades. One activist, Sophia Wilansky, 21, may face the amputation of her arm.

Even before Sunday’s subfreezing assault on the Backwater Bridge, the escalating violence, the masses of arrests—528 as of Monday—and even the routine response to demonstrations were taking their toll on local agencies. The policing costs have reached nearly $15 million. The courts are taxed. The jail is burdened. The 34 local law enforcement officers are stressed.
All this comes amid an increasingly loud public outcry against the militarized policing.

Organized campaigns to contact the people and agencies responsible for sending officers and equipment to aid Morton County in the assaults on water protectors have in some cases been effective. YES! Magazine published that contact information Oct. 31, and in less than a month, the Facebook post had reached more than half a million people with commenters trading stories about their experiences making complaints. The article has been published by media worldwide.

It was intense public response that led Montana’s Gallatin County Sheriff Brian Gootkin to literally turn his detail around. He and his deputies were en route to Morton County when Gov. Steve Bullock raised concerns about the potential misuse of the interstate statute. The Emergency Management Assistance Compact obligates law enforcement around the country to fulfill requests for aid under any form of emergency or disaster.

“I got messages from England, Poland, New Zealand, Australia,” Gootkin recalled. And he received phone calls and hundreds of emails from his constituents, too—people that may have elected him sheriff. They were concerned about the use of force on protesters, Oct. 27, he said, and also had been affected by the public outrage from Minneapolis’ Hennepin County.

Gootkin said the callers and emailers believed the EMAC was meant for natural disasters and catastrophic events like 9/11, not for protecting a corporation’s pipeline construction. All that caused Sheriff Gootkin to change his mind. He turned to Facebook to post his decision to stand down on Standing Rock: “Although my actions were well-intentioned, you made it clear that you do not want your Sheriff’s Office involved in this conflict. One of the biggest differences of an elected Sheriff from other law enforcement leaders is that I am directly accountable to the people I serve (YOU).”

It was not an easy choice to make, Gootkin said. “I wanted to go and help my fellow law enforcement.” Then, he raised a question that has begun to rattle many communities across America lately. “I just don’t understand where we separated from the public. It really breaks my heart. We are not the enemy.”

Sheriff Dave Mahoney from Wisconsin’s Dane County was also empathetic to those decrying deployment of his officers. “All share the opinion that our deputies should not be involved in this situation,” Mahoney told the Bismarck Tribune. He and his unit stood by Morton County officers for one week before pulling out and refusing to return.

This week, the ACLU released the most comprehensive list of law enforcement participating in the conflict at Standing Rock, 75 agencies total, all believed to be operating under the EMAC agreement. The ACLU’s current list of agency support to Morton County can be found here.

Of the $15 million spent so far to protect the pipeline construction, $4.4 million has been spent by Morton County alone, officials said. The figure also includes more than $10 million in state emergency funds, according to Cecily Fong, spokeswoman for the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services. Fong told the Associated Press that protest-related law enforcement costs
reached $10.9 million dollars last week, including $6 million borrowed from the state-owned Bank of North Dakota in September and an additional $4 million on Nov. 1.

Now it seems likely that the state will need to request even more money from its Emergency Commission. In a press conference two days prior to Sunday’s violence, Gov. Jack Dalrymple expressed frustration in the ongoing police action against protesters. “We’re incurring expenses every day,” Dalrymple said.

The governor has pressed the Obama administration for federal aid in responding to the escalating conflict. He has suggested the U.S. Marshal Service step in to evict thousands of protectors who have occupied U.S. Army Corps of Engineers land. “They are camped without a permit,” Dalrymple said of those occupying the mass encampment near the Backwater Bridge blockade. “In other words, they’re there illegally.”

But the Obama administration has refused to do that, opting to sit down with the Standing Rock Sioux and negotiate a solution. It has asked that construction of the $3.8 billion pipeline stop until one is reached, but Energy Transfer has refused. It is now suing the federal government and meanwhile continuing to advance the pipeline.

With the absence of federal assistance, Morton County has had to rely on the EMAC and support from police agencies nationwide. Since early August, the sheriff’s department says that nearly 1,300 officers have come from 24 counties, 16 cities, across nine different states.

The farthest traveled was the president of the National Sheriff’s Association, Greg Champagne of St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. He arrived Oct. 28, the day after Morton County led its heavily militarized removal of occupants from the “1851 Treaty Camp.” In a lengthy post on Facebook, Champagne commended the multiagency action while taking special care to praise Minnesota’s Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek. He said they were “protecting lives and property” that day.

But in the aftermath of the violent Oct. 27 raid, the number of law enforcement agencies assisting Morton County has dwindled—in some instances, because of the pipeline’s polarizing effect.

Minneapolis’ Hennepin County has received some of the loudest public outrage as taxpayers, voters, even state lawmakers turned out to denounce Sheriff Stanek’s decision to send Minnesota personnel and equipment to Standing Rock. “I do not have any control over the Sheriff’s actions, which I think were wrong,” said Lt. Gov. Tina Smith in a prepared statement. “I believe he should bring his deputies home, if he hasn’t already. I strongly support the rights of all people to peacefully protest, including, tonight, the Standing Rock protest.”

Following a nine-day stint in North Dakota, Sheriff Stanek said enlisting 29 of his deputies to serve on Morton County’s front lines was “the right thing to do.”

But he also said his deputies would not be returning.
Jenni Monet wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Jenni is an award-winning journalist and tribal member of the Pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico. She’s also executive producer and host of the podcast Still Here.


November 24, 2016

Veterans Plan "Deployment" to Join Water Protectors' Battle Against DAPL

"Let's stop this savage injustice being committed right here at home. If not us, who? If not now, when?"

By Nika Knight
Common Dreams

Over 1,000 U.S. military veterans are planning to "deploy" to join the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and peacefully support the water protectors' fight against the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline near Cannon Ball, North Dakota.

"We are calling for our fellow veterans to assemble as a peaceful, unarmed militia at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation on Dec 4-7 and defend the water protectors from assault and intimidation at the hands of the militarized police force and DAPL security," the organizers wrote on the group's GoFundMe page.

"Come to Standing Rock Indian Reservation and hold the line with Wes Clark Jr., Michael Wood Jr., [Hawaii Democratic Rep.] Tulsi Gabbard, and hundreds of other veterans in support of the Sioux nation against the DAPL pipeline," reads the description of the action on Facebook.

The event, Veterans Stand for Standing Rock, was put together by "veterans of the United States Armed Forces, including the U.S. Army, United States Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Coast Guard," according to the group's fundraiser.

The call to action has already garnered nearly $200,000 in donations, which will go toward funding veterans' travel to North Dakota and legal fees they are likely to incur.

Clark Jr. and Wood Jr., the two primary organizers of the campaign, spoke to their passion for the water protectors' cause and their commitment to nonviolence when they were profiled earlier this week in the veterans' publication Task & Purpose:

"This country is repressing our people," Wood Jr. says. "If we're going to be heroes, if we're really going to be those veterans that this country praises, well, then we need to do the things that we actually said we're going to do when we took the oath to defend the Constitution from enemies foreign and domestic."
"We're not going out there to get in a fight with anyone," Clark Jr. says. "They can feel free to beat us up, but we're 100% nonviolence."

"According to an 'operations order' for the planned engagement, posted to social media in mid-November, 'First Americans have served in the United States Military, defending the soil of our homelands, at a greater percentage than any other group of Americans. There is no other people more deserving of veteran support,'" Task & Purpose writes.

Indeed, Wood Jr. posted full the operations order on Twitter:

The veterans are prepared for the police violence that they may encounter: "Bring [b]ody armor, gas masks, earplugs, AND shooting mufflers (we may be facing a sound cannon) but no drugs, alcohol, or weapons," the organizers told the volunteers.

Task & Purpose delved into all the details of the veterans' plan, which is intended both to bolster the peaceful water protectors' fight as well as to draw media attention to the ongoing protest:

On Dec. 4, Clark Jr. and Wood Jr., along with a group of veterans and other folks in the "bravery business," as Wood Jr. puts it [...] will muster at Standing Rock. The following morning they will join members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, including Young, for a traditional healing ceremony. With an eye toward the media, old military uniforms will be donned so that if the veterans are brutalized by the police, they are brutalized not as ordinary citizens, but as people who once served the government they are protesting against. Then body armor, ear plugs, and gas masks will be issued to those who didn’t bring their own. Bagpipes will play, and traditional Sioux war songs will be sung. The music will continue as everyone marches together to the banks of the Missouri, on the other side of which a line of guards in riot gear will be standing ready with rifles, mace, batons, and dogs. Then, the veterans and their allies—or at least the ones who are brave enough—will lock arms and cross the river in a "massive line" for their "first encounter" with the "opposing forces." The goal is to make it to the drilling pad and surround it, arm in arm. That will require making it through the line of guards, who have repelled other such attempts with a level of physical force Sioux tribal members and protesters have described as "excessive"—claims that recently prompted a United Nations investigation. Of course, that's what the body armor and gas masks are for.

"We'll have those people who will recognize that they're not willing to take a bullet, and those who recognize that they are," Wood Jr. told Task & Purpose. "It's okay if some of them step back, but Wes and I have no intention of doing so."


November 25, 2016

Thanksgiving Blessings Following a Peace Vigil for Clergy at Standing Rock
Letter by Wendy Johnson

Dear Dharma friends, teachers and family,

I write you a day after the annual celebration of Thanksgiving, always a holiday of mixed blessing as well as one of love and awareness, so necessary now in these post election times.

A few weeks ago at the end of October during the sacred trio of days commemorating Samhain and All Hallows Eve, All Saints Day and All Souls Day or El Dia de los Muertos, I answered a compelling call for clergy to gather in prayer and solidarity with the Standing Rock Water Protectors at Oceti Sakowin Camp in rural North Dakota. There, at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri Rivers, the Dakota Access Pipeline is excavating a 1700 mile long pipeline to carry crude Bakken Shale oil through the sacred burial grounds of the Sioux Nation and under the Missouri River, the longest river in North America. The Missouri is also the living source of drinking water for twelve million people.

I responded to this call with every cell in my body. The proposed action was immediate, peaceful and clear: clergy were invited to gather at Standing Rock for a day of non-violent training and another full day of prayer and non-violent solidarity with the Water Protectors.

I immediately reached out for support from many of you, my strong and embodied blood and Dharma family, and from the extended indigenous community with whom I have been privileged to study Traditional Ecological Knowledge and to grow nourishing Native food crops for the last five years. With your love and support the next steps were easy: I packed my zen robes, gathered together plenty of warm clothes and winter camping gear, and carried a full jar of Muir Beach honey and a long, formal braid of Oneo, or Seneca White corn grown at Indian Valley Organic farm, to be offered as a gift to Grandma's Kitchen, one of the five thriving kitchens in the heart of the Standing Rock Camp.

More than 500 members of the Interfaith community responded to the call for clergy to gather, a call issued by Father John Floberg who has served at Standing Rock as Episcopal Supervising Priest for the last 25 years. Father Floberg invited us to "gather and stand witness to Water Protectors' acts of compassion for God's Creation, and to the transformative power of God's love to make a Way out of no Way".

More than twenty faith traditions, mostly Christian, were represented. We gathered from the ten directions, sleeping on the floor of Father John's churches, at the local casino, and in the smoky bottom land of the Oceti Sakowin Camp. The assembly was diverse in age and ecumenical composition. We gathered to support the Water Protectors and to listen and learn. Throughout our non-violent vigil all training and public prayer was guided and led by indigenous clergy.

On November 3rd at daybreak we journeyed to the Standing Rock main camp in full religious finery. We gathered for prayer at the central council fire of the camp. Christian clergy representing more than ten denominations stepped forward to repudiate the controversial Doctrine of Discovery, a 1493 Papal Bull granting European nations the absolute right to claim
so-called New World indigenous lands for their own. Following formal statements of repudiation, copies of the Doctrine of Discovery were passed to indigenous elders from Standing Rock who burned the documents in large metal bowls and abalone shells to raucous acclaim. The flame of five hundred year old words was then covered with fresh sage from the high prairie to smudge and bless each member of the clergy as we passed in formal procession out to the front lines of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Hundreds of allies and relatives gathered on the hills above the Cannonball River to witness the procession and prayer vigil of the clergy. We chanted, sang, prayed and stood in silent solidarity with indigenous hosts for more than three hours. Representatives of every faith tradition offered prayers and blessings from the back of a large flatbed truck as indigenous members of the Standing Rock community stood in peaceful attention guarding the front line of their ancestral lands in the intimidating presence of militarized guards in full riot gear.

Around noon some clergy exited our vigil to demonstrate on the courthouse steps of the capitol building in Bismark, North Dakota, calling on the Governor of the state to affirm his Christian roots and halt the pipeline. Other clergy engaged in non violent protest, many of them arrested for their actions.

Those of us remaining at Standing Rock after the vigil walked out to the front lines to join the indigenous guardians on the live edge of the conflict. Some of these Water Protectors were practicing Christians. We prayed together there as the sun sank low in the Winter sky. Then many of us made our way into the main camp, walking down the long, dusty Avenue of Flags representing more than 200 Native nations. We volunteered until dark, helping however possible to support the camp.

Upon returning to Father Floberg's church I was particularly moved to learn that at the end of our day of prayer into action, two local police officers who had been deputized to guard the Dakota Access Pipeline respectfully turned in their badges, no longer willing to serve.

On my final day at Standing Rock I joined dawn prayers at the Oceti Sakowin council fire. The remainder of the day, before flying home to the Bay Area at nightfall, was spent volunteering in Grandma's kitchen, helping the beloved Piute Hoopa elder and her practicing assembly of dedicated Bodhisattvas sort and serve food to hundreds of hungry people throughout the day.

I apologize for not communicating with you sooner about the courageous efforts of the Water Protectors at Standing Rock. When I first came home I found it difficult to speak. Following the results of the US Presidential election and as tensions increase at Oceti Sakowin, I am grateful for our patch-robed, cloud-and-water-wanderer sangha, willing to live and die together, moment by moment. Fierce and grounded prayer turned toward engaged action is essential now to uncover a "Way out of no Way".

Thank you for your love and service and for the gift of practicing together in consequential times.

Yours, always and ever,
Wendy Johnson

**Wendy Johnson** is a Buddhist meditation teacher and organic gardening mentor who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Wendy has been practicing Zen meditation for thirty-five years and has led meditation retreats nationwide since 1992 as an ordained lay dharma teacher in the traditions of Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh and the San Francisco Zen Center. Wendy is one of the founders of the organic Farm and Garden Program at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in Marin County, where she lived with her family from 1975 to 2000. She has been teaching gardening and environmental education to the public since the early 1980s. For more, visit her website:

http://gardeningatthedragonsgate.com/index.html
http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/thanksgiving-blessings-following-a-peace-vigil-for-clergy-at-standing-rock

November 25, 2016

It’s cowboy cops cavalry against peaceful Indians and their Anglo supporters at Standing Rock.

The corporate media meanwhile, have been for the most part shameless and useless in this enormous conflict between native people and the state.

By Dave Lindorff
Nation of Change

The struggle at Standing Rock, North Dakota, between the Sioux people and their supporters and the oil corporations and banks trying to run a dangerous pipeline for filthy Bakkan crude oil through their sacred lands and underneath the Missouri River was cranked up to a new level of violence Sunday and in ensuing days as National Guard troops and the Morton County Sheriff’s Department, bolstered by volunteers from various other police departments conducted an all-night attack using maximum violence, including flash-bang concussion grenades, rubber bullets, mace, teargas and three water cannons – this at a time the temperature on the prairie had fallen to a low of 22 degrees fahrenheit.

The casualties of this one-sided battle against peaceful protesters on a bridge were enormous, with some 300 of the estimated 400 protesting water protectors, both native people and non-native supporters, injured, 26 of them seriously. There was evidence that police were aiming rubber bullets at protesters’ heads and groins to inflict maximum pain and damage, with eight of the injured hospitalized, including a 13-year-old girl shot in the face, whose eye was reportedly damaged.

The gravest injuries were a tribal elder who suffered a cardiac arrest, and Sophia Wolansky, a 21-year-old New York City resident who had come to back the Standing Rock Sioux in their struggle to halt construction of the pipeline. She was hit in the arm by a flash-bang grenade thrown at her by a Morton County Sheriff’s deputy, which blew up on impact, blowing away the
flesh and muscle and reportedly some of the nerves and bone of the elbow joint. She has been evacuated to a hospital in Chicago where physicians and nurses are fighting to save her arm and hand from an amputation.

Wolansky’s father Wayne, a 61-year old lawyer in New York, angrily called on President to put a halt to the violent repression at Standing Rock. He said of his daughter’s injury, which was the result of a flash-bang concussion grenade being thrown directly at her, “This is the wound of someone who’s a warrior, who was sent to fight in a war,” Wayne said. “It’s not supposed to be a war. She’s peacefully trying to get people to not destroy the water supply. And they’re trying to kill her.” Concussion grenades are not supposed to be used to target people.

The grenade wound suffered by Sophia Wolansky blew away the muscle, exposing bone, looking like a war injury, not the typical police-abuse type of injury.

The attack on Sunday night, which has been rightly condemned by UN human rights observers as an atrocity, harks back to the simultaneous country-wide crushing of the Occupy movement occupations in cities across the US during early November, 2011, when local police aided in some cases by armed federal parks police, assaulted occupiers with maximum violence, almost always at night, barring the media from witnessing their deliberate and coordinated over-the-top violence.

In that case, an aggressive campaign of legal discovery by the Partnership for Civil Justice using the Freedom of Information Act, resulted in the unearthing of documents from both the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI proving there had been a concerted campaign by those federal agencies to coordinate the crushing of the Occupy Movement. That campaign urged police to use maximum violence, to operate at night, and to share the results of their attacks with other city police departments so that tactics of repression that “worked,” could be replicated.

It would appear that the repressive lessons learned by police agencies in 2011 are now being used as a kind of repression handbook by Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier and his deputies against the protesting Sioux water protectors and their Anglo supporters.

There is no indication that such vicious repression is working though. Even as the brutal assault last Sunday night and Monday morning sent dozens of people to area hospitals, more brave people continued to pour into Standing Rock to support the struggle of the Standing Rock Sioux and the many representatives of some 300 US tribes around the country, and the representatives of indigenous peoples from around the world fighting this battle.

The decision to run the so-called Dakota Access Pipeline through Sioux sacred lands, some of it formerly awarded to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe by US treaty, but later stolen from them, stands in stark contrast to an earlier decision to reroute it from a planned Missouri River crossing point near North Dakota’s capital city of Bismarck. There, protests by the local (white, middle-class) public forced a rethink by the companies behind the pipeline, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. They decided to alter the planned route to run it through Indian territory instead.
The Standing Rock Tribal Council has called on President Obama to put a halt to this dangerous and obscene project, suggesting that as president he has the power to declare the crossing site a National Historic Site, thus protecting it from such defilement. The president, of course, could also look at the local Sheriff’s repressive and violent tactics against an Indian people, and simply federalize local National Guard troops, ordering them to force local police to stand down instead of follow the Republican governor’s orders to participate in the repression.

That he hasn’t already done so speaks volumes about this president’s lack of courage and of principle. In 2014, President Obama visited the Standing Rock Sioux, and acknowledged their centuries of abuse by the US government. Now, however, that abuse is occurring on this president’s watch, and incredibly, despite the extent of the violence, he has done nothing to stop it.

It’s time for all decent Americans to take a stand in support of the Sioux People of Standing Rock. Contact the White House at 202–456–1414 and demand that the president send troops to stand between Sioux water protectors and their local law-enforcement assailants, and to have Federal Marshals arrest those who commit acts of brutality.

The militarized response to peaceful protest at Standing Rock should stand as a warning to all who would protest America’s slide into totalitarianism. What the government will do to Native Americans and their Anglo supporters today is what we can probably expect them to do to any of us who protest in this new Trumpian America.

The corporate media meanwhile, have been for the most part shameless and useless in this enormous conflict between native people and the state. Even as local sheriff’s deputies launched what appears to be building into a third Wounded Knee-style massacre at Standing Rock, the press keeps referring to a “confrontation” between protesters and law-enforcement, as though it is a battle being fought between equals. NPR yesterday ran with a story that referred to the Standing Rock challenge to the pipeline as “a magnet for activists.”

The NPR reporter might more honestly have called it a “magnet for police” since many of the “law enforcement” thugs attacking the peaceful water protectors are volunteers from neighboring states’ police departments – people anxious for a chance to play “cavalry” in this latest iteration of American’s murderous history of Indian Wars.

_Dave Lindorff is an American investigative reporter, a columnist for CounterPunch, and a contributor to Businessweek, The Nation, Extra! and Salon.com. His work was highlighted by Project Censored 2004, 2011 and 2012._


November 25, 2016

At Standing Rock and Beyond, What Is to Be Done?
Near Cannon Ball, N.D. — “We love you!” yelled someone from our line, linked arm in arm. We were facing Dakota Access Pipeline workers threatening us with baseball bats and wrenches, one of whom had only moments ago sped his large truck through our ranks. They had called us “the scum of the earth,” and replied to our assurance that we were nonviolent by warning, “We’re not.” A helicopter had appeared and begun circling low over our heads. And from this scene, one of the men who had not yet spoken sheepishly replied, “We love you, too.

We eventually parted ways, not in peace but at least not in physical violence. We had distracted them from further construction of the project that threatened to spill oil in the Lakota water supply and headed back to our cars to take part in a march through the streets of Bismarck, N.D. But amid all the movement, that moment stayed with me.

I had come with a group of Catholic Workers for reasons anyone studying or teaching theology as I do might find obvious. The violation of basic dignity happening here defies the consistent refrain by the prophets and Jesus to do justice with an eye toward the exploited. We had been told white bodies could help by surrounding native ones, shielding them while they sought to protect their water.

The anxiety about immigrants’ diluting “American culture” that helped usher Donald J. Trump to victory has caused many Americans to forget that “American culture” itself began as an intrusion from foreign lands; Lakota people at Standing Rock also have a historically well-established reason to fear this culture. The Lakota are reminding those who will listen that this land’s original immigration problem was of European origin and it continues to threaten their lives and livelihood after half a millennium of a genocidal onslaught. Its most recent manifestation is this pipeline.

I have meditated on that profession of love several days ago from a grown man wielding a bat to threaten us. It called to mind a conversation with my theology students at Fordham about Henry David Thoreau’s essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” in which he argues that “all machines have their friction,” but that “when the friction comes to have its machine, and oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such a machine any longer.” He had in mind the evils of slavery and the American government’s theft of half of Mexico in the Mexican-American War, but it spoke fittingly to this older form of oppression and robbery the Lakota people still suffer, in which even those who love them will still oppose them with a weapon and disrupt their sacred grounds.

After our class argued over how we might know when these frictions came to possess the machinery of government, one student declared emphatically that if we could not already recognize that the friction had taken over, then we would never see it.
It was hard to disagree, especially the day after our encounter with the pipeline workers when the police pepper sprayed a Lakota prayer service and those of us surrounding it, arresting whom they could. What kind of machine produces violence to meet prayer, and prison in return for demanding resources to simply live? What kind of machine responds to those trying to protect their water by spraying them in subfreezing temperatures with water? Is it a machine overtaken with friction, or is the nexus of power between corporations and government that is trying to trample over the Lakota once again simply an unfortunate byproduct of an otherwise benevolent and worthy machine? How much oppression and theft is tolerable in order to keep the machine running? Where is our breaking point, at which we say that the benefits do not outweigh the human cost?

Thoreau’s claim was that citizens needed to become a “counter-friction” against injustice, that all people had a duty to disobey immoral laws and orders. The idea directly influenced Gandhi and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who added their own positive notions to resistance. Gandhi insisted that more than ahimsa (the Sanskrit word for causing no harm) was needed in the Indian independence movement. Satyagraha, or “the force of truth,” had to be embodied as well. Dr. King invoked the Christian demand to love one’s enemies in the civil rights movement, summoning the Greek notion of agape, a form of universal love, to channel God’s love for racists in power like Bull Connor. In both cases, this notion of being a counter-friction was fundamental, as was Thoreau’s insistence that it was one’s duty.

We ought to ask ourselves whether Thoreau was right. What line in Standing Rock would have to be crossed to demand our resistance that had not been passed over long ago? Do we wait until the Missouri River flows with oil? Would we need the police to begin shooting the water protectors with metal bullets instead of rubber ones? At what point does Thoreau’s duty kick in? When white people rather than native tribes bear the brunt of oppression?

Another question arises: how to disobey? Must we hold allegiance to satyagraha and agape, or was Malcolm X right to assert that Dr. King’s insistence on love was just another layer of white colonization that put hypocritical conditions on how minorities might protest? Actions led by the Lakota people were disciplined in something like this concept of agape, reminding those on the front lines that we are to love these police officers and issuing prayers over the loudspeaker for their own children’s water supply. But some white allies who had joined their struggle, quite understandably, held no love for those who might mace them midprayer without warning. There was no clear consensus on the parameters for civil disobedience.

Of course, it is not for others to dictate to the Lakota how to protect their water. But Thoreau’s claim must be grappled with for those who reap the benefits of systemic injustice and exploitation, as he did. Donald Trump’s tenure as president-elect immediately began with protests, some more peaceful than others. As more people embrace the need to say “no” in some capacity, whether in North Dakota or beyond, the issue of how to do so and what is worth preserving has become pressing.

Daniel Berrigan, the poet and priest who died in April, and whose actions throughout his life pushed the limits of civil disobedience, posed the issue in language that closely echoed that of Thoreau and bears relevance today: “Someone, as a strict requirement of sanity and logic, must
be willing to say a simple thing: ‘The machine is working badly.’ And if the law of the machine, a law of military and economic profit, enacted by generals and tycoons, must be broken in favor of the needs of man, let the law be broken. Let the machine be turned around, taken apart, built over again.”

I still churn that moment over in my mind: A man threatening us with a baseball bat told us he loved us. Despite the presence of agape, love between people who had never even met before, we had already organized ourselves in a violent way that ruptured any chance for human community. It seems clear that the moment for resistance had come too late, that something was allowed to flourish that never should have had the chance to sprout. Lines were drawn centuries ago, were never erased, and we had simply stepped into ready-made roles. We loved one another, but a system was in place encouraging hatred, and we could only navigate it awkwardly and poorly.

It’s worth communal consideration whether this machine is worth maintaining. The ascension of the country’s next president demands it. But the question of whether we have a duty to be a counter-friction was answered a long time ago, and the situation at Standing Rock is merely a reminder that far too many of us are still refusing to answer it.

Eric Martin is a doctoral candidate in systematic theology at Fordham University and co-editor of “The Berrigan Letters.”


November 26, 2016

Officials to Close Standing Rock Protest Campsite

By Christopher Mele
New York Times

Citing public safety concerns, federal officials plan to close access to a campsite where demonstrators have protested the construction of a crude oil pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota and create a “free speech zone.”

The Army Corps of Engineers, in a letter Friday to the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Dave Archambault II, said the decision had been made to “protect the general public from the violent confrontations between protesters and law enforcement officials that have occurred in this area.”

Mr. Archambault said in a statement that the tribe was “deeply disappointed” by the decision.

“It is both unfortunate and disrespectful that this announcement comes the day after this country celebrates Thanksgiving — a historic exchange between Native Americans and the first
immigrants from Europe,” he said. “Although the news is saddening, it is not all surprising given the last 500 years of mistreatment of our people.”

The authorities will close the area north of the Cannonball River, including the Oceti Sakowin camp, about 40 miles south of Bismarck, where opponents of the 1,170-mile Dakota Access Pipeline have gathered for months.

Native American tribes, led by the Standing Rock Sioux, have been protesting the pipeline project. They fear it would pollute the Missouri River and harm sacred cultural lands and tribal burial grounds. There have been large protests at the Lake Oahe crossing; the Missouri River is the tribe’s primary source of drinking water.

Mr. Archambault said the best way to protect demonstrators during the winter and to reduce conflicts with the police “is to deny the easement for the Oahe crossing and deny it now.”

The letter from the district commander of the Army Corps, Col. John W. Henderson, said the emergency services and facilities needed to protect demonstrators camped north of the Cannonball River during the harsh North Dakota winters could not be provided.

“I do not take this action lightly but have decided that it is required due to the concern for public safety and the fact that much of this land is leased to private persons for grazing and/or haying purposes as part of the corps’ land management practices,” he wrote.

He said anyone found on the land after Dec. 5 could be charged with trespassing.

The project has spurred months of clashes between the police and demonstrators. The most serious injury happened early Monday. An explosion during a protest badly damaged the left arm and hand of woman who grew up in the Bronx, Sophia Wilansky, 21.

Her father, Wayne Wilansky, said that someone from the police lines had thrown a device he described as a grenade; the police suggested that fellow demonstrators had caused the explosion, and said officers did not use concussion or flash grenades at any time.

On Monday, the police confronted hundreds of protesters. Nearly 300 people were treated for injuries resulting from the use of police force, according to the Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council.

The pipeline project was delayed in September when the Obama administration temporarily blocked it from crossing under the Missouri River. President Obama called on both sides to show restraint and revealed that the Army Corps of Engineers was considering an alternative route for the project.

But Kelcy Warren, chief executive of the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners, told The Associated Press it would not consider a different route. Though the project has been delayed by legal disputes, the pipeline is nearly complete.
November 26, 2016

Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reacts to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Eviction Notice: Your Letter Makes a Grave & Dangerous Mistake

By Levi Rickert
Native News Online

EAGLE BUTTE, SOUTH DAKOTA – Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Chairman Harold Frazier was quick to respond to the U.S Army Corps of Engineers’ letter, dated November 25, 2016, that will evict the water protectors who are camping at Oceti Sakowin camp. The 10-day eviction notice came one day after Thanksgiving where thousands have come to show solidarity with the water protectors who oppose the Dakota Access pipeline.

Frazier was curt in his response to Colonel John W. Henderson, who sent the eviction letter. Frazier writes: “This decision, coming on the heels of the Thanksgiving holiday, is not only disrespectful, but continues the cycle of racism and oppression imposed on our people and our lands throughout history.”

Read Frazier’s letter below:

November 25, 2016

Colonel John W. Henderson
Commander and District Engineer
Omaha District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
1616 Capitol Avenue
Suite 900
Omaha, NE 68102

Re: November 25, 2016, Letter Regarding Closure of Treaty Lands

Dear Col. Henderson:

This letter responds to your correspondence, dated November 25, 2016, announcing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ (“Corps”) plan to close certain “Corps’ managed lands to all public use and access effective December 5, 2016.” You state that “[t]his decision is necessary to protect the general public from the violent confrontations between protestors and law enforcement officials that have occurred in this area, and to prevent death, illness, or serious injury to inhabitants of encampments due to the harsh North Dakota winter conditions.”

You have warned that anyone found outside of a so-called “free speech zone” will be considered trespassing and may be subject to prosecution under federal state, and local laws.” You have
asked me to “encourage members of [the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe], as well as any non-
members who support you who are located in the encampments north of the Cannonball River on 
Corps lands to immediately and peacefully move to the free speech zone. . . .”

The area north of the Cannonball River is both the ancestral homeland of the Lakota people and 
inside the boundaries of the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, a treaty that has not been abrogated and 
law that governs us all. The best of these lands have already been unjustly taken and flooded by 
the Corps in the disastrous Pick-Sloane legislation. We will no longer allow our rights as a Tribe 
or as indigenous people as a whole to continue to be eroded.

This decision, coming on the heels of the Thanksgiving holiday, is not only disrespectful, but 
continues the cycle of racism and oppression imposed on our people and our lands throughout 
history.

We ask that the Corps and the United States reconsider this decision. Treaties are the supreme 
law of the land and the Constitution of the United States demands that they be 
respected. Removal from Sioux Treaty lands should be the choice of the Oceti Sakowin Camp 
north of the Cannonball River, not the United States, which has been violating our rights for 
hundreds of years. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe stands with the more than 300 Tribal nations 
and the water protectors who are here peacefully protesting the Dakota Access pipeline while 
defending the rights of indigenous people.

Furthermore, your letter dangerously and profoundly misunderstands the basic function and 
status of a tribal government and its elected leaders. I am the chief executive of a sovereign 
nation that is comprised of individual citizens with physical territory within the exterior 
boundaries the State of South Dakota. Under the laws of the United States, my government lacks 
jurisdiction at Cannonball; but more importantly, I no more control the acts and behaviors of 
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal members or non-member water protectors at the Cannonball site 
than you do, Col. Henderson.

As set forth above, even if I could control the water protectors, I recognize and respect their 
righs under the Constitution of the United States to peaceably assemble in prayerful protest 
against the cultural and environmental atrocity that is the Dakota Access Pipeline. I would not 
use my authority, which is based on the consent of my citizens, to curtail their human and 
constitutional rights.

Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of your letter is your acknowledgement of the stark reality that 
that the confrontation between our peaceful water protectors and law enforcement could result in 
death or serious injury, a fact demonstrated by the brutal attack on Sophia Wilansky by North 
Dakota police last week. But in the very next paragraph you guarantee that further 
confrontations will occur by promising that these peaceful people will be trespassing on closed 
areas and you threaten that they will do so “at their own risk” and will “assume[] any and all 
corresponding liabilities for their unlawful presence and occupation of such lands.”

I take your letter as issuing a direct and irresponsible threat to the water protectors. It appears to 
further empower the militarized police force that has been brutalizing and terrorizing our water
protectors while imposing the blame and the risk on unarmed peaceful people. We have pleaded for the protection of the United States. Your letter makes a grave and dangerous mistake. Federal efforts to de-escalate the violence should be aimed at the wrongdoers, not at our peaceful people.

Sincerely,

Harold Frazier, Chairman
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe

cc: President Barack Obama
Assistant Secretary, Jo-Ellen Darcy
Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell
Attorney General Loretta Lynch
Acting Assistant Secretary Larry Roberts
Tracy Toulou


November 27, 2016

Standing Rock is a new turn in Christian ties with native Americans

By Erasmus
The Economist

WHATEVER the final result of the huge, long-running protests by native Americans against the Dakota Access Pipeline, the demonstrations will surely be remembered as a landmark in relations between organised religion, Christianity in particular, and indigenous people. Along with representatives of over 200 indigenous groups from across the New World, camped out at the Standing Rock Reservation since April, Christian clergy have been adding their voice to the protests in multiple ways.

Given that Pope Francis called for a rapid switch away from fossil fuels in his environmental encyclical, you might expect the radical end of the Catholic church to be the religious community most intensely engaged in this cause. But it is liberal or "mainline" Protestant churches who have made the running. If there is one individual who personifies Christian support for the indigenous protests, it is the Reverend John Floberg, who is responsible for Episcopal (Anglican) parishes on the North Dakota side of Standing Rock.

He co-ordinated the actions of 500 clergy and lay people from 20 different religious groups who gathered at the camp on November 3rd, and he has persuaded his own denomination's leadership, including Michael Curry, the African-American presiding bishop of the Episcopal church, to play an active part in opposing the line's completion. Although the Episcopal church is firmly on
the liberal side of America's religious spectrum, this is still new territory for a religious group which for years was the spiritual home of the nation's social and cultural elite.

Mr Floberg has called the protests "the most powerful experience I have had in 25 years at Standing Rock" while also lamenting that the demonstrations had triggered a "racist response" in some quarters in North Dakota. Leaders of the United Methodist Church, which counts plenty of indigenous people, as well as oil workers, among its flock, have joined the Anglicans in opposing the $3.8 billion project. The pipeline, which is nearly complete, is intended to run nearly 1,200 miles from oil fields in North Dakota before connecting to an existing line in Illinois. Its parent company argues that it will provide safer transport than trucks or trains; the indigenous protesters fear pollution of their drinking water and disturbance of sacred lands and burial sites. Some of this, they say, has already occurred.

Bruce Ough, a Methodist bishop responsible for the Dakotas and Minnesota, is one of the senior clergy who has linked the pipeline controversy to a "spiritual battle" over much broader issues, including respect for the indigenous understanding of sacred land. "This is a protest about the stewardship of God's creation and justice for the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains," he has said.

Although plenty of individual Catholics of a radical persuasion have become involved in the protests, this is a rather awkward issue for the Catholic church at an institutional level. Indigenous groups have long been pressing the Vatican to renounce, more explicitly than hitherto, the "doctrine of discovery" whereby popes of the 15th century underpinned the conquest of the New World, and the accompanying subjugation of native Americans, by the Spanish and Portuguese. Some indigenous leaders were disappointed when Pope Francis went ahead with the canonisation of Junipero Serra, a founder of Catholic missions on the American West coast, who is either a hero or a villain in the history of native Americans, depending on how you read the past.

Starting with Pope John Paul II, all recent pontiffs have acknowledged that the Catholic church has done great wrong to indigenous peoples and owes them a profound apology. But the standard line on the "doctrine of discovery", which is still cited in secular American courts, is that it has already been rescinded through papal statements in the 16th century. America's radically-minded nuns, grouped in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, are among those who say that a clearer renunciation is still needed. The Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian churches have all declared their opposition to the doctrine.

Compared with that of any other Christian group, the involvement of the Catholic church with the indigenous peoples of the New World has been the longest and messiest: cleaning up that mess will take a while longer yet.

November 28, 2016

North Dakota pipeline protest (photos)

By Stephanie Keith
Reuters

View a slideshow of photos by photographer Stephanie Keith:

http://in.reuters.com/news/picture/north-dakota-pipeline-protest?articleId=INRTST0OT&slideId=1163335901

November 28, 2016

Neil Young Begs Obama To Step In, End Violence At Standing Rock

“We will be going back to support the water protectors again.

By Maxwell Strachan, Senior Editor
The Huffington Post

Neil Young and his girlfriend, Daryl Hannah, published an open letter on Monday calling for President Barack Obama to do whatever he can to make sure authorities begin to treat the protestors at the Standing Rock Native American Reservation with decency and respect.

“We are calling upon you, President Barack Obama, to step in and end the violence against the peaceful water protectors at Standing Rock immediately,” Young and Hannah wrote.

In recent days, police have fired rubber bullets and water cannons at the protestors, who oppose building the Dakota Access Pipeline through the North Dakota reservation. Hundreds have been injured and more than 20 have been taken to hospitals as a result, according to The Intercept.

Young has become one of the most famous celebrities to stand in public support of the protestors. In September, he released a protest song, “Indian Givers,” that will appear on his upcoming album. On Nov. 12, the day of his 71st birthday, Young joined the protestors at Standing Rock to perform and bring attention to the issue. In the letter published Monday, he said the protestors he met were “committed to peaceful resistance” and forbid “[w]eapons[,] alcohol and drugs.”

“It is an awakening,” Young and Hannah wrote of the protests. “All here together, with their non-native relatives, standing strong in the face of outrageous, unnecessary and violent aggression, on the part of militarized local and state law enforcement agencies and National Guard, who are seemingly acting to protect the interests of the Dakota Access Pipeline profiteers, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of tax-payer dollars, above all other expressed concerns.”
Young also said he would return to Standing Rock yet again, and issued a call to all people who stand in solidarity with the protestors in Standing Rock.

“Unintimidated, stand, speak up and show up. Be counted. Be like our brothers and sisters at Standing Rock. Be there if you can,” the letter reads. “The progress we have made over two hundred and forty years as a nation, has always come first from the people.”

Tales of a feast on Plymouth plantation in the Autumn of 1621, where of pilgrims from the Mayflower, celebrated the harvest, shared and broke bread with the first Americans are false. They are still used as inspiration and shared with children, teaching them the beauty of gratitude.

But it is now widely understood this Thanksgiving story is a fictional history. It was invented to whitewash the vicious genocide wrought upon the native inhabitants of this magnificent continent. Not only did the Europeans try to eradicate native populations, but they made every effort to eviscerate their culture, their language and eliminate them from these coveted lands.

From Plymouth Rock to Standing Rock, this lie has made our Thanksgiving Day a Day of Mourning for the First Nations, all the tribes big and small, those who came before us.

A few weeks ago we traveled to visit the Standing Rock Sioux In North Dakota. We arrived at this unprecedented historical gathering of over five hundred tribes and thousands of others standing on the front lines to protect water, to state the most basic human truth, to say water is life. Despite the painful history, today they fight peacefully for us all.

The camp grows as winter comes. Standing in protection of our most vital life support systems, but also for the rightful preservation of Native American cultural ways and their sovereignty. Everyone we talk with is committed to peaceful resistance. Weapons alcohol and drugs are forbidden there.

Standing together in prayer to protect water displays a deeply rooted awareness of life’s interconnected nature, and of the intrinsic value and import of traditional ways. This growing movement stems from love, it is the most human instinct to protect that which we love. An eager and engaged youth are at the core of this pipeline route resistance, learning from a population of elders who pass down unforgotten knowledge.

It is an awakening. All here together, with their non-native relatives, standing strong in the face of outrageous, unnecessary and violent aggression, on the part of militarized local and state law enforcement agencies and National Guard, who are seemingly acting to protect the interests of the Dakota Access Pipeline profiteers, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of tax-payer dollars, above all other expressed concerns. They stand against corporate security forces, the county sheriff and the National Guard.

Standing while being hit with water cannons, mace, tear gas, rubber bullets. Standing without weapons and praying, the water protectors endure human rights abuses in sub freezing temperatures. Supplies arrive from all over as the social media universe shares the heartbreaking
news to the world, that an American corporate media is not free to report. Thus, it is the ugliness of corporate America, seen around the world.

But they stand, their hair frozen from water cannons. They stand for all that is good and they stay strong.

We are calling upon you, President Barack Obama, to step in and end the violence against the peaceful water protectors at Standing Rock immediately.

We will be going back to support the water protectors again.

Let us all stand with them in thanks, in appreciation for the ancient wisdom they carry, In thanks for this opportunity for true gratitude.

For giving us a path forward.

For trying to show us a road to survival.

We offer our support and our respect. We hear the call to protect the water protectors to listen, learn and get engaged. They are brave. We thank them.

And we can give thanks for the bounty.

Like water on the garden of activism, America’s surprise president brings a bounty of opportunity. The great issues of our time are now brightly illuminated and people are becoming more aware of them than ever, from sea to shining sea, from Standing Rock to Wall Street.

The surprise president elect was not the winner of the popular vote, does not have a mandate for the change of ideals envisioned. Keep in mind, close to over two million more people voted for another candidate.

Nor is the surprise president the leader of the free world. Two hundred of the worlds nations believe in science, above the profits of the oil, gas and coal industries, and are committed to working together to protect the future from an unchecked climate crisis.

The surprise president claims he does not believe in climate science nor the threats it presents and his actions and words reflect that claim in tangible and dangerous ways.

Do not be intimidated by the surprise presidents’ cabinet appointees as they descend the golden escalator. Those who behave in racist ways are not your leaders. The golden tower is not yours. The White House is your house.

Your growing activism in support of freedom over repression, addressing climate change, swiftly replacing a destructive old industries with safe, regenerative energy, encouraging wholistic thinking in balance with the future of our planet; that activism will strengthen and shed
continued light on us all. These worthy goals must be met for the all the worlds children and theirs after them.

This is our moment for truth.

Unintimidated, stand, speak up and show up. Be counted. Be like our brothers and sisters at Standing Rock. Be there if you can. The progress we have made over two hundred and forty years as a nation, has always come first from the people

Thank you
Neil & Daryl

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/neil-young-standing-rock-obama-trump_us_583c8be9e4b06539a789d9bb

November 28, 2016

Senator Reid, Standing Rock Sen. Reid on Standing Rock (Video)

C-SPAN

Watch the video:

https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4632844/senator-reid-standing-rock

November 28, 2016

North Dakota governor orders evacuation of Standing Rock protest site, but no forcible removals planned

By William Yardley
LA Times

North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple on Monday ordered a mandatory evacuation of protesters seeking to block construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, but both the state and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said they have no plans for “forcible removal” of the protesters.

The Corps of Engineers earlier had said that it planned to close the camp, led by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe of North Dakota, by Dec. 5, and that anyone still there could be prosecuted for trespassing.
On Sunday, however, after a broad backlash, the corps said it has “no plans for forcible removal” and “is seeking a peaceful and orderly transition to a safer location.”

Dalrymple’s evacuation order came Monday, citing safety concerns related to the region’s harsh winter weather.

In an emergency declaration, the governor, a Republican who has urged federal officials to allow completion of the pipeline, said the camp is “not zoned for dwellings suitable for living in winter conditions, and also [does] not possess proper permanent sanitation infrastructure to sustain a living environment consistent with proper public health.”

The governor referred to safety concerns stated by the corps and “the inability to effectively provide emergency, medical, fire response services, and law enforcement services.”

But though the order said people who defy it could face legal consequences, officials said the state also would not seek to forcibly remove people.

“It’s part of our due diligence. These folks out there have to understand the situation. We’ve got folks from all over the country out there and I don’t know what they know about North Dakota winters,” Jeff Zent, a spokesman for the governor, said.

“Today we got dumped about 5 inches of snow. I’m sure conditions are not good out there. This order lets them know the situation in no uncertain terms,” he added.

The corps said Sunday that groups that were not part of the original protest of the pipeline helped shape its decision to try to close the camp.

“Unfortunately, it is apparent that more dangerous groups have joined this protest and are provoking conflict in spite of the public pleas from tribal leaders,” said Col. John Henderson, the commander of the corps’ Omaha district. We are working to transition those engaged in peaceful protest from this area and enable law enforcement authorities to address violent or illegal acts as appropriate to protect public safety.”

The corps, which has allowed the camp to grow for months, had said “safety reasons” prompted the notice on Friday. More than 500 people have been arrested since the summer in sometimes violent clashes with local law enforcement, which has come under fierce criticism for what protesters say have been abusive tactics.
The notice prompted an array of criticisms and vows by protesters and their supporters to stay. Some noted that it came just a day after Thanksgiving, a holiday associated with oppression for many Native Americans, though it is also portrayed as symbolic of goodwill with European settlers. Others pointed out that Dec. 5 is the birthday of Gen. George Armstrong Custer, who famously clashed with Native Americans.

On Monday morning, Dallas Goldtooth, a leader of the Indigenous Environmental Network, posted a video showing snow falling outside the yurt in which he was camping at the site.

“We don’t expect a forced removal or a sweep ... of this camp relatively soon based on their words,” Goldtooth said, referring to the Sunday night clarification. “But we as a camp are prepared, are preparing, for any scenario for the protection and safety of our folks.

“In the meantime, shout out to all of you lovely people out there, rabble rousers, pipeline fighters. Let’s keep fossil fuels in the ground. Talk to you later. Peace. I’m going sledding later on.”

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe has argued for months that the pipeline will put its water supply and cultural sites at risk. The corps announced this month that it would continue to withhold a final permit for the pipeline while it conducts additional analysis of the project and expands consultation with the tribe.

The corps said the additional review was “warranted in light of the history of the Great Sioux Nation’s dispossession of lands, the importance of Lake Oahe to the Tribe, our government-to-government relationship, and the statute governing easements through government property.”

The company building the pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, has said that the Obama administration made the pipeline a political issue and that it has filed suit in federal court asking to proceed with the project.

The 1,170-mile pipeline would transport as much 500,000 barrels of crude oil daily from the Bakken production region of North Dakota to an existing pipeline in Patoka, Ill.


November 29, 2016
Standing Rock is the civil rights issue of our time – let's act accordingly

By Bill McKibben
The Guardian

The US government sent helpers to protect integration efforts in the 1960s. Why not do more to protect the Dakota Pipeline protesters today?

When John Doar died in 2014, Barack Obama, who’d already awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, called him “one of America’s bravest lawyers”. Without his courage and perseverance, the president said, “Michelle and I might not be where we are today”.

Doar was the federal lawyer sent south by the Kennedy and Johnson justice departments to keep an eye on the explosive centers of the civil rights movement. Those White Houses didn’t do enough – but at least they kept watch on things. Doar escorted James Meredith to classes at the University of Mississippi, and helped calm crowds at the murder of Medgar Evers; he rescued activists from mobs during the Freedom Rides. A figure of history, in other words.

But history is just news from a while ago. Right now, we’re seeing a scene as explosive as the Freedom Rides or the bus boycotts play out in real time on the high plains of the Dakotas. And it’s a scene that desperately needs some modern-day John Doars to keep it from getting any worse.

Representatives of more 200 Indian nations have gathered at the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in an effort to prevent construction of an oil pipeline that threatens the tribe’s water supply, not to mention the planet’s climate. It’s a remarkable encampment, perhaps the greatest show of indigenous unity in the continent’s history. If Trump Tower represents all that’s dark and greedy in America right now, Standing Rock is by contrast the moral center of the nation.

But the peaceful protests have been met with repression that closely resembles the work of Bull Connor, as the pipeline company’s hired guards began by using dogs, and the local sheriff escalated from pepper spray to using water guns in freezing weather, “sonic cannons” and rubber bullets.

Clearly the authorities are attempting, a la Birmingham or Selma, to goad nonviolent protesters into some kind of reaction that will justify more repression. They’ve used every trick in the book, including arresting reporters and shutting down camera drones to make sure they’re operating in the dark.

So far the Native Americans and their allies have held back despite the most intense provocation – for instance, the pipeline company bulldozed sacred sites and ancient graves the day after the tribe handed a list of their locations to a federal court. Now the Army Corps of Engineers has announced that they’re revoking the permit under which everyone is camped at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers as of 5 December.
So far the Obama administration has announced at least a short delay before granting the final pipeline permits. But that delay could expire at any moment, adding to the tension in the camp. Clearly the administration needs to do much more: the entire pipeline, which underwent an “antiquated” approval process, needs a full environmental review – by a body other than the project’s own developer.

Yes, Donald Trump will likely overturn the delay. But Trump’s not president yet; this tragedy is playing out in the Obama years.

Along with other actions, the federal government needs to grant the Sioux tribal government request to send justice department observers — contemporary John Doars – to the Standing Rock reservation to ensure that the local authorities don’t keep escalating the situation. They should do it because it’s right, and also because it’s a historic moment.


November 29, 2016

Dakota Access Pipeline ‘akin to cultural genocide’ - DAPL activist to RT (VIDEO)

RT.com

Linda Black Elk, who has treated Standing Rock protesters injured by law enforcement, describes the Dakota Access Pipeline as “cultural genocide” in an RT interview. Vowing not to give up the effort, she calls on President Barack Obama to stand with them.

“*The pipeline is actually akin to cultural genocide. They are destroying important plants, eatable and medical plants. They are destroying future restoration sites for plants that the Lakota people use every day in their culture, whether it is for food, medicine or ceremony,*” Black Elk of the Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council said.

For months, protesters have been asking the White House to stop the construction of the 1,200-mile pipeline and order a full environmental impact statement. Almost a year ago, Obama used his power to veto legislation authorizing construction of the Keystone XL oil pipeline after a final environmental impact statement by the State Department.

“*We really ask Obama to demand a full environmental impact statement so that these issues can be addressed properly,*” she told RT’s Ed Schultz. “*If we are speaking just simply environmental, there are number of endangered species right within the path of the pipeline that are never even mentioned.*”

The DAPL protesters celebrated a significant victory as the US Army Corps of Engineers backtracked their pledge to forcibly remove Standing Rock activists from a disputed protest camp by December 5.
“It was indeed a very emotional announcement,” Black Elk said, adding that she thinks that “a lot of people took it in stride.”

“This is really nothing new to us. As someone else said this has been happening for 500 years, so we are not surprised,” she said.

North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple (R) has issued an executive order for protesters to evacuate a campsite near the Dakota Access Pipeline over concerns of harsh winter weather and lack of sanitation.

However, even the coming winter storm and heavy snow are not going to shake protesters’ resolve, Black Elk vowed.

“We are standing with people of the Standing Rock. We are not leaving, we will stand with them,” she said.

Watch the video:


November 29, 2016

17 Former Native American Obama Administration Officials Send President DAPL Message

By Levi Rickert
Native News Online

WASHINGTON – Seventeen Native Americans from different tribal backgrounds and who served at various capacities within the Obama administration have called on President Barack Obama to take immediate action to block or reroute the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The collective group sent President Obama yesterday to ask him to stand up for Standing Rock.

“America has just completed a contentious presidential election; and, soon, President-elect Donald Trump will be responsible to uphold the sacred trust relationship between the United States and Indian tribes. But, that moral and legal responsibility still rests with your Administration,” says part of the letter.

The following individuals, who were part of the Obama administration signed the letter: Kim Teehee (Cherokee), former White House Senior Policy Advisor; Charles Galbraith (Navajo), former Associate Director of White House on Native American Affairs Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement; Raina Thiele (Dena’ina Athabascan & Yup’ik), former Associate Director of White House on Native American Affairs Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement; Donald “Del” Laverdure (Crow Nation), former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Lillian A. Sparks (Rosebud Sioux
Tribe/Oglala Sioux Tribe), former Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans; **Pilar Thomas** (Pascua Yaqui Tribe), former Deputy Solicitor of the Interior; Janie Simms Hipp (Chickasaw Nation), former Senior Advisor for Tribal Relations to the Secretary of Agriculture; **Paul Tsosie** (Navajo Nation), former Chief of Staff to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; **Wizipan Little Elk** (Rosebud Sioux Tribe), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; **Sarah Harris** (Mohegan Tribe), former Chief of Staff to the Assistant Assistant Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; **Nicole Willis** (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation), former Special Assistant for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of Labor; **Bryan Newland** (Bay Mills Indian Community – Ojibwe), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; **Rodina Cave** (Quechua), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; **Elizabeth Hensley** (Inupiaq), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; **Burton Warrington** (Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation/Menominee Indian Tribe), former Counselor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; **Michalyn Steele** (Seneca Nation), former Counselor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; and **Dion Killsback** (Northern Cheyenne), former Counselor to the Assistant Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs.

Click to view letter

About The Author

Levi Rickert, a tribal citizen of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, is the publisher and editor of Native News Online. Previously, he served as editor of the Native News Network. He is a resident of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

http://nativenewsonline.net/currents/17-former-native-american-obama-administration-officials-send-president-dapl-message/

November 29, 2016

The Many Ways to Help Standing Rock

*Even if you can’t show up at the wintry encampments, you can join water protectors in other ways: from calling the North Dakota governor to breaking up with your bank.*

By Sarah van Gelder

YES! Magazine

The timing couldn’t have been more awful.

The day after Thanksgiving, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers told the Standing Rock Sioux tribe that people camped at the Oceti Sakowin Camp would be considered trespassers on that federally managed land after Dec. 5. With thousands of people, it is the largest of the water
protectors’ camps. Next came the snow, which is piling up across the camp as I write. North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple ordered an immediate evacuation allegedly out of concern for the well-being of water protectors in the “harsh winter weather.”

“He gave a whole list of concerns … that we’re going to freeze to death and the solution is to cut off emergency services,” said Tara Houska, an organizer from Honor The Earth, at a news conference on Monday. The move evokes the “collective memory of Native people being pushed off land,” she added. “In 2016, that history is still happening.”

“The most dangerous thing we can do is force well-situated campers from their shelters and into the cold,” Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II said in a statement. “If the true concern is for public safety than [sic] the Governor should clear the blockade, and the county law enforcement should cease all use of flash grenades, high-pressure water cannons in freezing temperatures, dog kennels for temporary human jails, and any harmful weaponry against human beings.”

An elder at the camp, Faith Spotted Eagle said, “It is so transparent that what they are doing is to protect the pipeline.”

What will you do? With these rapidly unfolding events at Standing Rock, what can you do? How can you support this indigenous-led nonviolent movement?

“We call on all people of conscience, from all Nations, to join the encampments and stand with us by Dec. 5 as we put our bodies in front of the machines,” says a statement from the Sacred Stone Camp, which also states: “We call on allies across the world to take action EVERY DAY starting December 1.”

How can we do something every day, as requested, to make a difference where we are?

When I interviewed Chairman Archambault earlier this month, he said this: “Follow your heart. If you want to be here, you’re welcome. If you want to pray from home, pray from home. If you want to send a letter of support, send a letter of support. If you want to send a contribution, send a contribution.”

Here are some things to consider as you decide what to do.

Show up

If you’re a veteran, consider joining the 2,000-plus veterans who are “self-deploying” to Standing Rock on December 4–7 to stand nonviolently with the water protectors.

People with skills like nurses and other medics are needed. Check with Oceti Sakowin camp or teams already on the ground to find out. And there is always work to do in the kitchen or chopping wood. People are also needed at the front lines to maintain a nonviolent presence; they risk arrest and attack from law enforcement’s “sub-lethal” weapons.

If you do go to Standing Rock, remember that this is a movement founded in nonviolence and prayer. Respect the indigenous leaders there and follow their requests about how to behave at camp in keeping with Lakota traditions.
But before you pack up your car and head out, consider the snow. You will need to be well-provisioned to avoid becoming a burden on the community there. Many of the organizers have asked White allies to consider whether the money spent to get yourself to Standing Rock would be better spent donating to the cause: covering mounting legal costs, provisioning an indigenous water protector, or helping the Standing Rock tribe pay for costs.

You may be a more effective advocate where you are, where you have easy access to elected officials and banks; at Standing Rock, access to phone and internet service is limited.

Break up with your bank

Banks are feeling the heat from the protests and from their own customers. One bank, DNB of Norway, has responded to pressure by divesting from Energy Transfer, the parent company of the Dakota Access pipeline. DNB is reportedly reconsidering more than $400 million in credit. The ING Bank of the Netherlands, which prides itself on its sustainability and human rights stance, posted a statement on its website expressing concern about excessive police force at Standing Rock.

If your bank is one of the direct investors in DAPL or one of the investors in its parent companies, Energy Transfer and Sunoco Logistics, ask them to withdraw support. Tell them you plan to close your account if their support continues. Photograph yourself cutting up your credit card, or share your letter on your social media networks. I posted my break-up letter to Chase Bank on my blog and on Facebook and Twitter—and was surprised by how many responded that they planned to do the same.

If you have a retirement fund or mutual fund, find out if it is invested in Energy Transfer Partners, Energy Transfer Equity, or Sunoco Logistics—or any of the 38 banks offering credit to the pipeline project. If so, let those investment companies know you object and tell them you would like the fund to divest or you’ll shift your account to a socially responsible investment fund.

Consider planning or participating in a nonviolent protest at a bank branch or headquarters. Sacred Stone Camp has posted a map to find bank branches near you and recommends actions beginning Dec. 1.

Banks are risk-averse, and this pipeline project has become quite risky because of public relations problems as well as the oil price bust and reduction of oil extraction in North Dakota. Banks and investors may be hoping for an excuse to back out. Your action could help tip the balance.

Call off the police

There are now dozens of law enforcement agencies participating in the multistate force that is shooting water cannons, pepper spraying, and shooting various “sub-lethal” weapons at unarmed water protectors.

If your police force is there, call them home. Although the police staffing is changing constantly, some sheriffs have responded to public pressure by refusing to send deputies. Contact elected officials, write to local papers and local blogs, and contact local media to object to law enforcement involvement at Standing Rock.
Complain to government decision-makers

Angry about the evacuation order? Talk to the person who made it:

**North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple**

600 East Boulevard Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0100  

Phone: 701-328-2200  
Email: [http://www.governor.nd.gov/contact-us](http://www.governor.nd.gov/contact-us)  
[https://www.facebook.com/NDGovDalrymple](https://www.facebook.com/NDGovDalrymple)  
[https://twitter.com/NDGovDalrymple](https://twitter.com/NDGovDalrymple)

“Where is President Obama and why does he remain silent on this issue?” Kandi Mossett of the Indigenous Environmental Network asked in a statement responding to the governor’s evacuation order.

When he visited Standing Rock on June 13, 2014, President Obama said this: “I promised when I ran to be a president … who honors our sacred trust, and who respects your sovereignty, and upholds treaty obligations, and who works with you in a spirit of true partnership, in mutual respect, to give our children the future that they deserve.”

Remind President Obama of this and of the way his decision on DAPL will shape his legacy.

**President Barack Obama**

Phone: 202-456-1111  
Email: president@whitehouse.gov

You can also call Denis McDonough, White House chief of staff, at 202-456-3182.

Contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is charged with making a decision about the permit to drill under the Missouri River. Tell them to reject the permit and order a full environmental impact statement.

**The commanding general is Lt. Gen Todd T. Semonite**

441 G Street NW  
Washington, DC 20314-1000  
Phone: 202-761-0011

[https://www.facebook.com/USACEHQ/](https://www.facebook.com/USACEHQ/)

**Jo-Ellen Darcy, assistant secretary of Army (Civil Works)**
The Department of Justice should be concerned about the use of excessive force against the water protectors and alleged violations of civil and human rights.

**Attorney General Loretta Lynch**

United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530  
Tracy.Toulou2@usdoj.gov

You can also call the Department of Justice Office of Community Relations, which offers mediation to communities facing racial and religious confrontations.

Federal office: (202) 305-2935  
Regional office: (303) 844-2973  
Askcrs@usdoj.gov,  
https://www.justice.gov/crs/what-we-do

Remember to speak politely and factually about your concerns. If you send an email, copy it to your social media account to inspire your friends, and to local media.

**Call out the media**

If media outlets are ignoring or distorting the news, call them on it. Send open letters and share them on social media. Ask major media to fully and factually cover the unfolding drama at Standing Rock.

**Donate**

There are many opportunities to donate cash or supplies. Here are three that I can vouch for:

- The Standing Rock tribe, which is using the funds for their substantial legal expenses and for providing facilities for the camp: standwithstandingrock.net/donate/.
• Oceti Sakowin Camp is the largest of the water protector camps, the closest to the front lines, and is now facing evacuation: ocetisakowincamp.org/donate.

• The Water Protector Legal Collective (formerly the Red Owl Collective), which has been providing legal support to the many who have been arrested at Standing Rock: https://fundrazr.com/campaigns/11B5z8

You can also support some of the key indigenous organizations that are leading this movement nationwide and worldwide:

• The Indigenous Environmental Network: http://www.iearth.org/?s=donate.

• Honor the Earth: http://www.honorearth.org/.

You can raise more money for these and others by organizing support events and fundraisers in your community. Invite people who are curious about the issues as well as people who are already passionately engaged. Make it a celebratory or prayerful event in whatever way makes sense to your community.

Other options

Phone a bank. Invite friends over to make phone calls and send emails. It’s more fun together.

Resist extraction where you live. Join work to stop the pipelines, coal trains, fracking, and export terminals in your city or state and include #NoDAPL and #WaterisLife messages to remind people of the link to Standing Rock.

Resist but also renew. Remember that as you resist the dystopian world of extraction, Donald Trump, violence, and racism, you can also use your activism to build up the world you want. Do your own “just transition,” switching to clean energy, conserving, protecting the water, rebuilding the soil—while including everyone in a way of life that is more soul-satisfying and joy-filled.

Resilience for the days ahead

When I talk to people at Standing Rock, I feel the trauma and pain but also the resolve. The young people speak of being the Seventh Generation, the ones that were prayed for. And many speak of the suffering they are prepared to endure to ensure the next generations has the clean water they will need to survive. That resolve is helped by the support that continues to flow in from more than 300 tribes nationwide, and from hundreds of thousands of allies, including next week’s arrival of thousands of veterans.

“We are not standing down,” said LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, founder of Sacred Stone Camp, at a news conference on Monday in response to the governor’s evacuation order. “We are in our home, we are strong, and we have prayer.”

Sarah van Gelder wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Sarah is co-founder and editor at large of YES! Magazine. Her new book, “The Revolution Where You Live: Stories from a 12,000-Mile Journey Through a New America” is available now from YES! Read her blog and more about her road trip and book here and follow her on Twitter @sarahvangelder.
November 29, 2016

Sioux anti-pipeline action sustained by Native American spirituality

By Emily McFarlan Miller, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

STANDING ROCK SIOUX RESERVATION, N.D. - In the Sioux creation narrative, water was one of the first beings the Creator made, and it became a major part of the people's religious ceremonies.

Now the Lakota prayer over water has become a rallying cry in the mass action to prevent the construction of a crude oil pipeline near this reservation.

“‘Mni wiconi’ — we see that as a cry to rally people, and it’s not just here anymore, it’s worldwide. You see the hashtag, #MniWiconi. That means ‘water is life,’” Standing Rock Sioux tribal councilman Dana Yellow Fat said.

For the better part of a year, the hills along the Cannonball River near Cannon Ball, N.D., have been transformed into a small city, the epicenter of what is in essence a spiritual movement to protect that water from the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The largest encampment is called Oceti Sakowin, which means "Seven Council Fires," the name of the Great Sioux Nation.

As many as 8,000 people have camped there under the flags of 280 Native American nations. They include representatives of all seven bands of the Sioux Nation, reportedly gathered for the first time since defeating Lt. Col. George A. Custer 140 years ago at Little Bighorn.

As the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe waits for a final court decision, expected in January, on its challenge to the Dakota Access pipeline project — which it fears will endanger the tribe’s water supply and sacred grounds — many at the camps say they feel called to be there.

Camp coordinator Phyllis Young said the movement has been sustained to a large extent by the tribe's spiritual beliefs, which had been banned for more than a half-century until the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

“Now we’re adults in our spirituality," Young said. "We took back, and we evolved, so now we exercise our freedom of religion in our way, which is peaceful in prayer.”

Everything with prayer
The $3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline would run nearly 1,200 miles from North Dakota to Illinois.

Statistically, pipelines are the safest way to transport oil, according to Dakota Access. But the pipeline also would snake through Sioux sacred sites and run beneath the Missouri River upstream from the reservation and its water supply.

All but the river crossing now is complete in North Dakota, according to Dakota Access.

But the project has been in limbo since President Obama’s administration put a temporary hold on it in September, and, earlier this month, Obama told Now This News, “Right now, the Army Corps is examining whether there are ways to reroute this pipeline.”

The movement started April 1 with a nearly 30-mile prayer ride on horseback from Sitting Bull’s burial site in Fort Yates, N.D., to the Sacred Stone Camp site.

That prayer has continued in the camps since then: communal prayers in the morning and evening and at mealtimes; prayers in vigils and in songs; prayers while sage, cedar and tobacco are burned. And the Standing Rock Sioux have invited all people to join.

“As long as there’s prayer, we don’t judge. ... Our belief is there’s one Creator, and he taught all the nations of this world a way to pray in their own way,” Yellow Fat said.

The Oceti Sakowin camp in North Dakota, one of three camps gathered in opposition to the Dakota Access pipeline project. Activists are calling the gathering "the largest, most diverse tribal action in at least a century," @nytimes reported. #dapl

‘It doesn’t matter how you pray’

On a rainy Thursday morning in mid-September, Morgan MacIver stood circled in prayer with a half-dozen other women around a fire in the Oceti Sakowin Camp, mud splashed up to her knees and pressed into a dot on her forehead.

MacIver, who is not Native American, had come three weeks earlier after hearing about the gathering on Facebook. And while she said she doesn’t find her spirituality “from any other place than within myself,” she said she could feel the power of prayer in the camp.

“It doesn’t matter how you pray or who you pray to, all of that love in our hearts is the same, and the power of prayer is really the most powerful thing,” she said.

On Nov. 3, more than 500 clergy joined in those prayers, singing hymns while marching to a bridge that has been the site of clashes between demonstrators — who prefer to be called "water protectors" — and police, according to reports.

For the Rev. David Wilson — the Choctaw superintendent of the United Methodist Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, who had visited the camps early on — Christian Scripture is
filled not just with commands to “act justly,” but also with water imagery: Moses striking a rock to bring forth water for his people; Jesus’ words about “rivers of living water”; the waters of baptism.

“I think about those images,” Wilson said. “We can’t live without water, and for Christian people, the image of water in relation to Jesus is very important. It’s in our hymnody, Scriptures, liturgy — everything we do.”

A delegation from the American Humanists Association also visited the camp this month.

Prayer walk

In the days before construction came to a stop in early September, Dakota Access crews had removed topsoil across two miles of land, which several campers likened to desecrating and destroying a church.

For four days, until medicine men had held a ceremony and declared it finished, hundreds of demonstrators had marched in a prayer walk from Oceti Sakowin to the site of the digging. They sang and carried the flags of the nations they represented, stopping to knot prayer ties to fences along the site and leave tobacco offerings.

Tensions have escalated in the past few weeks, most notably Sunday (Nov. 20) when the Morton County Sheriff’s Department turned fire hoses, tear gas and rubber bullets on a group of about 400 demonstrators reportedly trying to remove a police blockade cutting off the camp from a nearby highway in freezing temperatures.

And a final decision on the Dakota Access pipeline isn’t likely to come until after a hearing in early 2017. But tribal councilman Yellow Fat said the Standing Rock Sioux’s action will end in the same way it began.

“We began this with prayer, and we look at this whole movement as a ceremony. It began with prayers before we left, and in the end, it will close with prayers,” he said.

“We’re fighting the pipeline with prayer.”

South Dakota
Dakota Access Pipeline protests
Standing Rock Indian Reservation
Sioux

As many as 2,000 veterans planned to gather next week at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota to serve as “human shields” for protesters who have for months clashed with the police over the construction of an oil pipeline, organizers said.

The effort, called Veterans Stand for Standing Rock, is planned as a nonviolent intervention to defend the demonstrators from what the group calls “assault and intimidation at the hands of the militarized police force.”

The veterans’ plan coincides with an announcement on Tuesday by law enforcement officials that they may begin imposing fines to block supplies from entering the main protest camp after a mandatory evacuation order from the governor. Officials had warned earlier of a physical blockade, but the governor’s office later backed away from that, Reuters said.

Protesters have vowed to stay put. Opponents of the 1,170-mile Dakota Access Pipeline have gathered for months at the Oceti Sakowin camp, about 40 miles south of Bismarck. The Standing Rock Sioux and other Native American tribes fear the pipeline could pollute the Missouri River and harm sacred cultural lands and tribal burial grounds.

The evacuation order issued on Monday by Gov. Jack Dalrymple cited “anticipated harsh weather conditions.” It came before a winter storm dumped about six inches of snow and brought strong winds to the area on Monday, making roads “roads nearly impassable at the camp sites,” according to Doualy Xaykaothao of Minnesota Public Radio, who was cited by NPR.

The governor’s statement said, “Any person who chooses to enter, re-enter or stay in the evacuation does so at their own risk.” The order was effective immediately and was to remain in place indefinitely.

The veterans’ effort will also run up against a plan by the Army Corps of Engineers to close off access to the protesters’ campsite and create a “free speech zone.” Federal officials said anyone found on the land after Dec. 5 could be charged with trespassing.

“Yeah, good luck with that,” Michael A. Wood Jr., a founder of the veterans’ event, said in an interview.

Mr. Wood, who served in the Marine Corps, organized the event with Wesley Clark Jr., a screenwriter, activist and son of Wesley K. Clark, the retired Army general and onetime supreme allied commander in Europe for NATO.
Mr. Wood said he had initially hoped to attract about 500 veterans; he had to stop sign-ups when they reached 2,000. He said volunteers are from diverse backgrounds: “We have every age, we have every war.”

An online fund-raiser has drawn over $570,000 in pledges as of Tuesday afternoon to pay for food, transportation and supplies for the veterans’ “muster,” which was planned for Dec. 4-7.

One veteran, Loreal Black Shawl, said the mission to support the protesters was intensely personal.

Ms. Black Shawl, 39, of Rio Rancho, N.M., is a descendant of two Native American tribes, the Oglala Lakota and Northern Arapaho. She served in the Army for nearly eight years, finishing her career as a sergeant.

“O.K., are you going to treat us veterans who have served our country in the same way as you have those water protectors?” Ms. Black Shawl said, referring to the protesters. “We’re not there to create chaos. We are there because we are tired of seeing the water protectors being treated as non-humans.”

The authorities have used rubber bullets, pepper spray and water cannons against demonstrators, hundreds of whom have been injured, according to protest organizers. The clashes have been highly contentious, with the police and demonstrators leveling accusations of violence at each other.

Some protesters filed a class-action lawsuit on Monday against the Morton County police and others, alleging excessive use of force and seeking a court injunction to prevent the authorities from using rubber bullets, explosive grenades and water cannons, according to The Atlantic. One woman was injured and in danger of losing her arm after an explosion at the protest site this month.

By spotlighting issues such as the use of force by the police, national energy policies and the treatment of Native Americans, the protests have garnered national headlines and widespread attention on social media.

Ms. Black Shawl acknowledged that the operation could prove problematic because the veterans and the police both have military or tactical training. She said she had a “huge, huge nervousness and anxiety” about possibly being injured and what could happen to other veterans.

An “operations order” for participants outlined the logistics with military precision and language, referring to opposing forces, friendly forces and supporting units. Organizers encouraged attendees to wear their old uniforms.

Mr. Wood said they were discouraging active-duty service members from attending. “There’s no reason for them to get into hot water,” he said.
In a break from military custom, the gathering will have a “chain of responsibility” instead of a chain of command, he said. There are no ranks, and participants will refer to one another by their given names.

Mr. Wood said the early stages of the event will be logistical: setting up tents and organizing food supplies. The first arrivals are expected on Wednesday.

The premise is for the veterans to be fully self-sufficient, he said. “There will be civilian and tribe members watching us from behind but nobody supporting us,” the operations order said. “We are the cavalry.”

A spokesman for the North Dakota State Highway Patrol, Lt. Thomas O. Iverson, said in an email on Monday, “Law enforcement is aware of the upcoming event planned for December 4-7.” He added, “If the group remains lawful and refrains from blocking the roadway, there will be no issues.”

Some officials expressed the hope that the demonstrators would move on.

“The well-being and property of ranchers, farmers and everyone else living in the region should not be threatened by protesters who are willing to commit acts of violence,” Senator John Hoeven, a Republican, said in a statement on Friday, The Associated Press reported.

The chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Dave Archambault II, said in an email that he had no concerns that tensions could escalate.

“Everyone that comes knows our intent — to remain in peace and prayer,” he said.


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November 29, 2016

The twisted economics of the Dakota Access Pipeline

By Jonathan Thompson
High Country News

As the weather gets colder, the fight over the Dakota Access Pipeline is heating up, in rather ugly ways. Just days before Thanksgiving, law enforcement officers tried to blast the protesters away with water cannons in 25-degree weather and employed other “less than lethal,” though still harmful, dispersal methods. One protester may lose her arm as a result of injuries suffered during the violence. And to top it off, the Army Corps of Engineers plans to close one of the camps of "water protectors" next week, which may embolden law enforcement to take a more forceful approach.
High Country News has reported what’s at stake for the Standing Rock Sioux tribal members and their allies trying to stop or re-route the project: Tribal sovereignty, water, environmental justice, holy lands, treaty-rights and antiquities. Add to that the prospect of more carbon spewing into the atmosphere, and one can see why activists are risking so much to stand in the pipeline’s way.

Less clear is what the $3.78 billion, 1,172-mile-long crude oil pipeline offers in return if and when construction is completed and it goes into operation. Energy Transfer Partners, the project’s main proponent, says that the pipeline will offer jobs, economic relief to a struggling region and, by spurring production of North Dakota Crude, it will take the U.S. closer to the lofty ideal of energy independence.

Construction on the pipeline is about 85 percent complete and it has, indeed, put people to work. Yet it is not clear how many new jobs have been created since the jobs are spread out over 1,000 miles. Rural towns along the pipeline’s corridor have reported a boost in hotel and campground occupancy rates as the contractors move through. That, in turn, generates sales and lodging tax revenues for the local governments. The boost, however, won't last. In a few months, when (and if) construction is complete, the workers and their spending money will depart. The finished pipeline will require just 40 permanent maintenance and operational jobs along its entire stretch.

Once oil is flowing, property tax revenues — an estimated total of $55 million annually — will kick in. While it’s a big chunk of change, the impacts will be diffused, shared by four states. North and South Dakota are expected to receive about $13 million each, divided between several counties, a drop in the budget bucket (Colorado generates nearly $20 million per month from taxes and fees on marijuana). That said, it might be enough to buy the county sheriffs some more military gear from the Pentagon in order to squelch the next pipeline protest. It will not, however, cover the costs of such squelching: The current law enforcement effort has reportedly cost $15 million so far.

The fact is, pipelines, like transmission lines, don't have a major economic impact except when they’re built. They otherwise go mostly unnoticed until they spill, burst or explode.

The bigger-picture impact, whether on climate change or energy independence, is more difficult to suss out. Both proponents and opponents seem to be working on the “build-it-and-they’ll-fill-it” premise. That is, if you expand pipeline capacity for North Dakota crude, it will encourage more oil drilling and thus more oil production. If more domestic oil is produced, the logic goes, then we have less need to import foreign oil and we achieve greater energy independence. The flip side to that is, the more oil we drill, the more we consume, resulting in greater carbon emissions. It's summed up in this nifty formula:


This formula, however, holds only if lack of pipeline capacity is a major hindrance to oil development. It's not. We can move crude oil not only through pipelines, but also with trucks, trains and tankers. Oil’s mobility (along with its relative fungibility) help make it a global commodity in a way that natural gas, for example, is not. The lack of pipeline capacity is not a
major limiting factor in oil development and production; when the North Dakota boom was on, no one opted out of drilling because of lack of transportation options. In fact, prices were so high, no one opted out of drilling at all.

Just as the biggest driver of oil development is a high oil price, the biggest hindrance, particularly for expensive-to-drill North Dakota crude, is a low oil price. That relationship has been on display in North Dakota, and across the West, for the last decade: Oil prices went up, thanks to burgeoning demand in China and the developing world, so drilling intensified and production went bananas. Oil prices crashed as China's economic growth slowed, the drill rigs were stored away and production has decreased.

Very few wells have been “shut-in” or plugged up. Most of the already-drilled wells continue to produce, but at lower and lower rates, a phenomenon known as the “decline curve.” Wells that produced 220 barrels per day when they were drilled in 2005, for example, now only produce about 20 barrels per day.

Plug these critical factors -- global supply vs. demand and price -- into the aforementioned formula and the outcome becomes far murkier. No longer does more pipeline capacity directly lead to more production; it must first either raise the price of oil, or induce demand. The latter's not going to happen. A pipeline across the upper Midwest will not inspire the masses in China to buy cars and drive them all over the country. It will not affect global demand.

So how about price? The Dakota Access Pipeline is expected to carry half-a-million barrels of oil per day to refineries and market hubs in Illinois. Moving a barrel of oil on the pipeline is expected to cost about $8, compared to approximately $15 for shipping it via rail. That is, if the producer would have received $34 per barrel for rail-shipped oil, it will get $41 per barrel for Dakota Access Pipeline-shipped oil.

This $7-per-barrel bonus could add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional revenue for the producer over the well’s life, and could certainly keep wells from being shut-in. Yet it's doubtful that it's enough to push the producer to dust off the rigs and start drilling again. It costs anywhere from $5 million to $15 million to drill a well in North Dakota's Bakken formation. After the last bust, producers and their investors are unlikely to fork out that kind of cash until oil prices go up considerably and stay there, which will only happen if Saudi Arabia commits to a long-term slash in its production. Unless new wells are drilled in North Dakota at a furious rate, production will continue to decrease, thanks to the decline curve.

There is one other way the pipeline could impact oil prices, at least for the oil flowing through the line. Some oil customers reportedly entered into contracts with producers prior to construction to buy DAPL oil at or near 2014 prices. If those contracts remain in place despite the protest-caused construction delay, it could, theoretically, push producers to drill a few more wells to produce enough oil to fetch the higher price. But probably not. It's more likely that those producers will simply divert oil now shipped by rail to the pipeline, thus increasing profit without increasing production.
If, somehow, the pipeline were able to increase oil production, then we'd still have another variable to plug into our equation. I'll call it the T. Greg Merrion factor, for the New Mexico oil executive who told me about it: “Nothing helps low prices like low prices, and nothing hurts high prices like high prices.” That is, the increased supply delivered by the pipeline (without a consequent increase in demand) would increase the amount of oil supply on a market where demand can’t keep up with supply. The glut grows. Prices slide further downward. There's even less drilling. Production slides. The cycle continues.

• The Dakota Access Pipeline, on its own, is not likely to result in increased production of North Dakota Crude, because More Pipeline Capacity ≠ More Demand;

• Therefore the pipeline will not create more oilfield jobs or result in higher severance tax revenues to North Dakota;

• If there is any uptick in production thanks to the pipeline, it won't be enough to put a dent in the 5.2 million barrels of oil the U.S. continues to import each and every day;

• Since the pipeline won't push more production, it also will not result in more consumption. Therefore, it will not directly lead to a significant increase in carbon emissions.

Which is to say, the pipeline will be neither the economic boon, nor the climate bane, it's been made out to be. Nor will it get the U.S. any closer to energy independence.

Why, then, is Energy Transfer Partners so intent on building this thing? The equation that answers that one is far simpler. If the pipeline indeed carries 470,000 barrels per day, at a rate of $8 per barrel, the company should gross about $1.37 billion per year. Operating costs are low (remember, there are just 40 employees running this thing), so it shouldn’t take long to recoup the capital costs. That leaves a lot for the investors, like Energy Transfer Partners' billionaire CEO Kelcy Warren, or reputed billionaire and President-elect Donald Trump.

Yes, Trump is invested in the companies behind the pipeline, though the amount of his stake decreased substantially between 2015 and 2016. Meanwhile, Warren donated more than $100,000 to Trump’s campaign, clearly hoping he would remove federal obstacles to the pipeline.

These numbers are worth considering when you see the images of the “water protectors” getting pummeled with water cannons, rubber bullets and tear gas. They’re not being attacked in the name of jobs, the economy or energy independence. They’re being attacked in the name of profit.

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November 29, 2016

Pope Francis: “Never been such a clear need for science” to protect the planet

By Brady Dennis
Washington Post

Pope Francis this week implored world leaders not to postpone the implementation of global environmental pacts, an appeal that appeared aimed at President-elect Donald Trump’s vows to end the United States’ leading role in combating climate change.

The pope’s remarks came during a gathering of scientists at the Vatican, at which he said there has “never been such a clear need for science” to guide human actions to safeguard the future of the planet.

“It is worth noting that international politics has reacted weakly — albeit with some praiseworthy exceptions — regarding the concrete will to seek the common good and universal goods, and the ease with which well-founded scientific opinion about the state of our planet is disregarded,” the pontiff said, according to a translation provided by the Vatican. He added that the “‘distraction’ or delay” in implementing global agreements on the environment demonstrates how politics have become submissive “to a technology and an economy which seek profit above all else.”

Trump, who is set to become one of the only world leaders to question the notion of global warming, has vowed to “cancel” U.S. participation in the international climate accord signed last year in Paris, in which countries pledged to cut carbon dioxide emissions sharply in coming years. In addition, Trump has called for rolling back pollution regulations on the oil, gas and coal industries and shrinking the role of the Environmental Protection Agency.

This week’s comments echoed an encyclical regarding the environment issued by Francis last year in which he wrote about the “urgent challenge to protect our common home” and argued that “the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.”

At the Vatican, Francis praised the work of scientists, who he said must remain independent and emerge as leaders in fighting for climate action.

“I would say that it falls to scientists, who work free of political, economic or ideological interests, to develop a cultural model which can face the crisis of climatic change and its social consequences,” he said, “so that the vast potential of productivity will not be reserved for only a few.”

November 30, 2016

John Grim on Standing Rock: ‘This is Not Only About Water, It’s All About Water’

By Timothy Brown
Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies

In recent days, the conflict has escalated over construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. John Grim, a senior lecturer and research scholar at F&ES and an expert in Native American religions, discusses the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of the Standing Rock demonstrations for Native people.

Since last April, members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their allies — who collectively call themselves “water protectors” — have been camped on the windswept prairie of North Dakota in an effort to block construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) across the Missouri River some 40 miles south of Bismarck.

But in recent days, the conflict over DAPL has escalated. There are reports of rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons being used against the demonstrators, and last Friday, North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple issued an executive order calling for the mandatory evacuation of the Oceti Sakowin camp. Native activists have responded that they have no intention of leaving the camps, except on their own terms. Indeed, this week a group of 2,000 military veterans announced they’re traveling to Standing Rock this coming weekend to serve as human shields for the water protectors.

Construction of the nearly $3.7 billion, 1,172-mile pipeline, which would transport oil from the Bakken shale in northwestern North Dakota to distribution centers in southern Illinois, is nearly complete. But organizers are hoping that their actions will convince the government to block the pipeline from crossing the Missouri River, the primary drinking water source for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. Protests against the pipeline’s construction have occurred at several points, especially where the pipeline crosses rivers in Iowa and Illinois. But none has garnered as much support and attention as Standing Rock.

Standing Rock is the largest Native gathering in the U.S. since the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Hundreds of American Indian tribes and indigenous allies from as far away as Scandinavia and New Zealand have come to support the water protectors. And despite the current sub-zero temperatures and blizzard-like conditions, activists say there are still upwards of 5000 people at the camps.

For greater cultural and historical context of the water protections at Standing Rock, we sat down with John Grim, senior lecturer and senior research scholar at F&ES. Grim, a native of North Dakota, is an expert in indigenous religions and culture. He has written and lectured extensively on indigenous religions, and has been adopted into a Crow family and participated in many Crow ceremonies. Grim, along with his wife, Mary Evelyn Tucker, coordinates the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. He is the author of “The Shaman: Patterns of Religious Healing Among the Ojibway Indians” (University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), and series editor of “World

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

I’ve read that up to 300 American Indian tribes — and the Sami in Scandinavia and Maori from New Zealand — have come to North Dakota in support of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. How significant is this action for indigenous people?

JOHN GRIM: It’s important for me to say that no one speaks for Hunkpapa people. They are capable of presenting themselves. There are people out there from the community who are speaking about these issues and who realize how important it is to bring this information out and to let people know what they’re doing and why they’re doing it.

This action has called across Indian country and has brought up participants from so many different peoples to stand in solidarity. We know that kind of pan-Indian movement from the powwow highway and the Native American Church, but this is at a scale that’s remarkable.

I think part of what this is about is an education for the larger American public. [The Hunkpapa] have been interacting with the dominant U.S. government for 150 years. They know the stakes are loaded against them. They’ve won a few, but lost more than they’ve won. And they’re still willing to stand up in this regard.

What is the role of religion for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe?

GRIM: For the Hunkpapa, the use of the word “religion” here is really problematic. I find the word “lifeway” much more helpful. Lifeways are the values that pervade the way they interact with the world, with one another. I think that we, namely dominant America, are not entirely out of that interpretive schema either. Our values pervade the way we are interacting with Hunkpapa people now. The Lakota concept is to stand in reciprocity, to deal with the need to bring to bear one’s values on the world. Among the Lakota, there’s this phrase: Mitakuye oyasin. When you enter into a ceremony, especially a sweat lodge, it’s entirely appropriate for a Lakota person to say Mitakuye oyasin, as if to say, “Everything I have experienced in this ceremonial moment is in relationship to all my relatives.” This is not a scientific ecology; Mary Evelyn Tucker and I tend to use this phrase “religious ecology” to try and get at what’s going on when people have a sense of humans embedded in a world in which they stand in relationship to this world in a certain way.

It’s really interesting to think about what is culture in relation to values — they’re one and the same. That’s what I’m trying to get at with “lifeway,” the idea that this is not simply an environmental resistance movement.
You’ve spoken about a Doctrine of Discovery. Describe that term and what it has meant for Native peoples?

GRIM: These Lakota people experienced during the mid-nineteenth century the full brunt of the then-developed United States of America. The experience of the Lakota and of all Native people was of a state moving across this continent strongly influenced by a Doctrine of Discovery that had been formulated in the European nations in conjunction with Christianity. The whole idea of the Doctrine of Discovery is that religious ideas are embedded in domination, and the deeper argument for domination is based on the Christian sense of subjugation to conversion. The Doctrine of Discovery ignored the religion and culture of indigenous peoples of the Americas. It thus provided the justification to subjugate others if you convert them because Christianity provides the path to heaven. You’re actually saving people who otherwise would be lost and you’re doing them a huge salvific favor by Christianizing. And of course, they become members of the state by being baptized. In this country we moved to separate church and state, but those values are totally embedded when we talk about eminent domain. We’ve shifted the Christian ethos of baptism into citizenship in the marketplace of ideas that’s the United States of America.

What does a sacred site mean coming from the Native perspective, and what’s really at risk of being damaged with this pipeline?

GRIM: I think sacred sites are just so amazingly different among Native peoples. There are sites there that are understood to be spiritual presences where people don’t go, and there are other places that people go in order to communicate with those spiritual beings. And there may be occasions where they overlap, or they flip. I think this is where the people themselves, their understanding, is crucial. And we need to respect that understanding.

I’ve seen photographs of water protectors on horseback or wearing feathers in their hair. Why are these traditional symbols important to the Lakota?

GRIM: That type of background question is very helpful because perceptions of Native peoples are largely by virtue of acting in a grade school Thanksgiving play, or a Hollywood movie that generally situates Native people in the period of the Indian Wars of the 1860s-70s. The image is really crucial and complex and historically fraught. But this image issue also works against Native people in the sense that if they show signs of adapting to cars, watches, iPads, going to Yale Law School, then they have, by that very action, left behind their so-called tradition. The DAPL action, by using the word “protector,” is affirming traditional values of these Lakota people who call themselves Hunkpapa.

People who come to the Sacred Stone Camp are given nonviolence training. Even the use of that word casts it in a Gandhian, or at least contemporary, resistance. This nonviolent training has to be anchored into Lakota traditional values. These Hunkpapa people have a profound cultural history in which they have thought about themselves in relationship to where they’ve lived for thousands of years and they have come up with an intricate and complex set of stories, set of values, set of ways of acting in the world that they find successful and communicates not only who they are as people, but a way of life that nurtures them and the life community… I think
that’s also what we’re seeing with all the feathers, headdresses — the efforts to foreground what we call “culture.”

I can hear people saying, “These people are standing in the way of progress. They’re frozen in history; they don’t understand what the world is about.” My response is that I think they understand the world better than dominant America does. We can’t live without water; we can’t survive. And so this action in support of water is all the more important. It’s what this School is about.

For somebody who’s unfamiliar with treaty rights, how important are these treaties for the Lakota?

GRIM: The U.S. Constitution mentions Indians and gives to the United States government the right to negotiate with these foreign nations. We inherited from the British and the French a process of interacting with Native nations as nations. Those treaties are not all the same. Some treaty makers were quite savvy and some were not. The Great Sioux Reservation included the Black Hills. Gold was discovered there in 1875 and in rushed illegal gold prospectors. The military came in to protect the miners, and with a larger agenda of, again, domination. The Indian Claims Commission, in an effort “to do right” concerning all broken treaties, determined that the Black Hills were illegally taken and offered $15 million in compensation, but the Lakota refused the money, which has been held in escrow and is now worth over a billion dollars. This is their Holy Land. What we did is alienate these people from their Vatican and carved Mount Rushmore in the midst of their Holy Land.

The Lakota word for white person is wasi’chu — (which means) fat-takers; they take the best parts and they want everything.

I recently read quote by a Hunkpapa person who said, “They’ve been waiting since Custer to do this.” What do you think he meant by this statement?

GRIM: Someone who was not sympathetic would say it’s paranoia. But I don’t think it’s paranoia; I think it’s a real assessment. If you think about 1887 — all the bison are killed. There are remnant herds in Canada and individual animals were brought to the U.S. and that’s the basis of the herds here today. There are Northern Plains people — Crow, Blackfeet, that used these buffalo. We now know that documents show very clearly that the military encouraged and actively assisted in the aimless, pointless, and wasteful killing of buffalo. So that sense of “out to get us” can be traced back very early. In 1887, the Dawes Act allotted 160 acres to every man, woman, and child on the Indian reservation. And when that land was allotted, all the so-called “extraneous land” was then open for non-Native settlement. So, no “prior and informed consent” by Native people at all. They knew about it, but what voice did they have in the United States Congress?

There was the Dawes Act, and the forced removal of Native people from the eastern U.S., and boarding schools where children were taken away from their families to be educated out of their languages, out of their cultural identity. In the 1950s, there was an effort by the Truman
administration and the first Eisenhower administration to terminate all treaties. Treaty-making ended in the 1870s by a formal act of Congress, but the 1950s termination policy was an effort by the United States to get out from under — that’s how the metaphors were put — the burden of these wards of the state; to cut off any kind of promised payment that many people had never received. These ongoing activities are behind the statement: “They’re out to get us.” It’s not as if it was just one thing.

*How do treaty violations play into the legal argument that the Tribe has to fight the pipeline?*

GRIM: The pipeline itself is not on the reservation but the fact that the pipeline would go under the Missouri River is what is threatening to the water on the reservation should there be any leaks. Many scientists have expressed concerns about leaks that have occurred across the country. So the threat that is perceived to the water and that these individuals are standing up to protect is embedded in the treaty right that Native people have to foster life and sustain life on the reservation. And outsiders, or the United States government, shall not take activities that endanger their lives. So in the treaties are written these stipulations that Native nations, like the Pueblos in the Southwest, have used to successfully sue cities, like Albuquerque, about water quality for rivers that flow through Albuquerque and then onto the reservation.

*In essence, Standing Rock is really about a lot more than protecting water.*

GRIM: I find an interesting way to get at it is, “This is not only about water; it’s all about water.” We’re in this incredible contradictory episode where, when you talk about water, well that’s romantic imaging, or it’s religion, or it’s a symbol; and it’s also about reality, pragmatic reality. It’s not only about water; it’s about a whole range of issues. But it’s about water.

**Standing with Standing Rock**

Earlier this month, F&ES students organized a public conversation about DAPL and drafted a Statement of Support for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. This statement, signed by over 300 concerned students, alumni, faculty, and staff, was delivered to the Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II last Thursday. Students continue to organize, fundraise, and travel to North Dakota to protest the pipeline’s construction, which, if completed, has huge implications for climate change and other environmental issues.

In two op-eds, F&ES masters students Sarah Lakshmi Sax ’17 M.E.Sc., and Christina Stone ’17 M.E.M. offer unique perspectives on the Dakota Access Pipeline. Sax discusses the climate change implications of the pipeline, and Stone, a native of North Dakota, describes her personal and conflicting emotions about the pipeline.

http://environment.yale.edu/news/article/john-grim-on-standing-rock/

December 2016
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The Priest in the Trees

Feral faith in the age of climate change

By Fred Bahnson
Harper's Magazine

On the last Sunday in September 2015, the Reverend Stephen Blackmer stopped beside the stand of beech stumps where he had once performed the chain-saw Eucharist. He was leading a dozen or so members of the Church of the Woods on a contemplative walk. With his plaid shirt, decades-old custom Limmer hiking boots, and graying beard sans mustache, Blackmer didn’t look the part of a religious professional. He skipped nimbly over roots and rocks, turning around to laugh or make a point. His talk swept from exuberant to pensive to crass; at times he sounded like the theologically astute priest he was, at others like a mischievous wood sprite. It was the first anniversary of the church, located several miles from the town of Canterbury, New Hampshire. A full lunar eclipse was expected that night, and Blackmer would be turning sixty in a few days. To celebrate these auspicious events, church members had planned a full day of activities: meditation walks, trail work, a Eucharist service, a bonfire, and, for those who still had energy, an eclipse-viewing party. When the group paused along the ridge of beech stumps it was midmorning; they were only halfway through a circumnavigation of the church’s 106 acres, which Blackmer described as a “labyrinth on a grand scale.” There was no church building, just woods. If you wanted to see the sanctuary, you had to hike.

The contemplative trek would take around three hours, but no one was complaining. Long walks in the woods are conducive to stories. Like the story of the chain-saw Eucharist. On a sunny, twelve-degree day in January, Blackmer had hiked into the Church of the Woods pulling a sled full of trail-clearing gear: axe, chain saw, oil, and gas. He wanted to clear new meditation trails, which mostly involved sawing up blowdowns and saplings. When he came to the ridge, he found it choked by the stand of young beech, so he cranked up his Jonsered and began felling trees. Over the next hour, Blackmer had a growing feeling that something wasn’t right. He hit the kill switch. Shit, he thought, I have utterly sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It wasn’t cutting trees that bothered him. It was that he had been taking life after life “and had been utterly oblivious to the enormity of that act.” He had failed to remember that trees, even scrubby little saplings, are worthy of reverence.

Blackmer’s sled also held what he called his prayer kit: Communion bread, a water bottle full of wine, the Book of Common Prayer. Kneeling in the sawdust and snow beside one of the widest
stumps, he spread out the elements and set up an altar. That day’s lectionary reading was from Isaiah. He read aloud:

I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. . . . Shout, O depths of the earth! Break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it.

He prayed the prayer of confession, consecrated the bread and wine, and offered them to his fellow congregants — the trees — before partaking himself.

Until nine years ago, Blackmer was an agnostic. After training as a forest ecologist at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in the early Eighties, he founded and directed two successful conservation organizations in New England: the Northern Forest Center, where he managed a staff of more than a dozen and an annual budget of roughly $1.2 million, and the Northern Forest Alliance, a coalition of advocacy groups that succeeded in both shifting the local logging industry to more sustainable types of forestry and conserving millions of acres of land across Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, and Maine. At the time, Blackmer had no use for religion, especially for Chris-chens, as he called them — “those angry, antiscience, anti-environmental bigots.” He was fond of the bumper sticker that read BORN PRETTY GOOD THE FIRST TIME.

Then, on a flight to Dublin in 2007, Blackmer heard the Voice. As the plane descended he looked down and saw a church steeple. Priest, the Voice said. You are to be a priest. He had heard the Voice before, and would hear it many times over the next year, but on the plane it would be the clearest. It was a sound he heard in his heart rather than his ears, but a voice nonetheless, and what it said was not a suggestion like, Have you ever considered a career in the ministry? You have the right set of skills. It was a statement of fact. You are to be a priest.

There is more to Blackmer’s story, both before and after that flight over Dublin, but perhaps the most immediately startling thing is this: not until he arrived at divinity school, two years later, did he actually read the Bible. As a child, he’d read a few chapters of Genesis and heard the Christmas story. When he finally sat down and read the story to which he had committed his life, he was struck by how often the biblical writers engaged the very subject he’d spent his career studying: the land. The places in which the narrative occurred — mountaintops, hillsides, lakeshores, gardens — were not just stages on which the human story played out; they were actors in the story itself. He came to love the Psalms, and the frequency with which the psalmist used metaphors of nature, especially trees. In Psalm 92 the righteous ones “flourish like the palm tree. They are planted in the house of the Lord. . . . In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap.” In other Psalms the trees of the fields clap their hands, shout for joy. When humans sing praises, they do the same thing. Nature is not inert. It was a revelatory idea.

In the Gospels, Blackmer found the most intriguing examples of divine encounter in nature. He kept noticing what he called “throwaway lines”: after Jesus had “dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray” (Matthew), or “He would withdraw to deserted places and pray” (Luke). Sometimes Jesus went to a garden. Or a lakeshore. Or the Judean desert. The
location varied, but the pattern was evident throughout the Gospels. Jesus went to the temple “to teach and to raise a ruckus,” but when he needed to pray Jesus fled to the countryside, to places unmediated by both temples and the religious authorities that governed them. Blackmer came to believe that direct contact with God is religion’s raison d’être, but one that’s often lacking in church. Of course one can experience God in a building, he concedes. But for at least some people, especially at this moment in history, there needs to be a practice of going into the wilderness to pray. And if one lives in New England, the obvious place to do that is the woods.

Though affiliated with the Episcopal Church (the denomination in which Blackmer was ordained), the Church of the Woods is tied to a nonprofit organization called Kairos Earth, which Blackmer founded in 2013. In biblical Greek, *kairos* refers to an opportune or critical moment when God acts. In its first year, nearly nine hundred people attended services at the Church of the Woods. Of its thirty or so regular members, nearly half have graduate degrees. Many are medical professionals whose finely tuned diagnostic skills tell them that our planet is running a fever. As Wendy Weiger, a Harvard-trained research physician, told me, “Climate change is the biggest public-health crisis humanity has ever faced.”

Blackmer believes our ecological crises have precipitated a *kairos* moment. He sees a parallel with the Book of Jeremiah, in which the prophet describes a sense of impending doom as the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem in 587 B.C. “I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void,” Jeremiah wrote, “and to the heavens, and they had no light.” On reading the book in seminary, Blackmer’s first thought had been, *He’s talking about climate change.*

As Western Christianity undergoes its identity crisis — a reformation or a slow implosion, depending on your leaning — a small but determined number of people like Blackmer are urging the church to seek God in the literal wilderness. They are calling for carbon repentance, but their credo is more nuanced than just slapping a fresh coat of Christian morality onto secular environmental politics; the Sierra Club at prayer this is not. At the Church of the Woods there is no action plan, no hive of online activity promising the earth’s salvation if only you [click here](#). There is rather a summons, an invitation to carry contemplative practice and ritual enactment into one’s local ecosystem and thereby rediscover the awe and wonder that Moses experienced before the burning bush. By wooing Christianity back to its feral beginnings, Blackmer believes, we can finally confront the long trajectory of our ecological sin, and perhaps begin to change direction.

It was late morning at the stand of beech stumps. One of Blackmer’s congregants, an eighty-year-old retired physician named Peter Hope, had brought his GPS to map the network of trails. If he wanted to cover the distance before nightfall, he would have to get going. He set out walking, and the meditative trekkers followed in silence.

For the first-time visitor, there isn’t much to distinguish the Church of the Woods from any other forested part of southern New Hampshire. The previous landowner had cut the most desirable timber, leaving behind the stunted or misshapen trees in a practice known as high-grading. Though the forests are diminished, the bone structure of this land presents a walker with intriguing features: oddly shaped ridges, dells, and vernal pools. Something more than trees or
squirrels resides there. The land tells a story about itself that, like braille, becomes legible only if you feel your way across the signs.

Growing on a dead hemlock stump was a dinner-plate-size reishi, a polypore known in China and Japan as the “mushroom of immortality” for its alleged immune-boosting properties. “Hey,” Weiger shouted up to Blackmer, “maybe we should apply for a religious exemption to eat psychedelic mushrooms. Like a peyote ceremony!”

Weiger is not the sort who goes in for hallucinogens. After earning her M.D. and Ph.D., she worked for a number of years as a researcher at Harvard Medical School’s Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. Ever since living in Nepal in her twenties she had been drawn to meditation, and in 2003 she moved to Maine to pursue a more contemplative life. Once a month she drives the six hours down to the Church of the Woods.

Many of the church’s members are either former or current environmental activists. Wendy helped form a nonprofit that fought a protracted legal battle against Plum Creek Timber, a lumber company that wanted to develop 400,000 acres of Maine woods. Sue Moore, who is sixty-nine, was arrested alongside the environmentalist Bill McKibben at a rally against the Keystone XL pipeline in 2011. Blackmer fully supports lobbying and activism, but a common theme at the Church of the Woods is that activism isn’t enough. When he considered the difference between Christians protesting a coal plant and secular activists doing the same, he thought, There has to be something different in liturgy, giving the word its full extent of meaning in the New Testament Greek. Leitour gia gets translated as “worship or service to God,” but it can also be parsed as “the work of the people.”

This need to find a new path through liturgy and contemplation was true both of seasoned activists like Blackmer and Weiger and of younger members such as Rachel Field, who had looked at the available activist responses to the ecological crisis — secular or faith-based — and found them wanting. For two years Field worked for the Center for the Environment and Society at Washington College, in Maryland, where she and her co-workers banded 14,000 migratory birds a year. She loved the work, but found it difficult to speak about faith in that science-heavy environment, so eventually she enrolled at Yale Divinity School and began attending the Church of the Woods. She was considering returning to Maryland to start a Church of the Marshes, where she might offer up the bread and wine among the egrets and plovers on the tidal flats of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Altar is the spiritual, if not the actual, center of the church. It is here that Blackmer offers Communion to his peripatetic flock. There is a worry among certain mainline Christians that once you start dabbling in nature, you’re on the slippery slope to paganism, but Blackmer is no druid. He found years ago that the vague, earth-based spirituality he’d lived with for most of his
life wasn’t enough, and now considers himself a solid Trinitarian. But that makes it sound as though his conversion was the result of a spiritual shopping trip, when the better comparison would be a boxing match.

In 2005, Blackmer had been an environmental activist for nearly three decades, and he found he couldn’t sustain it any longer. Despite some successes, the overwhelming reality of climate change made him feel as though the movement was fighting a losing battle. A friend invited him to a vision quest in California’s Inyo Mountains, a land of extremes. To the west stands the highest point in the contiguous United States, to the east lies the lowest. Just north grows the oldest tree on earth. An auspicious place to receive a vision.

Blackmer’s quest ended in a solitary four-day fast on a mountain, a time full of signs and portents. On his last night, in total darkness, he attempted a walk around the mountain. With no trail to follow, he came to a place where he had to choose between two routes. He asked aloud for a sign, and in the next moment saw a shooting star. “I mean, it was just silly,” Blackmer laughed. He followed the star. Groping along in the dark, he stumbled into a deep gully and ran into a rock wall. There appeared to be no way out. “I was scared out of my freaking mind,” he said. Feeling his way along the wall, he eventually came to a lone piñon pine silhouetted against a black sky, a tree he had seen before. He knew how to get back. In the small hours of the morning, having walked many miles, he finally stumbled into camp. Blackmer believed that “something utterly profound” had happened in his life, but he had no clue what it meant. He lived with that uncertainty for the next two years and fell deep into depression. That’s when he first heard the Voice.

While meditating one morning, Blackmer heard: *The meaning of your journey around the mountain is that you must turn around and go the other way. You must follow the same path, but going in the other direction. This is a spiritual path.* He tried Buddhism, which seemed like a logical fit — he had been meditating for several years — but it just didn’t take. Sometimes he woke in the night with horrible anxiety, and the Voice would say, *Rest in the crucible of anxiety. It will destroy you. It will transform you.* Then came the flight into Dublin.

In the months following the trip, Blackmer resigned from the Northern Forest Center and began to experience visions. He dreamed he saw a triptych of the face of Christ, except the face in all three panels was his own. At the urging of a friend, a fellow forester and conservationist who also happened to be the only priest he knew, Blackmer visited the Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Episcopal monastery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He spent three days in utter silence and anonymity, feeling like a foreigner. He saw the monks bowing before they passed the altar and thought, *I can’t bow to this altar, to the white linens and shiny goblets.* Then he realized that the monks were simply bowing to the mystery. That he could do. On the third day, Blackmer heard the brothers chanting the Psalms and something inside him broke. Their beauty, the chanted words from three thousand years ago, shattered his defenses. He wept. He took the Eucharist for the first time in his life. But when he returned home, he still resisted attending church.

Two months later, Blackmer and his wife were visiting his brother in the cloud forest of Costa Rica. One morning, meditating alone in the house, he heard a knock at the window. He checked
and found nothing there. When he sat down he heard a second knock, this time a bit louder. Again, nothing. This happened a third time, and then he heard the Voice say, *Let me in.*

*Oh shit,* he thought, *it’s Jesus.* It was Easter Sunday.

Like Flannery O’Connor’s Hazel Motes, who saw Jesus “move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure,” Blackmer was a man haunted by God. He often laughed at the absurdity of it all. Vision quests, voices, shooting stars? Knocks at the window? He was amazed too at his former self, at the strength of his resistance — “heels dug in every inch of the way.” He wasn’t going to church.

But after so many rounds in the ring, he surrendered. He began reading about Christianity. He wanted to find out “if there was room for me in this hierarchical, antiquated, rule-bound, anti-environmental faith. Do they have people like me?” The more he read, the more he was convinced the answer was yes. One year after his flight to Dublin, he was baptized. Four years later, in 2012, he finished divinity school. And a few months after that, he purchased, with help from a generous donor, the 106 acres that would become the Church of the Woods.

Following a long respite at the Altar, the trekkers took a fork in the trail. Blackmer stooped, picked a handful of wintergreen leaves from the understory, and passed them around for people to chew. They nibbled, walked, and prayed.

After crossing a century-old dam now overgrown with vegetation, the group paused to observe a young hemlock. Its trunk stood atop an upright protrusion of roots, making the tree appear as if it had legs.

“Maybe it’s an Ent,” Field said, referring to Tolkien’s mythical tree creatures. “Stand back, it might start walking.”

They climbed another small rise. “It’s an odd piece of land,” Blackmer said, “like this funny little ridge we’re standing on. But that’s fitting, because we’re an odd bunch of people.”

One of the church’s members goes by the name of Sister Athanasius. An Episcopal nun in California since the Seventies, she chose her name when she read about the bishop of Alexandria who was consecrated, in A.D. 326, only after vigorous resistance. Sister Athanasius had not wanted to become a nun, which explains in part why she and Blackmer get along so well. In addition to their attempts at dodging the divine, both speak their minds freely, often employing a most impious lexicon. More important, they are equally smitten with the natural world. On Blackmer’s coffee table he keeps a book-length poem given to him by Sister Athanasius: W. S. Merwin’s *Unchopping a Tree.* The poem is an imaginative exercise in arboreal reconstruction. The narrator issues directives: how to rig the tackle for lifting the bole, how to reattach the broken trunk, how to glue back every splinter, chip, and piece of moss, until reaching this final, devastating line: “Everything is going to have to be put back.”

The walkers came to the boundary of the church’s property. Someone wondered aloud why the border still had barbed wire, and Sister Athanasius chuckled and said, “So the prisoners won’t
escape.” Suddenly everyone grew quiet. The Canterbury-pilgrim mood of jocular ease had given way to something else.

Before them lay a bowl-shaped depression, a tiny clearing encircling a dried-up vernal pool. Moose tracks led into the muddy water. A gentle slope rose up and away into thick woods. Fallen hemlock and paper birch lay crisscrossed over the clearing like giant pickup sticks. Trees that had fallen and were not going to be put back. The air was still. Smells of pine, rotting duff, the dank musk of humus. An ordinary forest clearing, and yet more than ordinary. The kind of place that you might chance upon as a child while wandering in the woods, though if you were asked why you tarried there, or for how long, you couldn’t say.

Soon Blackmer would send them off for a period of individual contemplation, but before he spoke there was a long, palpable hush. Sister Athanasius slowly raised her palms to her temples. She gazed at the pools, the bits of sunlight dappling the glade, the dark mystery of the woods beyond. “Ah, Jesus,” she said softly, “just look at that.”

The story of Moses and the burning bush is one of Blackmer’s favorite texts. In Exodus, the Lord appears to Moses in a bush that burns but is not consumed. “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Blackmer often takes that literally, celebrating the Eucharist barefoot. Confronted with the threat of climate change, he believes, we must think of all ground as holy ground. Without such a recognition, there is no way out of our ecological woes. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the burning bush prefigures Mary the Theotokos, the God-bearer, who carried the Incarnate God inside her womb but remained unharmed. Blackmer thinks of the Earth itself as a theotokos. Would we clear-cut a forest or demolish a mountain or frack a field that bore the living God?

When the little band of pilgrims returned to the parking lot, Blackmer pointed out the church’s sole “relic,” a bent and broken aluminum ladder leaning against a tree, left behind by the loggers when they high-graded the place. It reminds him of Jacob’s Ladder, another favorite biblical story. Genesis recounts how Jacob lay down upon a stone to sleep and dreamed of a ladder that joined heaven and earth. Upon awakening, he exclaimed, “Surely the Lord is in this place — and I did not know it!”

A common theme in Blackmer’s conversations is that we’ve lost the face-to-face connection with God, the awesome, fearsome encounter that so often occurs in wild settings. Art, music, a beautiful sanctuary — all of those can be soul-stirring. But they can also obfuscate one’s connection to God. Nature strips away the human intermediary.

A hawk cried overhead. Peter Hope ambled over with trekking poles, backpack, and GPS unit. It was midday now, and after walking the property that morning with the contemplative hikers, he was off to take readings on the remaining trails. By the end of the day this eighty-year-old man would have trod seven or eight miles over this land of mounds and folds. Traversing the theotokos, praying with his feet.

Since the Industrial Revolution we’ve scaled up development to a tremendous degree, and even under the most optimistic scenarios we’re going to be dealing with climate change for centuries
to come. Blackmer foresees a time of unimaginable suffering and grief. His faith tells him that on the far side of that suffering stands the tree of life, symbol of the resurrected world in which humans will have found their place in creation. There is no path to that perfect world, however, that does not involve hardship and death. “We’re not going to skate through this one untouched,” he told me.

Blackmer’s understanding of the Second Coming is not one in which Jesus returns to fix everything. His eschatology leans toward the Eastern Orthodox understanding of *theosis*: deification. Through the slow work of prayer and contemplation, a person becomes more like Christ, and Christ comes to dwell more completely within that person. “That’s the way Jesus becomes present,” he said. “It’s through *our* transformation. A spiritual death. And a rebirth.” What must die is the materialist worldview in which physical reality is viewed as just stuff: “The world is not merely physical matter we can manipulate any damn way we please.” The result of that outlook is not just a spiritual death but a real, grisly, on-the-cross kind of death. “We are erecting that cross even now,” he said.

Rachel Field also knows that humans are causing climate change and that the results will be catastrophic, but she wonders about our ability to stop it. She sees the human role as that of a witness, a provider of hospice care for the ecosystems we’ve damaged. Coming to a place that has been as heavily logged as the Church of the Woods is one way she can say to the land, *Yes, we did this. And we are not going to leave you.* She knows that this earth, this cosmos, will endure and will transform into something beautiful even if humans can’t survive on it. “Every time a creature is lost, a piece of God’s glory is leaving,” she said. “But it’s bigger than us.”

Though Blackmer freely acknowledges that some are called to activism and that such work is sorely needed, he himself has left that role behind, at least in the usual sense. Activism, in his view, too often becomes a mask for hiding undigested fear or grief. His work now is to change people’s consciousness rather than to affect policy.

Hearing Blackmer talk, one might wonder how a shift in consciousness can save a beleaguered planet. As environmentalist groups like 350.org have shown, it takes direct political action to achieve tangible results, such as the protests that managed to stop the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, or Blackmer’s own efforts to preserve millions of acres of New England forest. It’s difficult to imagine achieving those results through an internal shift, but for Blackmer, the emphasis is on the activist’s starting place. The question is not whether one takes action, it is from what heart and mind one does so.

The church’s *leitourgia*, the work of the people, is first the work of prayer. The once-thriving Canterbury Shaker Village lies only a few miles east of the Church of the Woods, and for Blackmer the proximity is no coincidence. The Shakers’ connection to the land and their devotion to prayer left a spiritual presence that is still palpable. “Prayer transforms places as well as people,” Blackmer said. “You can actually feel it when you walk into a place where people have prayed for long periods of time. It is as if prayer has changed the molecular structure of a place.” Thus altered, the woods become a kind of inner sanctum in which we are faced with what the theologian Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*. “The semi-darkness . . . of a lofty
forest glade,” he wrote in *The Idea of the Holy*, “has always spoken eloquently to the soul, and builders of temples, mosques, and churches have made full use of it.”

The work of the people also includes the Eucharist. For Blackmer, “It is the act of taking into ourselves the body of He who died and went through death and came back.” Death and grief transmuted into love. That expression of hope in the midst of death is where, for Blackmer, the Christian faith comes into its own. “All of us go down to the dust,” he said, quoting the burial rite from the Book of Common Prayer, “yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” Death does not have the final word. Joy does. “That’s what Jesus was all about,” Blackmer said. “And if we forget that, then shit — we’re a sad, pitiful bunch. And we’re sure as hell not leading anybody to the Promised Land.” When he presides over the liturgy each Sunday, this priest in the trees, a sixty-one-year-old man still green and full of sap, carefully spreads his elements across the white-pine stump. He offers the first morsels of bread and the last sip of wine to the earth.

That Sunday evening, when most of the crowd had left the Church of the Woods, a dozen members huddled by the campfire and watched the lunar eclipse. The moon rose red above the trees. A super blood moon. It faded as it climbed, its face slowly adumbrated by Earth’s shadow. The fading orb seemed to glow from within. Just before the full eclipse, a luminous plane of light appeared on the moon’s edge. For a brief moment it grew bright. Then it was gone.

Though it began in a desert, Christianity is a faith haunted by trees. The story opens in a garden, in the center of which grows the tree of life. Ignoring that tree, Adam and Eve make for another — from which they pluck our downfall. The primal couple are hungry for knowledge and knowledge they get, but they soon find it’s a mixed bag. They eat the fruit and “the eyes of both were opened,” and lo, the beginnings of human consciousness. Of the tree of life we hear no more until the final chapter of Revelation, where we find it growing on either side of the river in the center of the New Jerusalem. Its leaves “are for the healing of the nations.” Between the Bible’s arboreal bookends stands a third tree, the cross at the center of the Christian story. Given their narrative prominence, the biblical drama stands or falls with the trees.

“The bulk of a tree,” writes Tom Wessels in *Reading the Forested Landscape*, “is mostly dead wood.” Other than the leaves, the only living part is the cambium, a group of cells a few millimeters thick that resides under the bark. The trunk may be lifeless and inert, but it’s still needed to provide structure for the growing cambium. The bulk of Christianity — whether it be ancient cathedrals or big-box megachurches — is mostly dead wood. The cambium of faith resides unseen, just beneath the surface, ever growing in new directions.

I had already been thinking a good deal about trees long before my visit with Reverend Blackmer. I’m surrounded by them, for one thing. Transylvania County, where I live, is aptly named. *Trans*, “through”; *sylvan*, “woods.” Trees thrive in this part of western North Carolina because it is a temperate rainforest, containing some of the greatest biodiversity in North America. The landscape here feels maternal. It swaddles you in its gentle folds, its swaying branches, the humid air of so much life breathing in, breathing out. Here I’ve taken to pondering the symbiosis between these forests and the Christian faith I attempt, and often fail, to practice.
That August, in Transylvania County, it began to rain. Right on through to Christmas, it rained: fifty-nine inches in all. Normally we average around seventy inches of rain a year. As the atmosphere warms, increasing the air’s capacity to hold moisture, that amount will surely increase. It already has. Two years earlier we had received 112 inches of rain. A few days after Christmas, on a day like so many other days that December — rainy, seventy-five degrees — I followed my three young sons down to the creek that runs near our house. The boys had been building a mud dam and were eager to show me their handiwork. On a winter’s day when we should have been sledding, my sons and I squatted beside a creek in the warm drizzle and played in the mud.

There is a word, coined by the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht, that describes the longing for your own home, not homesickness from a distance but the yearning you feel for a place in which you still live but which has become unrecognizably damaged by some extractive industry: “solastalgia.” We now speak of “shifting baselines” and the “new normal” — euphemisms that soften the blow of climate catastrophe. Perhaps this is our work now, to abandon the false linguistic signposts that lead us astray — “stopping” or “fixing” climate change — and instead find new words and stories and metaphors that will help us confront what is already upon us, and devote ourselves to what we might yet save. “The powerful metaphor,” Bill McKibben has written, “will be more useful than the cleanest engine.” As the Church of the Woods has discovered, such metaphors are already waiting in our religious traditions, claiming a power far deeper than the utilitarian “ecosystem services” or even the language of democracy. The question climate change poses is how to confront the enemy within, and that is not primarily a technological or political question; it is a religious one.

We have high-graded the world, taking the best and leaving the scruffy undergrowth. We now find ourselves chastened by the scope of our destructive power, yet still hungry for the awe and wonder we once felt before creation’s magnitude. The Babylonian invaders are approaching, and we have no choice but to face them — which is to say, face ourselves.

The search for God in a sacred grove recalls the Israelites in their tabernacle in the Sinai desert. That search cannot be contained by human walls, despite the solidity that Chartres or Notre Dame or the National Cathedral might suggest. If Christianity is going to confront climate change, perhaps it needs to rewild itself, go feral. What the faith has to offer first is not protest or activism, though it may lead there. It is leitourgia. The work of the people. And the work of the people now is this: Keep the land holy. Keep the carbon in the ground. Renounce the myth that this earth is a random assortment of bio-geophysical processes that can be prodded, manipulated, fracked, or drilled for our own purposes, however nefarious or benign. Approach with awe the theotokos, the bush that burns but is not consumed. Perhaps we begin by taking off our shoes.

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http://harpers.org/archive/2016/12/the-priest-in-the-trees/
December 2, 2016

Iran 'serious' about fighting climate change

Al Jazeera

Iran's Vice President Masoumeh Ebtekar discusses her country's latest environmental policies.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM3BJTjyuw&feature=youtu.be

December 2, 2016

Standing Rock: A Change of Heart

By Charles Eisenstein
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I am told by Native American friends active at Standing Rock that the elders are counseling the Water Protectors to undertake each action prayerfully and to stay off the warpath.

I would like to explain why this advice is not only spiritually sound, but politically astute as well. I would like to translate it into a strategic compass for anyone who is going to Standing Rock or supporting the Water Protectors from afar. I also want to explain how it contains a recipe for the kind of miracles that we need for the healing of our planet.

Let me explain what I mean here by a miracle. A miracle is a kind of a gift, an occurrence that is beyond our capacity to make happen. It is something beyond the normal rules of cause and effect as we have understood them. These include the rules of political and economic power that determine what is practical and “realistic.”

The halting of the Dakota Access Pipeline would be miraculous simply because of the array of powerful ruling interests that are committed to building it. Not only has Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) already spent hundreds of millions of dollars on the pipeline, but a who’s-who of global banks has committed over $10 billion in lines of credit to ETP and other involved entities. Those banks, many of whom are facing financial stress of their own, are counting on the profits from the loans at a time when credit-worthy capital investments are hard to come by. Finally, the United States government has (in its estimation) a geopolitical interest in increasing domestic oil production to reduce the economic power of Russia and the Middle East. To hope to halt the pipeline in the face of such powers is in a certain sense unrealistic.

Since when has a Native American people successfully thwarted large-scale plans of mining, energy, or agricultural interests? The usual pattern has been one land grab after another in which resistance is at best futile and at worst suicidal. But at Standing Rock, something different is possible. It is not because the Dakota Sioux have finally acquired more guns or money than the pro-pipeline forces. It is because we are ready collectively for a change of heart.
That would be good news not only for the people directly affected by the pipeline, because the whole planet is in need of similar miracles on a massive scale. Around the globe, powerful interests are destroying ecosystems and landscapes, clearcutting, stripmining, and polluting. In every case, the destroyers have more military, political, and financial power than those who would resist them. If this planet and our civilization is to heal, it cannot be through winning a contest of force. When you have a chance of overcoming an opponent by force, then fighting is a reasonable option. Absent that condition, victory has to come some other way: through the exercise of a kind of power that makes guns, money, and other kinds of coercive force irrelevant. Dare we call this power love?

Before I go on, let me convey to you my awareness of the injustice and suffering that the Water Protectors have endured. Many of my friends have witnessed them first hand. These things must be taken into account if a philosophy of nonviolence is to be relevant to the real world. Furthermore, I am no armchair philosopher in this matter. My own son is at Standing Rock as I write this.

OK then, love. I am not talking about shying away from confrontation and hoping to stop the pipeline by loving the police or energy company from afar. Standing Rock has given us many examples of love in action that offer a hint of the miracle that is possible.

I heard about one incident in which a group of Water Protectors went to talk to the sheriff about the water cannons. They were met with police who began to arrest them. While she was being arrested, one of the women began to sing a native prayer song; soon all of the group were singing in unison. The police began to look uncomfortable; one of them even started crying. Another, who looked like he might have Native heritage himself, started to take off his helmet but thought better of it when he saw none of the other police were doing it.

There have been many actions like this at Standing Rock involving song, prayer, ceremony, and nonviolent resistance. To a great extent the urging of the elders has been heeded, and as the above incident demonstrates, these actions have an effect on the police. They disrupt the narratives that legitimize the forceful suppression of the Water Protectors, narratives about violent extremists, criminal elements, protecting the public, and so forth. This has already born fruit: if not for the resolute nonviolence of the resistance, the government would surely have forcefully evicted the Water Protectors by now, justifying violence with violence.

If the Water Protectors go onto the warpath and see and treat the police as enemies, they play into the narratives that legitimize state violence. Consider this report from an army veteran, Harlan Wallner, who wrote to me after spending some time at Standing Rock: “I witnessed people on the shore shouting that the police were fat donut-eating pigs, cowards, etc., that they should be ashamed of themselves, that they have no honor. I heard one man shout that a curse was being placed on them and all of their descendants. I saw one man throw a rock at police in a boat and then be shot in the leg with one of their bean-bag bullets. On two occasions when the anger got particularly fevered I shouted ‘It’s still important to be kind! It’s still important to be kind!’ and the second time I was nearly attacked. ‘Fuck you!Fuck that, it’s way beyond time for that!’ one man nearly growled at me. I shut up after that.”
Now put yourself in the shoes of the police officers. Nothing creates solidarity in the ranks like a common threat. Slurs like “donut-eating pigs” eliminate any possibility that the police will sympathize with the protestors. They play into the very narratives that justify police action to begin with: maintaining law and order in the face of violent extremists. In other words, by engaging in this kind of verbal violence against the police, the militants comply with their own demonization. They put themselves in a position where the only kind of victory possible is a victory by force.

That kind of victory is unlikely. Worse, even if it is achieved, it creates the conditions for an eventual defeat. What are the deep conditions that give rise to the desecration of indigenous peoples and destruction of nature? In the case of indigenous peoples, their oppression is invariably facilitated by their dehumanization or even demonization. This is the deep template of genocide, the primary prerequisite. By demonizing the police or ETP executives, one contributes to the field of dehumanization. One upholds the basic premise that some people are less fully human than others, that they are contemptible, abhorrent… deplorable. That is the essence of racism and the enabler of war.

The dehumanization of the Other that happens in war, racism, and genocide is no different from any reduction of the sacred to the profane. It is the same mentality that informs the reduction of nature from a sacred, living intelligence into a collection of insensate things: mere resources to be exploited or an enemy to be conquered. The reduction of humans to enemies or to subhuman caricatures like greedy executives and donut-eating police pigs is the same mentality that makes it OK to threaten a river with catastrophic oil spills. Invoking the principle of morphic resonance, by entering into war mentality we strengthen the field of war, including the reduction and domination of nature. That is why victories in war so often lead to just more war. The war is won, but the ideals for which it was fought remain as distant as ever. So it has been for five thousand years.

In other words, if we seek to win a fight using the tactics of dehumanization, we are contributing to the sacrilege that is at the root of the problem. No pipelines would be built if we loved the river like a grandmother.

When the elders ask us to proceed prayerfully, what do they mean? To be prayerful is to be in awareness of the sacred. We too easily forget the sacred, whether in relationship to human beings or to other-than-human beings like trees, soil, and rivers. If prayer is sacred speech, then to act prayerfully is to be reverent in action as well as speech. The dehumanization that leads us onto the warpath is the opposite of reverence.

It is not easy to stay off the warpath. Each new atrocity and outrage renews the invitation into hatred. Lord knows we’ve received many such invitations onto the warpath. The attack dogs, the pepper spraying, the water cannons, the woman whose face was shattered by a rubber bullet, the news that the police will start carrying live ammunition, the state government’s fines for those bringing supplies to Standing Rock, the fact that ETP’s drilling is currently illegal, the historical robbery of native lands and the breaking of every treaty… there are any number of reasons to adopt a good-versus-evil view. As tempting as it is for me, all the more for people at Standing Rock who have been subjected to violence personally or witnessed it first hand. To counsel
forgiveness or nonviolence from afar seems almost arrogant, were it not echoing the elders and so many others on site.

Each of these invitations onto the warpath also presents an opportunity to defy the enabling narratives of violence and to take a step toward victory without fighting. It is an opportunity to employ what Gandhi called “soul force.” Meeting violence with nonviolence invites the other into nonviolence as well. Refusing the invitation onto the warpath automatically extends a counter-invitation to the enemy to cease being an enemy. That is why it is so important to remember that the purpose of nonviolent action is not to make the other side look bad. That would be a kind of attack, a kind of violence, and a tactic of war. No, the purpose is to invite the other side and onlookers alike to join you in courage. Of course, they may decline the invitation, but it grows more powerful with each escalation of violence.

Each time you refuse the invitation onto the warpath, you become more powerful. Those who can stay peaceful in the face of any terror or threat become virtual miracle-workers. I am reminded of an Afghan woman I know named Sakena. She does peace and education work in Kabul, including the education of girls. This is a dangerous line of work in a place where religious fundamentalists believe that educating girls should be punishable by death, and indeed Sakena receives her share of death threats – something to be taken seriously in that place.

One day Sakena was in a car with her driver, two staff people, and her unarmed bodyguard. Suddenly the driver stopped. A makeshift roadblock was ahead of them, manned by twenty or so young men dressed in fundamentalist garb and armed with rifles, which were pointed at the car. “Tell Sakena to get out,” they shouted.

Bravely, the driver said, “You’ve got the wrong car. There’s no one by that name here.”

“Oh yes there is,” they replied. “We know she’s in there. We’ve been watching her.”

Sakena got out of the car and strode up to the young men. “I’m Sakena,” she declared. “What do you want?”

For the next half hour, the four people in the car watched as Sakena talked to the young men. Finally she returned to the car and said, “OK, we can go now.” Astonished, her staffers asked what happened. She told them that the young men had decided that they wanted to be educated too, just like the girls, and had arranged to meet her again the next week outside a certain mosque.

Such is the potential power of staying off the warpath. Even with guns pointed at her, Sakena refused to see the young men as anything less than divine human beings. She refused to reduce them in her vision to crazed terrorists or subhuman “fundamentalists.” She saw them as promising young men who of course wanted an education. Her fearlessness and goodwill exerted an invitation so compelling that the men were nearly helpless to refuse it.

The way we see and treat someone is a powerful invitation for them to be as we see them. See someone as deplorable, and even their peace overtures will look like cynical ploys. Distrust
generates untrustworthiness. On the other hand, when we are able to see beyond conventional roles and categories, we become able to invite others into previously unmanifest potentials. This cannot be done in ignorance of the subjective reality of another’s situation; to the contrary, it depends on an empathic understanding of their situation. It starts with the question that defines compassion: What is it like to be you?

That question is anathema to the militant and the warmonger, because it rehumanizes those that they would dehumanize. Broach it, and they will call you soft, naïve, a fool or a traitor.

What it is like to be a police at Standing Rock? Or what it is like to be an ETP executive? Can you bring yourself into the knowledge that they are our brothers here on earth, doing their best under the circumstances they have been given? I imagine myself in the ETP executive suite. The stress level is high. The board of directors are freaking out. The banks are threatening to pull their funding. We’ve spent tens of millions leasing capital equipment. Maybe we have bond payments due. Business is tough enough as it is, and now these protestors come in who don’t realize that pipelines are safer than rail tankers. They use gasoline too, the hypocrites! And they’re making us into the bad guys! And look how hate-filled they are! Yup, it’s obvious who the good guys are.

I am not endorsing this viewpoint. I am merely trying to understand it. One product of that understanding that is uncomfortable for the ego of the militant is that it would take courage for the ETP executives to halt the project — to do so would require sacrificing their self-interest as they understand it. Similarly, it might take courage for a policeman to defy orders or disbelieve propaganda or break ranks. In a way, we are all in the same boat; we are all facing situations that invite us to choose love over fear, to listen to the heart when it feels unsafe to do so. We need to help each other obey that call. In that, we are allies. We can be allies in calling each other to our highest potential.

Another friend described his encounters with pepper-spraying police at Standing Rock. He noticed that in each instance, it was only one or two police who were doing most of the violence. The others were standing around looking uncomfortable, probably wishing they were somewhere else.

What would activist tactics look like if they were based on the conviction, “Most of the police don’t really want to be doing this”? What would it look like to express in word and deed an underlying certainty that each of them is here on earth to carry out a sacred mission of service to life? How would it feel to them to be told, “I am sorry you are being put in this position. I am sorry you are under such pressure to contravene your heart. But it is not too late. We forgive you and welcome you to join us in service to life.”

As I write this, the first of two thousand U.S. military veterans are entering the camps at Standing Rock. They have vowed to stand with and protect the Water Protectors with their own bodies. They are not bringing weapons. Many of them are leaving jobs and families in order to help protect the water. If they too can keep peaceful hearts, they will magnify the invitation to the government, the company, and particularly the police to make the courageous choice themselves.
Victory at Standing Rock will have far-reaching consequences. It may seem inconsequential in the macro view if the pipeline is merely rerouted or replaced with rail tankers (which are even worse than pipelines). On a deeper level though, a victory will establish a precedent: if it can happen at Standing Rock, why not globally? If a pipeline can be stopped against great odds in one place, similar violations can be stopped in every place. It will shift our view of what is possible. That’s one reason why I agree with the Sioux elders’ preference to keep the movement focused on the water and not let it be hijacked by climate change activists. Climate change is the result of a million insults to a million places on earth. Honoring the place of Standing Rock establishes a principle of honor to all places.

Writ large, the situation at Standing Rock is the situation of our whole planet: everywhere, dominating forces seek to exploit what remains of the treasures of earth and sea. They cannot be defeated by force. We must instead invite a change of heart by being in a place of heartfulness ourselves – of courage, empathy, and compassion. If the Water Protectors at Standing Rock can stay strong in that invitation, they will demonstrate an unstoppable power and win a miraculous victory, inspiring the rest of us to follow their example.

What if I am wrong? Not every nonviolent action succeeds in its explicit aims; not every invitation, no matter how powerful, is accepted. Yet even if the pipeline goes through, if the Water Protectors stay off the warpath another kind of victory will be won – the creation of a psychic template for the future. With each choice we face, we are being asked what kind of world we want to live in. The more courage required to make that choice, the more powerful the prayer, because Whoever listens to prayers knows we really mean it. Therefore, when we choose love in the face of enormous temptation to hate, we are issuing a powerful prayer for a world of love. When we refuse to dehumanize in the face of atrocity, we issue a prayer for universal dignity. When thousands of people sacrifice their safety and comfort to protect the water, a powerful prayer issues from their gathering. Some day, in some form, it will be answered.

http://charleseisenstein.net/standing-rock-a-change-of-heart/

December 2, 2016

Veterans and elders ignore eviction notice, arrive at #NoDAPL camp in North Dakota (video)

By Chris Stewart
APTN National News

As the Dec. 5 eviction date at the North Dakota camp trying to shut down construction of a pipeline, new groups of supporters have arrived on the scene.

Watch the video here:

December 2, 2016

Fake Cowboys and Real Indians

By Timothy Egan
New York Times

For most of this past week, a winter storm has lashed at the North Dakota prairie camp where the Standing Rock Sioux are making a stand to keep an oil pipeline away from water that is a source of life for them.

The sight of native people shivering in a blizzard, while government authorities threaten to starve them out or forcefully remove them, is a living diorama of so much awful history between the First Americans and those who took everything from them.

The authorities have brought water cannons, rubber bullets, tear gas, helicopters and dogs against what has become one of the largest gatherings of tribes, from all nations, in a century. They’ve given the protesters, who will soon include a brigade of veterans, until Dec. 5 to disperse.

Now flash back a few years to another Western standoff, the Nevada siege of Cliven Bundy, the deadbeat rancher who drew heavily armed white militia members to defend a man who stiffed the government while grazing his cattle on public land. There, the feds backed off.

Mr. Bundy and his thugs on the range were praised by Fox News and Tea Party Republicans. His two sons later took over the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, occupying that sanctuary of birds until they were arrested. In October, the Bundys and five others were acquitted of conspiracy and weapons charges.

At the heart of these cases is land — who owns it, and the narrative justification for a way of life. The Bundy brothers are comic-book cowboys. One of them runs a valet service in Phoenix. The other has a construction company in Utah. But they look the part; playing the role of principled Western men doin’ what a man’s got to do.

For the Indians, the Dakota Access Pipeline, which will run from oil fields in North Dakota to a terminal in Illinois, is an existential threat. “Water is life” is the protest name. As planned, the pipeline would pump an artery of oil under the Missouri River — the source of the tribe’s water. The Indians want the pipeline rerouted.

The new administration of Donald J. Trump will be heavy with people who see public land, and Indian Country, as just one thing — a place to drill for oil, move it along, or get out of the way.

The story behind the policy is all-important here — what Senator Al Franken called “the complex burden of historical trauma.” Consider how Jon Stewart once described the national holiday just passed. “I celebrated Thanksgiving in an old-fashioned way,” he said. “I invited
everyone in my neighborhood to my house, we had an enormous feast, and then I killed them and took their land.”

Now consider what the Bundy brothers said they were fighting for when they took over the Malheur Wildlife Refuge by armed force earlier this year. They wanted the government to give up turf owned by every American and let a handful of white ranchers “come back and reclaim their land.”

This prompted collective whiplash from members of the Paiute Tribe, whose people have lived in the high desert of Oregon for centuries. “For them to say they want to give the land back to the rightful owners — well, I just had to laugh at that,” the tribal chairwoman, Charlotte Rodrique, said at the time.

The Indian view is much more than P.C. revisionism, if you believe in the rule of law. A huge swath of the northern Plains was promised to bands of the Sioux in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, one of the few times when Native Americans forced the government to terms after defeating it in war.

The tribes lost much of that treaty land to intruders, backed by the Army. “A more ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings will never, in all possibility, be found in our history,” the Supreme Court concluded in 1980. One of the legacies of the great Sioux tactician, Red Cloud, was an apt description of how the big emerging nation treated the diminished ones. “They made many promises,” he said. “But they kept but one: They promised to take our land, and they took it.”

The “complex burden” of trauma that Senator Franken referred to includes images of frozen Indian bodies in the snow after the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. And yet, even with that history haunting the present protest, many of the natives at Standing Rock are not bitter, and see this stand in spiritual terms.

“In the face of this we pray,” Lyla June Johnston, a young Native leader, told me the day after the blizzards blew in. “In the face of this we love. In the face of this we forgive. Because the vast majority of water protectors know this is the greatest battle of all: to keep our hearts intact.”


December 2, 2016

Restoring Paradise One Watershed at a Time

Reflections from Miriam MacGillis at Genesis Farm

Perhaps Paradise was never lost. Earth can’t be lost. She can be desecrated and abused. She can be diminished severely in her beauty, health and creativity, yet still endure.
Prophets, poets and wise people from earlier times also mourned the loss of people, lands and things they loved. They did their best to explain the mystery of change. Especially difficult change that brought a sense of loss.

Maybe they told stories about loss that helped them to cope. Maybe some of them thought Earth was originally a magical Paradise where there was no loss. Then, a serious event happened which caused Earth’s very self to be degraded causing everything and everyone with it to undergo the same fate.

A sense of Paradise was lost.

Maybe there was a sense that Earth needed to be redesigned and re-engineered to create a better Paradise.

Hence, hard work and perseverance gave birth to industrialization, eugenics, war, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, robotics, artificial intelligence, torture, and bullying.

Maybe at some depth of soul, the eight billion of us in this human generation knows better.

Maybe Earth is Paradise. Maybe humans are sensing that the older stories need to be re-examined. Maybe the prospects of leaving Earth to go to Mars are producing some hesitation. And anxiety.

Mars?

Maybe the indigenous wisdom arising at Standing Rock is an uprising of common sense, sanity and compassion for the planet.

Maybe the clear vision, love and courage in the people realistically facing the loss of their water is stirring something deep in all of us.

Perhaps we are looking into the severe differences being played out over the implications of some of those older stories.

Maybe that is why so many countless people at Standing Rock, day after freezing day, are aligning with the common sense and love for life still enduring at the depths of our collective soul. Perhaps we are remembering our own indigenous wisdom. Maybe it has just been forgotten and neglected, but never lost. Anymore than Paradise.

Perhaps it has taken the awful brutality done to those crying out to protect the waters of our planet, for the rest of us to gaze into the shadow of our nations’ soul, our collective self, and say:

No more. No more.
We all live close to the waters that we drink. Water is life. Every water basin is a “shed” holding water. A watershed. No people in their right mind would poison or contaminate it.

Common sense knows better.

We Can Restore Paradise; One Watershed at a Time

Let us begin with the Missouri River. Here’s how:

Write, call, petition President Obama to permanently halt the Dakota Access Pipeline through the sacred lands and waters of the Standing Rock Sioux.

http://lakotalaw.org/?gclid=CNm1-ojy1dACFZJMDQodcGgDeQ

Contribute to the Standing Rock Winter Encampment

http://www.honorearth.org/

Be prepared to defeat a fracked gas pipe coming your way before it does.

http://earthjustice.org/features/campaigns/fracking-across-the-united-states

Divest in Fossil Fuel Companies

https://350.org/divest/

Write to Pope Francis, asking him to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery

https://1drv.ms/w/s!AkhNLVy1X0V5gRnrFeN_ZO0HhMGB

Come home to a sense of place, to the bioregional possibilities of the place where you live. Think small, think local but carry the whole planet in your soul. We can help to restore it, one watershed at a time.
Explore in every way possible the insights of a new evolutionary story of the origin of the Universe, Earth, life and human life with all its racial, religious, gender and cultural diversities.

But consider especially the possibilities you will unleash within yourself by enrolling in

https://www.coursera.org/learn/thomas-berry

http://hosted.verticalresponse.com/857531/4544cf46ba/1634009901/d32c77a1c6/

December 2, 2016

Water Protectors Deliver Donations to Morton County Officers

By Jade Begay

Indigenous Environment Network

MANAND, ND - On Friday December 2nd at approximately 2pm CST Water Protectors from Oceti Sakowin camp will fulfill a donation list that the Morton County Sheriff’s Department released on November 22, 2016.

The Oceti Sakowin headsman will join veterans, youth, and women leaders and stand with Leonard Crow Dog who will offer a prayer as Protectors deliver the supplies to the Sheriff’s Department in Mandan, ND.

Water Protectors offer these donations to the Morton County officers in generosity and compassion, despite the aggression and hostility they have shown innocent unarmed Protectors of this camp.

The following is a joint statement from the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Indigenous Peoples Power Project:

“North Dakota taxpayers have already bankrolled the Morton County Sheriff Department with approximately 10 million dollars for the suppression of peaceful water protectors. Despite this excessive financial support, Morton County officers are asking taxpayers to donate supplies.

The Oceti Sakowin camp is a prayer camp, and a resilient, self-sufficient community. The camp is full of abundance-- in spirit, in humanity, and in resources. Oceti Sakowin has enough to share. Generosity is an original teaching for the Lakota.”
Established in 1990 within the United States, IEN was formed by grassroots Indigenous peoples and individuals to address environmental and economic justice issues (EJ). IEN’s activities include building the capacity of Indigenous communities and tribal governments to develop mechanisms to protect our sacred sites, land, water, air, natural resources, health of both our people and all living things, and to build economically sustainable communities.

Indigenous Environment Network
Contact:
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http://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2016/12/02/water-protectors-deliver-donations-morton-county-officers

December 3, 2016


By Alexa Erickson
Collective Evolution

Environmental attorney and activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has put in decades of work to protect the environment, so having him publicly show his support in the fight against Energy Transfer Partners and the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL) is of massive importance.

“What [Energy Transfer Partners] is doing is a real environmental crime,” said Kennedy, who serves as senior attorney and president of the Waterkeeper Alliance, which is a non-profit organization regarding the right to clean water.

Kennedy is among a growing list of high-profile supporters who have shown their support against DAPL by visiting the site to stand with Standing Rock in the movement to protect water and indigenous sovereignty.

Recently, Kennedy wrote a letter on EcoWatch that revealed valuable insight regarding the looming removal of the water protectors from the DAPL site they are protesting on.

“On Sunday, the U.S. Army Corps issued a declaration to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe that might have been penned by the Kern county sheriff. The Corps Colonel John Henderson told Standing Rock Chairman Dave Archambault II that the agency was evicting the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protesters from their camp for their own protection.”

“The tribes and their supporters will be moved to a ‘free speech’ zone a great distance from the pipeline. Henderson’s threats would be troubling if addressed to any group of American citizens,
but coming from the U.S. Army Corps to the Sioux nation, it is positively chilling. One wonders whether Colonel Henderson is even peripherally aware of the Corp’s central role in the Indian genocide, the most shameful stain on America’s national experience, our high ideals and character.”

Kennedy then provided valuable insight on genocide, referencing anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ observation that genocide is “a continuum that runs for years, decades, or centuries” through the initiation of “marginalization and dehumanization of an identifiable minority, the theft of their lands and property, their slaughter and decimation, and the gradual squeezing of remnant populations.”

What happens then is the transformation of people into monsters that makes discrimination and violence rationalized behaviors.

“Colonel Henderson’s letter manages to be both, patronizing and menacing. In that sense, it captures perfectly the tone and content of a hundred letters received by Indians from U.S. Corp colonels and generals over four centuries, all of them repeating genocide’s persistent refrain: ‘For your own good, move off the land, or else,’” Kennedy said.

He then points out that the lands and waterways that are now in the hands of Dakota Access, a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners, are the very same lands that our government and the U.S. Army Corps gave property rights to in the treaties of 1825 and 1851, of which, along with the Fort Laramie treaty of 1868, promised the tribe the lands would stay in the hands of the Sioux tribe “so long as the grass is green, the eagles fly, and the rivers flow.”

“No, once again, illegal white mineral interests need the Sioux’s land, and, once again, the Army Corps is insisting the Sioux move.”

Colonel Henderson’s threats are meant to protect DAPL’s promoters, Energy Transfer Partners, an outlaw oil company. Construction of the 1,200 mile Dakota Access Pipeline project clearly violates the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires a full environmental impact review for any project that “might have significant environmental impacts” on an area larger than one-half acre. “There is no question that the 1,200 mile pipeline meets both criteria,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy urges that the pipeline will, along with unjustly take away land that is not lawfully permitted to be taken away, will also generate more carbon pollution than “27 coal burning power plants, and cross and disrupt 209 waterways, including Lake Oahe, the Sioux’s only water source.

The Sioux recognize this as the final eviction—without Lake Oahe, their remnant reservation is uninhabitable. The Corp considers a catastrophic water poisoning pipeline failure, so likely, that following protests by Bismarck residents, Henderson agreed to move the pipeline away from its more direct route across the Bismarck water supply and into Indian country.
And so, with so many downsides, what do the people behind DAPL have left to say besides admit to their dirty desire to garner company oil profits? “This project is a 1,200-mile boondoggle designed to allow billionaire investors like Donald Trump to make themselves richer by impoverishing other Americans,” Kennedy explained.

“The company’s claims to be a job creator will wither in the daylight. Like the Keystone XL pipeline, DAPL is unlikely to produce even 100 long term jobs while jeopardizing the water supply for 18 million people and the breadbasket of American food production.”

“Despite its contrary denials to the public and regulators, DAPL has admitted privately that its oil will be shipped to Asia where it will lower manufacturing costs for America’s foreign competitors and aggravate climate chaos. If Obama were to order an Environmental Impact Statement, our incoming president, Donald Trump, would be powerless to reverse that determination. The question now is: Will Obama act?”

Americans are rushing to Standing Rock to support the Sioux because they care about freedom and justice. They are sick of the unjustified profit at the hands of land and people.

“I’ll see you at Standing Rock’ has become the battle cry for Americans who still share an idealistic vision for our country,” concluded Kennedy.


December 4, 2016

The victory at Standing Rock could mark a turning point

By Bill McKibben
The Guardian

The defeat of an energy company by indigenous activists shows what nonviolent unity can accomplish. There are lessons here as we enter a challenging new age

The news that the US federal government has refused to issue the permit needed to run a pipeline under the Missouri river means many things – including that indigenous activists have won a smashing victory, one that shows what nonviolent unity can accomplish.

From the start, this has been an against-the-odds battle. Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the pipeline, is as wired as they come: its line of credit links it to virtually every bank you’ve ever heard of. And operating under a “fast-track” permit process, it had managed to win most of its approvals and lay most of its pipe before opponents managed to mount an effective resistance.
But that opposition finally did arise, and it centered on the last place the pipeline would have to cross: the confluence of the Missouri and the Cannonball rivers. It wasn’t standard-issue environmental lobbying, nor standard-issue protest, though there was certainly some of both (lawyers took the company to court, activists shut down bank branches). At its heart, however, in the great camp that grew up along the rivers, this was a largely spiritual resistance. David Archambault, the head of the Standing Rock Sioux who demonstrated great character and dexterity for months, kept insisting that the camp was a place of prayer, and you couldn’t wander its paths without running into drum circles and sacred fires.

As a result, overlapping epochs of sad American history were on display. When native American protesters sat down in front of bulldozers to try and protect ancestral graves, they were met with attack dogs – the pictures looked like Birmingham, Alabama, circa 1963. But it went back further than that: the encampment, with its teepees and woodsmoke hovering in the valley, looked like something out of an 1840s painting. With the exception that this was not just one tribe: this was pretty much all of native North America. The flags of more than 200 Indian nations lined the rough dirt entrance road. Other Americans, drawn in part by a sense of shame at this part of our heritage, flooded in to help – when the announcement came today, there were thousands of military veterans on hand.

Indigenous organizers are some of the finest organizers around the globe – they’ve been key to everything from the Keystone fight to battling plans for the world’s largest coal mine in Australia. If we manage to slow down the fossil fuel juggernaut before it boils the planet, groups like the Indigenous Environmental Network and Honor the Earth will deserve a great share of the credit. Right now, for instance, Canada’s First Nations are preparing for “Standing Rock North” along the route of two contested pipelines out of Canada’s tarsands. But in the Dakotas it’s been particularly special: they’ve managed to build not just resistance to a project, but a remarkable new and unified force that will, I think, persist. Persist, perhaps, even in the face of the new Trump administration.

Trump, of course, can try and figure out a way to approve the pipeline right away, though the Obama administration has done its best to make that difficult. (That’s why, instead of an outright denial, they simply refused to grant the permit, thus allowing for the start of the environmental impact statement process). But if Trump decides to do that, he’s up against people who have captured the imagination of the country. Simply spitting on them to aid his friends in the oil industry would clarify a lot about him from the start, which is one reason he may hesitate.

In any event, though, time is measured somewhat differently in the dispute between this continent’s original inhabitants and the late-coming rest of us. For five hundred years, half a millennium, the same grim story has repeated itself over and over again. Today’s news is a break in that long-running story, a new chapter. It won’t set this relationship on an entirely new course – change never comes that easily. But it won’t ever be forgotten, and it will influence events for centuries to come. Standing Rock, like Little Big Horn or Wounded Knee, or for that matter Lexington Green and Concord Bridge, now belongs to our history.

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/04/standing-rock-victory-turning-point
Army Corps Blocks Dakota Access Oil Pipeline Route

The Corps' decision is a victory for several thousand protesters camped near the construction site

By James MacPherson
NBC Washington

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said Sunday that it won't grant an easement for the Dakota Access oil pipeline in southern North Dakota.

The decision is a victory for the several thousand camped near the construction site, who've said for months that the four-state, $3.8 billion project would threaten a water source and cultural sites.

The pipeline is largely complete except for the now-blocked segment underneath Lake Oahe, a Missouri River reservoir. According to a news release, Assistant Secretary for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy said her decision was based on the need to "explore alternate routes" for the pipeline's crossing.

"Although we have had continuing discussion and exchanges of new information with the Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access, it's clear that there's more work to do," Darcy said. "The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously is to explore alternate routes for the pipeline crossing."

The company constructing the pipeline, Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners, had said it was unwilling to reroute the project. It and the Morton County Sheriff's Office, which has done much of the policing of the protests, didn't have immediate comment.

U.S. Secretary for the Interior Sally Jewell said in a statement that the Corps' "thoughtful approach ... ensures that there will be an in-depth evaluation of alternative routes for the pipeline and a closer look at potential impacts" and "underscores that tribal rights reserved in treaties and federal law, as well as Nation-to-Nation consultation with tribal leaders, are essential components of the analysis to be undertaken in the environmental impact statement going forward."

North Dakota Republican Rep. Kevin Cramer says that the Army Corps' decision not to grant an easement for the Dakota Access oil pipeline is "a very chilling signal" for the future of infrastructure in the U.S.

Cramer said in a statement that infrastructure will be hard to build "when criminal behavior is rewarded this way," apparently referring to the large protest encampment on federal land and the clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement. Cramer also said that "law and order" will
be restored when Donald Trump takes office and that he feels bad for the Corps having to do "diligent work ... only to have their Commander-in-Chief throw them under the bus."

The federal government has ordered people to leave the main encampment, which is on Army Corps of Engineers' land, by Monday. But demonstrators say they're prepared to stay, and authorities say they won't forcibly remove them.

Earlier Sunday, an organizer with Veterans Stand for Standing Rock said tribal elders had asked the military veterans not to have confrontations with law enforcement officials, adding the group is there to help out those who've dug in against the project.

About 250 veterans gathered about a mile from the Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Council Fires, camp in southern North Dakota for a meeting with organizer Wes Clark Jr., the son of former Democratic presidential candidate Gen. Wesley Clark. The group had said about 2,000 veterans were coming, but it wasn't clear how many actually arrived.

"We have been asked by the elders not to do direct action," Wes Clark Jr. said. He then talked about North Dakota authorities' decision to move away from a key bridge north of the encampment by 4 p.m. Sunday if demonstrators agree to certain conditions, saying the National Guard and law enforcement have armored vehicles and are armed.

"If we come forward, they will attack us," Clark said. Instead, he told the veterans, "If you see someone who needs help, help them out."

Authorities said they'll move from the north end of the Backwater Bridge if protesters stay south of it and come to the bridge only if there is a prearranged meeting. Authorities also asked protesters not to remove barriers on the bridge, which they have said was damaged in the late October conflict that led to several people being hurt, including a serious arm injury.

"The question was asked if we would consider pulling back from the Backwater Bridge," Cass County Sheriff Paul Laney said in a Saturday news release after a conversation between law enforcement and the group's organizers, "and the answer is yes! We want this to de-escalate."

Protesters also are not supposed to walk, ride or fly drones north of the bridge, Laney said. Any violation will "will result in their arrest," the statement said.

The bridge blockade is something that Standing Rock Sioux tribal chairman Dave Archambault has been asking to be removed, the Bismarck Tribune reports, and something he said he would to talk to Gov. Jack Dalrymple about when they meet in person. A date for that meeting hasn't been set.

Veterans Stand for Standing Rock's GoFundMe.com page had raised more than $1 million of its $1.2 million goal by Sunday — money due to go toward food, transportation and supplies. Cars waiting to get into the camp Sunday afternoon were backed up for more than a half-mile.
"People are fighting for something, and I thought they could use my help," said Navy veteran and Harvard graduate student Art Grayson. The 29-year-old from Cambridge, Massachusetts, flew the first leg of the journey, then rode from Bismarck in the back of a pickup truck. He has finals this week, but told professors, "I'll see you when I get back."

Steven Perry, a 66-year-old Vietnam veteran who's a member of the Little Traverse Bay band of Odawa Indians in Michigan, spoke of one of the protesters' main concerns: that the pipeline could pollute drinking water. "This is not just a native issue," he said, "This is an issue for everyone."

Art Woodson and two other veterans drove 17 hours straight from Flint, Michigan, a city whose lead-tainted water crisis parallels with the tribe's fight over water, he said.

"We know in Flint that water is in dire need," the 49-year-old disabled Gulf War Army veteran said. "In North Dakota, they're trying to force pipes on people. We're trying to get pipes in Flint for safe water."

On Monday, some veterans will take part in a prayer ceremony in which they'll apologize for historical detrimental conduct by the military toward Native Americans and ask for forgiveness, Clark said. He also called the veterans' presence "about right and wrong and peace and love."


December 4, 2016

Obama Administration Halts Construction Of Dakota Access Pipeline

The “historic” decision comes as thousands of protesters gather on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation.

By Chris D'Angelo
Huffington Post

The Obama administration has halted construction of the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline amid growing protests that were expected to draw some 2,000 U.S. military veterans.

The Army announced Sunday that it has denied the final easement required for the $3.8 billion project to cross under Lake Oahe in North Dakota. Instead, it will conduct an Environmental Impact Statement to examine the impacts and explore alternative routes, it said.

“Although we have had continuing discussion and exchanges of new information with Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access, it’s clear that there’s more work to do,” Jo-Ellen Darcy, the Army’s assistant secretary for civil works, said in a statement. “The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously is to explore alternative routes for the pipeline crossing.”
In a statement, Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II applauded the news. “We wholeheartedly support the decision of the administration and commend with the utmost gratitude the courage it took on the part of President Obama, the Army Corps, the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior to take steps to correct the course history and to do the right thing,” he said.

Archambault added that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and all of Indian Country “will be forever grateful to the Obama Administration for this historic decision.” He noted his hope that the incoming Trump administration would respect the decision.

This is a developing story. Check back for updates.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/obama-dakota-access-pipeline-halt_us_5844882be4b0c68e04817323?section=politics

December 5, 2016

Indigenous Activists at Standing Rock Told a Deep, True Story

And that’s why they won at least a temporary victory.

By Bill McKibben
The Nation

All organizing is story-telling, and the story that got told at Standing Rock was so powerful that ultimately the Obama White House had little choice but to go along.

The decision by the Army Corps of Engineers not to grant the permits necessary for sending the Dakota Access Pipeline beneath the Missouri River is a tribute to truly remarkable efforts by Indigenous organizers, from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe to groups like the Indigenous Environmental Network and Honor the Earth. It’s also a tribute to the incredible power of civil disobedience, a tool I tried to describe in last week’s print edition of The Nation.

But my analysis pales next to the actual story from the Oceti Sakowin encampment. There, the last few months have unfolded with almost eerie grace, and the textbook on nonviolent action has been revised and illustrated in the process. The highlights include:

- Remarkable unity. The politics of Indian country is historically fractious, at least on occasion. But this time representatives of more than 200 tribes came together in common purpose on the banks of the Cannonball River. Their flags flew along the dirt road that bisected the camp, and that spirit of unity was palpable. It extended to Indigenous people around the world—yesterday morning, for instance, came word that the Sami people of Norway had helped force that country’s biggest bank to withdraw from financing the project.
Remarkable discipline. The Morton County sheriff’s department and other “public safety” agencies devoted themselves to the task of goading the water protectors into violence. They fired beanbag pellets and rubber bullets and concussion grenades, not to mention “sonic cannons” and water cannons and canisters of pepper spray. They were met with prayer, and with strict nonviolence. In the camp, elders made sure that no one went too far with their protests. All of that was essential, because any bad image would have been splashed across the nation’s press, breaking the spell that the activists were casting.

Remarkable images. Instead, the battle of photos broke decisively the other way. Amy Goodman and her crew from Democracy Now! were on hand the late summer day when a security crew from Energy Transfer Partners unleashed German shepherds on unarmed Native Americans. The pictures were uncannily close to the images that emerged from, say, Birmingham in 1963 at the height of the civil-rights movement. Those pictures helped the world set this fight in context. And the beautiful art that was churned out at the camp workshop almost from day one helped too.

Remarkable solidarity. Though the camp at the Cannonball was big—sometimes one of the six or seven biggest cities in North Dakota—only a tiny fraction of the supporters of this cause ever made it there. Yesterday it was veterans flooding in, and the day before that clergy, all of which was crucial. But just as important was the involvement of people around the world, who started figuring out their own actions, closing out accounts in the banks that backed the pipeline or sitting in at Army Corps offices. No one outside the camp tried to lead; everyone did their best to follow. There was little overt choreography, and much spontaneous cooperation.

Taken together, all of that told an irresistible story, of the many and small and courageous against the militarized power of the state. (The local sheriff’s office was driving what were essentially tanks; they constantly bulked up in body armor and balaclavas.) And it played out against the larger story that all Americans know, the story of shame that is the treatment of this continent’s original inhabitants.

The question now is whether similar tactics will be of use against Donald Trump. The answer, in the short term, is maybe and maybe not. Obama did his best to tie the hands of his successor; had they merely rejected the pipeline outright, he would have had a fresh start, but instead there’s an environmental impact review underway now, and with that comes certain legal constraints. Still, it’s entirely possible that Trump will simply sweep all that aside.

If he does, he will take a hit to his popularity—a great many people, even among his ranks, understand that we owe a debt to Native Americans that can’t really be repaid. He will earn the unending enmity of every tribe in the country, and that will haunt his presidency in at least a small way. His racism will be proved. And he will seem the miniature marionette of the mighty oil industry, never a good look.

But if he does approve the pipeline, and the Keystone pipeline, and a dozen other bad things, it’s still not a sign to abandon the fight. Because the real target of activists is always the zeitgeist. Trump rode one zeitgeist wave to power, but the next one, if we can make it build, may wash him back to Mar-a-Lago. Those waves don’t come from “power”—power reckoned that way is
almost always in the hands of the wealthy. They come instead from the power of story. No one has ever told a tale truer or deeper than the Standing Rock Sioux.

Bill McKibben is the author of 15 books, most recently *Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist*. A scholar in residence at Middlebury College, he is the co-founder of 350.org, the largest global grassroots organizing campaign on climate change.


December 5, 2016

New “MAPTING” App Launched to Increase Youth Participation in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

Soka Gakkai International (SGI)

**Tokyo:** A new app has been created to track and map activities that contribute to actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development launched at the UN in September of last year.

Called “Mapting” (“mapping” and “acting”), the app was developed jointly by the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and Earth Charter International (ECI) as a way of engaging and educating youth in the challenge of making the 17 SDGs a reality by the target date of 2030.

The Mapting app, which became available for use on both Android and iOS devices as of December 2, 2016, can be viewed and downloaded here: [www.mapting.org](http://www.mapting.org).

Mapting is a mobile participatory app that invites users to take photos or videos of any act, project or idea that will help achieve the SDGs and share them on a world map.

The SGI and ECI have cooperated for over 15 years in the creation of awareness-raising exhibitions that promote education for sustainable development. Tadashi Nagai, Program Officer for the SGI, commented, “We believe the Mapting app can make a real contribution in terms of sharing information. It can spread a positive message that one individual’s action can make a difference.”

Dino De Francesco, Digital Communication Specialist for ECI added, “With the ‘browser’ function, users can see other activities going on in their area. For example, if I see that someone has organized a really great organic garden, maybe I can contact them and even collaborate.”

Users can also learn about the values and principles of the Earth Charter by unlocking principles with each shared picture or video.
The launch of the Mapting app was announced at an event titled “Youth Boosting the Promotion and Implementation of the SDGs” held at the UN Headquarters in New York on November 10, 2016. The event was organized by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in collaboration with the SGI and ECI.

Dr. David Nabarro, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, commented at the event, “The SDGs are the plan for the future of the world and its people. We have to make sure there is space for young people everywhere to be part of this movement . . . I’d love it if we have one million activists.”

The Mapting app homepage features 17 SDG icons representing each of the SDG action areas (Climate Action, Gender Equality, Responsible Consumption and Production and so on). When uploading a photo or video to the app, users can enter their content under one of the action areas simply by clicking on the relevant icon. For example, planting trees would relate to Climate Action, so they could click on the icon for Goal 13.

The event at the UN Headquarters announcing the launch of the app can be viewed here.

Soka Gakkai International is a community-based Buddhist association with 12 million members around the world. It engages in grassroots awareness-raising activities promoting peace and disarmament, education for sustainable development and human rights education in partnership with other NGOs and in support of the United Nations.

Learn more about the SGI’s awareness-raising activities here.

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December 5, 2016

Rowan Williams Keynote Speaker at 2018 Yale Liturgy Conference

Yale University Institute of Sacred Music

Yale Institute of Sacred Music (ISM) has announced that Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, will be the keynote speaker at the fifth international liturgy conference at Yale University, to be held June 18 – 21, 2018. The theme of the conference is “Full of Your Glory: Liturgy, Cosmos, Creation.”
The conference will explore ideas of creation and cosmos embedded in the worship life of the church at a time of unprecedented attention to ecological and cosmological concerns. Conference speakers will highlight some of the rich traditions of the past (ritual, visual, and musical, among others) and also address contemporary concerns. The broader aim of the conference is to offer the resources of the liturgical tradition – and its particular insights – to the ongoing conversations around ecology and cosmology. It will become clear that liturgy has always been about more than human beings at worship: specific understandings of creation and the cosmos are in fact at the heart of all Christian worship.

Rowan Williams served as Archbishop of Canterbury for ten years from 2002 to 2012. Since 2013 he has been master of Magdalene College at the University of Cambridge. A Fellow of the British Academy, he speaks or reads nine languages in addition to his native Welsh, and has published many books, including studies of Dostoevsky, Arius, Teresa of Avila, and Sergii Bulgakov, together with writings on a wide range of theological, historical, and political themes. He is also a noted poet and translator of poetry.

“This conference will address these important subjects in new and significant ways,” said Martin Jean, director of the ISM, an interdisciplinary graduate center at Yale University. “We are delighted to welcome Rowan Williams to Yale, who will add insight from a unique perspective, as well as draw global attention to these pressing ecological and cosmological issues.”

The conference is organized by the liturgical studies faculty at the ISM and Yale Divinity School: Teresa Berger, Melanie Ross, and Bryan Spinks, and is supported by Berkeley Divinity School at Yale.

Registration will open in mid-2017 at ism.yale.edu/Liturgy2018

NOTE: there is also a Call for Papers for the conference; details at http://ism.yale.edu/events/liturgy-conference-2018/call-papers


December 5, 2016

“We beg for your forgiveness”: Veterans join Native elders in celebration ceremony

Wes Clark Jr. was among the veterans celebrating the DAPL news and asking forgiveness

Salon

Wes Clark Jr., the son of retired U.S. Army general and former supreme commander at NATO Wesley Clark Sr., was part of a group of veterans at Standing Rock one day after the Army Corps announcement. The veterans joined Native American tribal elders in a ceremony celebrating the Dakota Access Pipeline easement denial.
Lakota spiritual leader and medicine man Chief Leonard Crow Dog and Standing Rock Sioux spokeswoman Phyllis Young were among several Native elders who spoke, thanking the veterans for standing in solidarity during the protests.

Clark got into formation by rank, with his veterans, and knelt before the elders asking for their forgiveness for the long brutal history between the United States and Native Americans:

“Many of us, me particularly, are from the units that have hurt you over the many years. We came. We fought you. We took your land. We signed treaties that we broke. We stole minerals from your sacred hills. We blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountain. When we took still more land and then we took your children and then we tried to make your language and we tried to eliminate your language that God gave you, and the Creator gave you. We didn’t respect you, we polluted your Earth, we’ve hurt you in so many ways but we’ve come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service and we beg for your forgiveness.”

Watch the video here:

http://www.salon.com/2016/12/05/we-beg-for-your-forgiveness-veterans-join-native-elders-in-celebration-ceremony/

December 6, 2016

The Dakota Access Pipeline and the Doctrine of Native Genocide

By Tim Scott
Truthout

The peaceful Native Water Protectors who have been resisting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) on sacred land belonging to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have succeeded in winning federal accommodations to temporarily halt DAPL construction, but the energy company behind DAPL has pledged to proceed (with state support). Knowing the enduring historic and structural nature of this modern struggle -- a struggle in which the Water Protectors have courageously confronted violent local, state and private militarized forces, inspiring support from thousands of US military veterans -- is vital to understanding its significance.

While the origins of the legal doctrine that facilitated conquest, genocide and the structure of settler colonialism in the US is well known to Native people throughout North America (and beyond), they are less known to current generations of white settlers.

The Doctrine of Discovery, Colonialism and White (Christian) Supremacy

The Crusades were launched in 1095 by Pope Urban II and his papal bull (an official papal decree), Terra Nullius. Terra Nullius, Latin for "land that belongs to no one" permitted European Christian kings and princes to "discover" and claim land occupied by non-Christians. During the
Crusades in 1240, the canon lawyer Pope Innocent IV penned a legal commentary on the rights of non-Christians that questioned if it was lawful to invade a land that "infidels" possess. Innocent went on to respond that it was, because the Crusades were "just wars" and were being fought in "defense" of Christianity and to take back lands that rightfully belonged to Christians. Innocent asserted a Christian right to legally dispossess pagans of sovereignty and property.

In 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued the papal bull *Dum Diversas*, which gave King Alfonso of Portugal the God-given right to conquer and enslave sub-Saharan Africans. In the bull, Nicholas V mandated Alfonso to "invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens [Muslims] and pagans whatsoever ... to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors ... and to convert them to his and their use and profit." In 1455, Pope Nicholas V issued another bull, the *Romanus Pontifex*, to King Alfonso -- and extended to all Catholic monarchies -- the right of "discovery" and seizure of all lands that were not inhabited by Catholics. It also encouraged the enslavement of the non-Christian inhabitants of all stolen lands. Thus, when Christopher Columbus landed on Guanahani island in 1492, he performed a ceremony to "take possession" of the land in the name of the king and queen of Spain, as ordained by the church. Columbus was also following church doctrine when he wrote in his personal diary about his intentions for the Indigenous people he encountered by claiming, "I could conquer the whole of them with 50 men, and govern them as I pleased."

A year later, in 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull *Inter Caetera*, which gave Spain the Americas, while Africa and India were allotted to Portugal (and later, land that would become Brazil, as well), for the purposes of colonization and to convert and enslave the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. *Inter Caetera* also justified the enslavement of Africans. *Inter Caetera* established the Law of Nations (also known as the Law of Christendom), a papal and thus legal decree stating that "one Christian nation did not have the right to establish dominion over lands previously dominated by another Christian nation."

All together these papal decrees (between 1095-1493), originating from the Crusades, served as a bedrock for the ideology of white supremacy as tied to the establishment of international law under the Doctrine of Discovery (or the Doctrine of Christian Discovery). This ideological doctrine was fundamental in the creation of sovereign rights in settler colonial nation-states and the legalization of European claims to own, occupy, colonize and exploit the continent of Africa and the entire Western Hemisphere, condemning Indigenous peoples to a subhuman status in domestic and international politics. The Doctrine of Discovery advanced the structural foundations (political/legal, cultural and economic) for the transatlantic slave trade and the genocidal policies and practices of colonization across the globe.

With the "discovery" of the Americas, the imperialist nations of England and France followed the new doctrine of discovery and quickly used it to claim rights and powers of first discovery in North America. In 1496, England's King Henry VII issued a Royal Charter, which commissioned an expedition led by John Cabot -- in the name of England -- "to find, discover and investigate whatsoever islands, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians ... to conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever such towns, castles, cities and islands by them." Based on Cabot's explorations, England laid claim to his "discoveries" from Newfoundland to Virginia. France
contested England's claims, and declared first discovery rights of ownership and sovereignty over North America. At the time, both countries were Catholic, making them cautious to violate papal bulls. It would not be until the end of the 16th century when France, England and the Netherlands were able to compete with Spain and Portugal for supremacy over the lands and bodies of Indigenous peoples on a global scale.

By the late 16th century, England freed itself from papal rule and attached the name and principles of the 1095 papal bull *Terra Nullius* to Queen Elizabeth I's definition of discovery rights, which required the occupancy and actual possession by Europeans of non-Christian lands as crucial elements of a discovery claim.

Thereafter England proclaimed that only Christian nations could discover and claim territory in the Americas (and later Australia), conditioned on the establishment of permanent settlements that cultivated the land. According to the Encyclopedia of Public International Law, this version of the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* was to become the "eighteenth-century convention of European international law -- it being held that any land which was unoccupied or unsettled could be acquired as a new territory by a sovereign State, and that the laws of that State would apply in the new territory."

In his article, "The Doctrine of Discovery in American Indian Law," professor Robert Miller documents how "the Doctrine of Discovery was the international law under which America was explored and ... was the legal authority the English Crown used to colonize America and to obtain Indian lands." After the American Revolution, the "Doctrine of Discovery" was embraced by the states and the courts as both common and natural law. Thus, the doctrine became the legal and ideological basis for settler colonialism in the United States, and became further entrenched as the centerpiece of land rights and Native law in the US by the time of the 1823 US Supreme Court decision, *Johnson v. M'Intosh*. This decision affirmed that the "Doctrine of Discovery" was indeed a well-established legal principle of English and American colonial law and had carried over to become the law of the land in US states and the federal government. According to journalist Julian Brave NoiseCat, "Justice John Marshall used the doctrine to support the majority opinion of the court, which found that Indians ... could not own, the ancestral homelands where their people had lived, loved, worshipped, married, mourned and died for millennia." The *Johnson v. M'Intosh* decision stands to this day. NoiseCat went on to report:

The doctrine has had a significant influence on Indian law and set a precedent that resonates even in modern decisions. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg -- widely considered the most liberal justice on the Supreme Court -- even cited cases based upon the doctrine as recently as 2005 to deny a land claim brought before the court by the Oneida Nation.

To this day, the doctrine continues to be a structural barrier to Indigenous rights to lands, resources and self-determination (liberation).

**US Settler Colonialism: "Destroy to Replace"**

The nationalistic narrative attached to the Doctrine of Discovery inspired the notion of Manifest Destiny and conjured up a social imaginary where intrepid white immigrant pioneers
courageously settled a vast continent that was there for the taking. The counter-narrative to this tale is best described by settler colonialism, which frames this undertaking not as a set of distinct historical events, but as a persistent and ongoing cultural, political and economic structure. In their article, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck and Angie Morrill explain:

Newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there. Within settler colonialism, it is exploitation of land that yields supreme value. In order for settlers to usurp the land and extract its value, Indigenous peoples must be destroyed, removed, and made into ghosts.

As a nation-state, the United States is defined by the genocide of Native people and the enslavement of Black people and would not exist without the brutal structure of settler colonialism (and chattel slavery). In fact, genocide is not an aberration of US democracy, but is instead foundational to it.

The colonization of North America by Christian whites -- especially after the formation of the US -- differed significantly from "franchise colonialism" (or extraction-oriented colonialism) that was practiced in other parts of the world, such as in India under British rule.

As professor Lorenzo Veracini describes it in Settler Colonial Studies journal, franchise colonialism differs from settler colonialism in that its "message to Native populations is 'You, work for me,'" while "the settler-colonial message is 'You, go away.'" Settler colonialism, as Wolfe puts it in the Journal of Genocide Research, "destroys to replace" by erecting "a new colonial society on the expropriated land base ... settler colonizers come to stay [and] invasion is a structure not an event ... to get in the way of settler colonization, all the native has to do is stay at home." While in some instances, white settlers in US settlements enslaved Indigenous peoples for their labor, the primary goal of the US settler state was to eliminate Native people altogether.

Soon after the American Revolution, Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1790, which claimed, "any Alien being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen." As a result, scholar Malathi Michelle Iyengar points out, "even the lowest-status whites (Jews, Irish peasants, indentured servants) were legally white -- i.e. Human -- by virtue of not being Black (i.e. Slave) or Indian (i.e. Savage-to-be-vanquished)." This dehumanizing racial paradigm allowed Congress to establish that only "free white" people are eligible to be citizens in the growing settler nation and deserving of the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Despite nationalist ideologies, the social structure of settler colonialism cannot be reduced to distant and unfortunate "birth pangs" of a young nation as it strived to live up to its enlightened values and institutions. The violence of settler colonialism is reasserted each and every day of the occupation for as long as it lasts. Its violence is inherently entwined in other persisting forms of brutality.
In addition to frontier homicide, other genocidal strategies of elimination and social control characterized by the US settler colonial nation-state include systematic and state-facilitated assimilation techniques via boarding schools, child abduction, Christian conversion, forced sterilization and the breaking down of Native title into alienable individual freeholds (see Dawes Act of 1887). Elimination strategies continue to this day through criminalization, impoverishment and perpetual treaty violations as suicide rates among Native youth skyrocket. Additional strategies include blood quantum laws (Indian blood laws) designed to decrease recognition of Indigenous land claims over generations, as well as laws that enable white settlers to make claims of indigeneity (claim membership in an Indigenous group).

Native poet and novelist Sherman Alexie claimed, "In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts." The racial construction of Native people continues to be embedded within the ideology of eugenics, whereby the destiny of their Indigenous identity will be diluted and disappear over generations and white settlers can more legitimately claim native status. Arvin, Tuck and Morrill emphasize that "settlement colonialism must be understood as a multi-fronted project of making the First Peoples of a place extinct; it is a relentless structure, not contained in a period of time."

Only through continued resistance have Native people survived the ongoing genocidal project of the Doctrine of Discovery and US settler colonialism. Recognizing this reality reveals what is at stake for the Water Protectors who will continue to resist big oil at Standing Rock, for it is a struggle for Indigenous survival and for the preservation of Earth itself.


December 6, 2016

'Would you go and tear up St. Peter's in Rome?'

By Maureen Fiedler
National Catholic Reporter

"Would you go and tear up St. Peter's in Rome just because you want to put a pipeline through it?" This is a quote from Miles Allard, a Native American elder at Standing Rock in North Dakota, where the protests against a proposed oil pipeline have been growing for months. The essence of that protest is actually religious in nature. The Sioux regard the land where the pipeline would run as "sacred land," deemed so by their ancestors as well as present-day Native Americans. This is not often mentioned in the news.

Allard was interviewed by Abby Holtzman, an assistant producer and Loretto volunteer here at Interfaith Voices on her recent visit to Standing Rock.

The comparison to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is especially striking. Native Americans have long believed in the sacredness of the Earth, and have often designated tracts of land as "sacred."
There are no buildings, temples, churches, steeples or stained-glass windows in those sacred spaces — only the Earth itself.

That often strikes outsiders as odd or peculiar. But there is true wisdom here. Native Americans understand at some deep level the sacredness of our planet and the need to preserve it from nefarious uses. That consciousness is part of their gift to us.

So it is with great rejoicing that the Sioux, and the thousands who have stood with them in North Dakota, rejoice now that they have won a major victory in their struggle. The Army Corps of Engineers recently denied the proposed pipeline route that would have run through sacred lands.

However, the protesters are not leaving. Everyone knows that the administration of Donald Trump will take office after Jan. 20. Trump has already made clear that he supports the pipeline, and may well to try to reverse this Corps of Engineers decision once he's in office. It's not likely that he cares about "sacred land," if he even knows what that means.

However, those of us who do care about the Earth, and the very future of our planet, can learn a great deal from the Native Americans who have led the protests at Standing Rock. They are teaching us that our very planet is sacred, and we have a duty to preserve it from anything that would despoil or threaten it.

I have not heard Pope Francis make any statements on this protest. But given his words on environmental justice in "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home," I suspect he blesses the courageous efforts of Native Americans and their allies. Let us hope that this recent victory, which could reroute the pipeline away from sacred land, holds.


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**December 6, 2016**

How Standing Rock became a site of pilgrimage

By Rosalyn R. LaPier
The Conversation

The Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency responsible for investigating, developing and maintaining water and related environmental resources, recently announced that they would not allow the Dakota Access pipeline to be constructed under the Missouri River and through Lakota territory.

This decision essentially ended the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s protest against the pipeline, which they claimed would both desecrate their sacred sites and cause potential environmental harm.
The Standing Rock Sioux tribe was able to achieve this victory in part because of the assistance of thousands of “water protectors.” In his letter of thanks, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chairman David Archambault Jr. wrote,

“Standing Rock could not have come this far alone. Hundreds of tribes came together in a display of tribal unity not seen in hundreds of years. And many thousands of indigenous people from around the world have prayed with us and made us stronger.”

Thousands of people, both those within Native American communities and their non-Native allies, felt called to go to Standing Rock. But what drew that many people to Standing Rock?

As a Native American scholar of environmental history and religion, I believe that for most individuals who gathered at the site, it was a modern-day pilgrimage.

Here’s why.

**Idea of pilgrimage**

First, what is a pilgrimage? Anthropologists Victor Turner and Edith Turner in their classic study “Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture” addressed that question when they researched the personal motivations of those who traveled long distances on pilgrimage.

Their answer was twofold. The Turners contended that individuals on a spiritual quest seek both an “out of this ordinary world” experience and a sense of community, “unity” or “oneness” with those on a similar quest. Individuals on a pilgrimage usually have these experiences both while traveling to certain places of transcendence and while at those sacred places.

Lakota scholar Philip Deloria, has also described how the transformative experience of Native American sacred places provides meaning and personal growth for individuals who journey to be in their presence. In the book “American Indian Places,” Deloria discusses how people are likely to return to these important places again and again.

Going to Standing Rock evolved into a pilgrimage for many Native Americans: they left their “ordinary” lives behind to journey to a Lakota sacred place, and participate in a larger collective action.

My cousin Renee LaPier and her daughter Modesta LaPier, for example, journeyed 2,600 miles to and from Standing Rock. As Ojibwe women, with family on the Turtle Mountain reservation in North Dakota, they felt inspired to go to Standing Rock after meeting hundreds of like-minded individuals at a “water protectors” gathering they organized in their hometown of Portland, Oregon.

Going to Standing Rock forced them and others to step out of their “ordinary” modern lives and travel to a remote rural area of the U.S. with few amenities including no cellphone coverage. And once at the site, they encountered a transformative experience. Reflecting on her experience,
Renee said, “It’s personal. It’s deeply deeply personal. It’s important for all of us to stand up together.”

**Modern-day pilgrimage**

It is not just Native Americans who have gone to Standing Rock. On Dec. 5 an estimated 2,000 U.S. veterans, both Native American and their non-Native allies, made their pilgrimage to Standing Rock in a freezing blizzard. They came from across the U.S. and other parts of the world; they represented American veterans from many conflicts and wars, including older Korean and Vietnam vets and younger Iraqi vets. They said they came to Standing Rock for “peace and prayer.”

What does this mean?

Religious scholar Laurel Zwissler has studied why and how young people are “refocusing their personal religious practices” to include “religious practice with public action.” She explains how they are blending their individual religious ideas and political activism into a new form of religious expression.

Zwissler’s research reveals participating in protests, even those across a great distance, becomes a new place of individual and collective spiritual practice.

Many Native Americans and non-Native allies viewed going to Standing Rock as a pilgrimage. I have read hundreds of social media posts of people who were drawn to go there as a spiritual quest, reflecting on how the experience changed their sense of identity, gave meaning to their lives, provided a sense of community and transformed them forever.

Even Chairman David Archambault Jr., in an address to the veterans, said their pilgrimage had meaning because “What you’re doing is sacred.”

I believe a modern kind of pilgrimage for Native Americans is emerging in which people travel to sites of collective action as a form of religious practice. It is true that some come for personal goals of spiritual awakening and some to journey to a sacred place. And, there are others who undertake a spiritual journey to find community, and purpose.

In the end, utilizing prayer and ceremony, they would have all experienced a pilgrimage – returning to their home different from when they left.

*Rosalyn R. LaPier is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Women's Studies, Environmental Studies and Native American Religion, Harvard University. She is affiliated with Saokio Heritage.*


December 6, 2016
While Eyes Were On Standing Rock, The Dakota Pipeline Was Being Drilled Under Another Water Source

By Adele Peters
Fast Co.Exist

While the pipeline may have been halted in North Dakota, construction workers just finished drilling under the Des Moines River, which supplies the water for half a million people in Iowa.

In the heart of Appalachia, in places like West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, life has long been built around coal, figuratively and literally. In the early 20th century, coal companies founded towns in the rugged and steep interiors of West Virginia to hold their workforces. But coal—and the traditional idea of coal country with it—is dying. Markets have embraced cheaper or cleaner alternatives. Natural gas has surpassed coal as the country's largest source of net electricity generation. Renewables are projected to increase by 72% by 2040. After years of coal booms and busts, "this is final," says Gwendolyn Christon, the owner of the IGA grocery store in Isom, Kentucky, and one of the many locals we spoke to in a trip across the region to document the future of coal country. "If we’re gonna stay here and prosper, we have to start looking for other ways of making a living. You have to do that quickly and not just sit back and wait for something to happen. It’s not going to depend on the federal government or someone coming in to rescue us. It’s going to be us going to work and doing it ourselves."

Throughout 2016, the decline of coal has been used as a political football, a metaphor for the damage done by liberal, environmentalist regulation to the working class. Hillary Clinton, who said that her energy plans would "put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business," lost enormously across Appalachia. Donald Trump, both during the campaign and since his victory, has promised to save the coal industry with energy reform that rescinds environmental efforts like Obama's Climate Action Plan; he’s also spoken of abolishing the Environmental Protection Agency, and there is concern he will ignore international climate agreements. In West Virginia, the newly elected Democratic governor, Trump-esque billionaire coal baron Jim Justice, is noncommittal on the existence of climate change and has pledged to "promote new uses for coal," incentivize power plants to use only West Virginia coal and bring back coal jobs. But economics might be a stronger force than rhetoric: Even with the prospect of supportive federal and state administrations, many power company executives—including ones in Appalachia—are declaring that coal is simply too cost-ineffective, and are continuing with plans to shut down their coal-fired power plants.

But while coal country happens to be in the political spotlight today, the region is not unique in its susceptibility to the problems in which it finds itself. The 20th century has seen countless regional economies built on extractive and polluting industries that have been decimated by technological advancement and globalization: manufacturing in the Rust Belt, the auto industry in Detroit, the timber industry in the Pacific Northwest. As the coal industry dies—and make no mistake, it is dying—some in Appalachia are still clinging to a past that can’t save them, but many others are trying to find a way to create a new economy, focused on a future where the communities of Appalachia are more self-sustaining. In driving through the region this fall, we discovered that the lessons they’re learning and sharing will be vital as more and more
industries—and the economies they support—fall victim to the same forces that are ending coal. The innovative web of entrepreneurs, community organizations, and government programs in Appalachia can serve as the model for the transition to a new economy for any community.

_Coal keeps the lights on—until it doesn't_

In places like West Virginia, where my colleague Elaine McMillion Sheldon and I are from, coal is a foundational part of the cultural identity. So much so that on a rainy day this August, when we drove past a modest lot of used cars on West Virginia's Route 19, the sign that loomed above it seemed completely normal: King Coal Pre-Owned Super Store. It might have held a certain significance now, as we crisscrossed West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, but we have driven by this sign and others like it dozens of times in our lives. To grow up in the heart of Appalachia is to internalize this narrative, whether your family has worked in the mines for generations (as in Elaine's case) or it hasn't (as in mine). Coal is king. Friends of coal. Coal keeps the lights on—until it doesn't.

_Listen to a short audio documentary introducing you to this trip to document the new economy of coal country:_

The coal economy has been many things in and to Appalachia—pride, livelihood, environmental villain, political juggernaut—but it has never been particularly resilient. While U.S. coal production was on an overall increase from 1949 to the mid-2000s, that rise was peppered with spikes and plateaus, as well as fluctuations in the labor force. In the mid-20th century, mechanization and consolidation in the coal industry sent jobs plummeting. West Virginian mining jobs dropped from 125,000 to 65,000 between 1947 and 1954, eventually hitting 41,000 in 1968, which was at the time a 65-year low. (This era also marked a large regional migration to northern industrial cities, often referred to as the "Hillbilly Highway." Between 1940 and 1960, 7 million Appalachians left.) Eastern Kentucky’s production experienced sharp downward spikes in the late 1950s and '80s, West Virginia in the early '90s and early 2000s. Coal has always brought booms as well as busts.

There is much evidence to suggest that Appalachia’s last boom has come and gone. Even without the rise of renewables, the bottom has fallen out of the coal market. The driving force in the decline of U.S. coal production is the booming shale gas market. Last year, for the first time, natural gas surpassed coal as the country's largest source of net electricity generation. And coal from the western United States—where coal is generally cheaper and mined less labor-intensively in surface mines—is supplanting Appalachian coal. (The country's biggest coal producer today is, by far, Wyoming.) Global exports, which account for an estimated 27% of West Virginia’s coal production, are also down.

Coal production here has been in overall decline since 1990, dropping by 45% between 2000 and 2015; in eastern Kentucky, production has plummeted by 80%. West Virginia, Appalachia's biggest coal producer, produced 168 million short tons in 2008. If this year's output continues at pace, that number is expected to hit 68 million, the state's lowest annual output in a century. Long-term forecasts are similarly low: the West Virginia University Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) projects state coal production to fall to fewer than 67 million short
tons by 2036. (Back in 2009, *Charleston Gazette-Mail* writer Ken Ward Jr., long an important voice in this conversation, pointed out that the Appalachian Basin could hit "peak coal"—the point of maximum production, after which it’s all downhill—as early as 2020.) Between 2000-2015, Appalachia lost more than 9,300 coal jobs, and major mining companies like Alpha Natural Resources have filed for bankruptcy, leaving behind devastated livelihoods and devastated earth. WVU's BBER sees only .5% job growth in the state’s natural resources and mining sector (with all of those jobs coming in natural gas) over the next five years; it expects coal industry employment to contract by an average annual rate of 2% per year through 2021.

**A new economy, and a new identity**

From the outside, coal’s dethroning to cheaper, cleaner alternatives may seem inarguable. But the reason for coal's demise has been something of a debate, especially to those who believe that its only real problem is the Obama administration and a liberal, Environmental Protection Agency-led war on coal. (In fact, while compliance with the carbon-emissions-reducing Clean Power Plan contributes to decreased coal production, the U.S. EIA found that Appalachia would actually see the country's smallest CPP-attributable drop.) So when Elaine and I set out to document the efforts underway in Appalachia's transitioning economy, we knew that we could not presuppose that everyone believed such a transition was happening. The first question had to be not how is Appalachia transitioning, but is it?

On our travels through West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, we heard just one person refer in earnest to a war on coal. We heard many others—economists, community development leaders, small-business owners, ex-miners—say that the moment of transition had arrived. That there was no going back. That coal might still be mined, some miners might keep their jobs, but the industry would never again be what it once was. To say good-bye to coal—even if just to say good-bye to its halcyon days—is a profound spiritual and emotional decision for a people who have watched their family members work, suffer, and die underground, who have loved and taken deep pride in the community coal created. One person invoked the stages of grief, several others mentioned post-traumatic stress disorder. It's hard to overstate—and perhaps, to outsiders, hard to explain at all—the mental shift that this economic change represents, and the reevaluation of identity it prompts.

It creates an opportunity, but it also creates a vacuum. For decades in West Virginia, for instance, the economy has been dominated by largely absentee companies that have, in essence, extracted twice: first resources, then profit. Relative to the wealth of coal moguls like Don Blankenship, the disgraced Massey Energy CEO (currently serving a one-year sentence for conspiring to violate federal mine safety standards in the Upper Big Branch disaster that killed 29 miners) and governor-elect Justice, little of coal's prosperity has touched the people whose land it came from or who tooled to get it out, save for the new vehicles and homes bought with coal salaries and so easily repossessed after layoffs came to town. One possible outcome of an imbalance like this is the sense that one is living in a feudal state—that, when those lords leave, others need to come in to take their places. Much of the work being done by economic development groups around Appalachia starts with reversing this idea and helping people see the possibility, and opportunity, within themselves and their home.
Reinventing The Rural Economy

But this is less a story about coal’s decline than it is about what the people left in the wake of that descent can do after to quickly strengthen economic muscles that atrophied while coal grew more and more powerful. The decline of coal brings unprecedented opportunities to build lasting, meaningful economies. Here, in a place largely without the urban centers that traditionally attract the likes of Google and Uber, it is a chance to find new ways to utilize potential, to reinvent the rural economy into something multifaceted and resilient.

All around Appalachia, people are trying to harness that possibility and realize that opportunity for as many people as possible, by trying to figure out how to both capitalize on their strengths in new areas and improve existing economic sectors (and how to do both fast). In some places, these efforts have the flash of millennial innovation (life sciences businesses, tech startups), and in others (auto shops, aerospace mechanics) they don't. They involve new ideas and existing infrastructures, young people who are just starting their careers, and people who have had to figure out, in the middle of their lives, how to start over.

These efforts are encouraging—as are the modest drops in forecasted unemployment rates in both West Virginia and Kentucky, led by construction, professional, and service sectors—but they exist within a context of systemic, pervasive challenges. The decline of coal has affected not just those who work in the industry, though they are undoubtedly hit the hardest, but also those who work in transportation, as metal fabricators, even at shopping malls. Entrepreneurship is a major tenant of a diversified Appalachian economy, but Appalachian entrepreneurs often lack access to capital; there is not a single venture capital firm in the state of West Virginia, which Forbes has declared the worst state in the country in which to do business. An average of 29% of the population of Eastern Kentucky is below the poverty line; in West Virginia, it’s 18%. West Virginia had the country's highest percentage of drug-overdose deaths in 2014, and it's losing population faster than any state in the country. John Deskins, director of the WVU BBER, says the state's main economic challenge is human capital: a healthy, skilled workforce.

The major barrier to a skilled workforce, of course, is lack of education. Coal provided high-paying jobs for those with relatively little education, and now that workforce is often ill-prepared for other markets, but they're not alone. Only 19% of the population of West Virginia and an average of 12% of the population of eastern Kentucky have bachelor degrees or higher. (Projections suggest that, in West Virginia alone, 52% of jobs will require post-secondary degrees by 2020.)

Here, there is progress: WVU and the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission are working to improve graduation rates with student-centered programs that target rural counties with low college attendance, offer on-campus support, and support entrepreneurialism, and last year the state had a record number of two- and four-year graduates. Almost every economic-development initiative we saw in West Virginia and eastern Kentucky came back, somehow, to education, even if just a workshop, training program, or retraining program. (Many involved financial assistance.) Progress in education can be slow to pay off, especially considering the length of a bachelor's degree, but it must be prioritized, says Chris Bollinger, director of the University of Kentucky Center of Business and Economic Research. Otherwise, history stands to
repeat itself yet again: "A generation from now, we're going to be in the same place," he said. "You can go back to Night Comes to the Cumberlands"—Harry Caudill's seminal 1963 book on the region's troubled and depressed history—"and it could have been written yesterday."

In Kentucky, a bipartisan initiative called SOAR (Shaping our Appalachian Region) united longtime Republican Congressman Hal Rogers and Republican Governor Matt Bevin in an "honest dialogue" about a future beyond eastern Kentucky's struggling coal economy, with events and seminars that work toward job creation and innovation in what it calls a "landscape-changing enterprise." It's not an understatement: By dint of its existence, SOAR has given state actors like the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) a new freedom. When we sat down at the 40-year-old advocacy group's office in Berea, Kentucky, its director, Peter Hille, pointed to a row of books on a shelf behind him, which contained a 1986 MACED coal study that, among other things, challenged the longevity of coal and its economic impact on the state. "There's stuff in there that was not popular to say," he says. "But now you've got Rogers, the Republican chair of the appropriations committee, saying essentially, 'Coal's not coming back and we need to do something different.'"

That this kind of dialogue is lacking in West Virginia leaves people like James Van Nostrand, director of the WVU College of Law's Center for Energy and Sustainable Development, still feeling hamstrung in his ability to act on what he considers economics-driven issues, not political ones. "It makes it harder to have those conversations about where we need to go when some are saying, 'We don't need to go anywhere, we just need to get the EPA off our back,'" Van Nostrand said. "It's a complete copout in terms of the leadership we need to start addressing these issues."

An Old Story With A New Ending

Perhaps some solace is that many people we met, from former coal miners to independent artists, weren't waiting—they were addressing their issues themselves, as best they could. In Beckley, West Virginia, a former miner opens an auto shop. In Charleston, a man starts a hotdog stand as part of a downtown revitalization. In Berea, Kentucky, an artist sells her friends' work in her art and coffee house. Nearby, a laid-off miner is trained for a new job: to retrofit houses to be more energy efficient. It isn't that simple, of course—as Hille put it, we also need an industrial-sized solution, because we have an industrial-sized problem—but Deskins and Bollinger agree: that these small independent actors are a big part of a diverse economy's success. When citizens are given the resources they need to open a business or retrain for a new job, Bollinger says, "People making decisions about the economic conditions around them generally make good decisions."

In driving through West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, we found five places being shaped by these kinds of decisions—and the new economies that can spring up around them. They do not represent a comprehensive overview of the many efforts like them, nor are they the only way forward. If there is one common thread of the many conversations we had in the region, it's that there can never be just one way again.

In Berea, Hille spoke about a project he did years ago, visiting rural communities around the country with the Kellogg Foundation. Everywhere he went, someone would tell him what made their hometown different. This is what's happening here, they would say: Their economy wasn't
working anymore, their children were leaving, their businesses were boarding up, their schools were closing, and they didn't know what to do. They might have been talking about cotton in the South, timber in the Pacific Northwest, or sugar cane in Hawaii. When you looked past the details, it was the same story everywhere. Now, though, there might be a happier ending.

**Next Stop: Morgantown, West Virginia:** Can West Virginia University Jump-Start A New Economy Based On Innovation—Not Coal?

*Courtney Balestier* is a James Beard-nominated writer whose work has appeared in the New Yorker online, the New York Times, *the* Oxford American, and elsewhere. *She writes often about Appalachia.*

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https://www.fastcoexist.com/3066246/while-eyes-were-on-standing-rock-the-dakota-pipeline-was-being-drilled-under-another-water-s

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**December 7, 2016**

Why Standing Rock Is About Way More Than a Pipeline

By Jordan Chariton
Mediaite

Growing up in a land of white privilege on Long Island, I had it fairly good. I wasn’t rich nor poor; I was middle class with two loving, working parents.

Neither my family nor tribe of relatives were slaughtered; my land wasn’t stolen in the name of another race and class colonizing their own country from the burnt ashes of mine.

So when I first arrived in Cannonball, North Dakota in September for what would become the first of five reporting trips, my world shook. Interview after interview, all the melodrama I’d ever built up in my head about my own experience ceased to matter.

Speaking with hundreds of Native American water protectors at Standing Rock over the last four months, a heartbreaking trend gnawed at me: where I was shocked and shaken, indigenous people were numb and utterly unsurprised.

All of the militarized police brutality perpetrated by North Dakota police toward the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their non-native allies; the environmental racism perpetrated by federal and state authorities onto the Tribe; and the desecration of their land perpetrated by a private oil company cloaked with federal and state police protection—forces who are supposed to be
protecting *them* rather than an oil company—was nothing extraordinary to these prayerful and righteous people.

After all, this was the centuries-old story they’ve been forced to endure.

That’s why December 5th, 2016 will forever be an historic day. That’s when veterans, led by *The Young Turks* host Wes Clark Jr. and contributor Michael A. Wood Jr., kneed down and begged Native American tribal leaders for forgiveness for the original sins of the United States.

“We came here to be the conscience of the nation,” Clark Jr. began while kneeling in front of Native tribal leaders during a forgiveness ceremony.

“Within that conscience, we must first confess our sins to you because many of us in particular are from units that have hurt you over the many years. We came, we fought you, we took your land, we signed treaties that we broke, we stole minerals from your sacred hills, we blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountains, and we took more land, and then we took your children, and then we tried to take your language, we tried to eliminate your language that God gave you and that the creator gave you. We didn’t respect you, we polluted your earth, we hurt you in so many ways, and we’ve come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service, and we beg for your forgiveness.”

In the endless drivel that is our corporate-media-horse-race-industrial-complex, those inside the bubble might read that and indignantly shout, “Who gives a damn about the plight of the Native Americans, President-Elect Trump just tweeted he’s going to bomb Scandinavia because the Prime Minister didn’t like *The Apprentice*!”

Here’s why you should care: America just elected one of the most unqualified, potentially diabolical presidents in history because of a frozen, deep despair; an anger and hopelessness that’s quietly swept across the country over the last 30 years.

The raw emotion and frustration that sprung a man like Trump into office came from the never-ending dark cloud that poisons America: unfettered greed and heartlessness; a type of social Darwinism fired by the plutocratic elite at average people—those with far less of a voice or chips to gamble into the corrupt pot that’s become America.

You know, like the Native Americans.

Of course, we have to be vigilant and steadfast in trying to achieve equality and respect for all groups, minorities, and people attacked by corporate, economic, and social colonialism, including our African American, Latino, Asian, and LGBT brothers and sisters.

This is especially vital as incoming forces inside the White House, and those supporting them, try and rewrite America into their diluted concept of what makes it great.
But, of all the historic lessons to take from the epic battle of Standing Rock—one that is *still not over* despite President Obama’s decision to deny a crucial final drilling permit—we can ironically learn one courtesy of Trump.

For, on election night, when he promised to rescue the “the forgotten men and women of our country,” he was unknowingly talking about the group thousands of brave veterans from across the U.S. just kneeled down to in a genuine desire for forgiveness.

Our real founders—the Native Americans.

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*Jordan Chariton* is a Politics Reporter for The Young Turks, covering the presidential campaign trail, where he’s interviewing voters on both sides. He’s also a columnist for Mediaite and here’s his latest column. Follow him [@JordanChariton](https://twitter.com/JordanChariton) and watch videos at [YouTube.com/tytpolitics](https://www.youtube.com/tytpolitics).

http://www.mediaite.com/online/why-standing-rock-is-about-way-more-than-a-pipeline/

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**December 7, 2016**

Veterans apologize to Indigenous on behalf of U.S. Army at Standing Rock

By Amanda Froelich

Nation of Change

*Today, hundreds of veterans from across the United States took a knee and begged for forgiveness for crimes committed toward indigenous people in the name of the U.S. military.*

A massive awakening is being realized, and it’s stemming from the Standing Rock protest camps located near Cannon Ball, North Dakota. Since April, “water protectors” have been protesting the development of a four-state Dakota Access Pipeline.

Individuals in support of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, who believe the land is rightfully theirs due to an 1851 treaty, have been maced, tased, beaten with batons, shot with rubber bullets, and even sprayed down with water canons in freezing temperatures because they believe the DAPL’s construction will uproot burial ground and potentially contaminate the Missouri river.

Energy Transfer Partners insists that the pipeline is incredibly safe, but betting on “human error” has *proven to be too much of a risk*, which is why advocates for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe protest. This past weekend, over three thousand veterans arrived at the Sacred Stone camp to show their support for the indigenous peoples’ plight, as well as to help prepare activists for the cold winter.

Likely because of the veterans’ arrival – which was organized by Michael J. Wood, a former Baltimore police officer, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [denied an easement to the oil companies](https://nationofchange.org/2016/09/08/deny-easement-dakota-access-pipeline-take-action/) responsible for the $3.7 billion pipeline. Cheers erupted in the camp as word spread,
but a statement by Energy Transfer Partners soon made it clear that construction of the DAPL will continue regardless of the Obama Administration’s interference.

As of now, a standoff continues between law enforcement workers and water protectors; those who are present at Standing Rock – and many more who intend to venture to North Dakota – are adamant that they are not going anywhere until the pipeline is rerouted.

With heartache and humility in the air, veterans led by Wesley Clark Jr. did something remarkable today. Hundreds of veterans gathered before tribal leaders of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and begged for forgiveness for crimes committed toward indigenous people in the name of the U.S. military.

The ceremony, according to Redhawk’s Facebook post, was led by Arvol Looking Horse, Leonard Crow Dog, Phyllis Young, Ivan Looking Horse, and a number of other natives of Turtle Island.

Though many military personnel are in favor of the pipeline’s construction due to the potential boost it could offer the economy, others see it as another instance in which native Americans are being trampled upon within a two-hundred-year period. To attempt to ‘right’ the many wrongs of the past, the brave veterans asked for forgiveness.

According to Jon Eagle, who is the tribal historic preservation officer for the Standing Rock Sioux, Leksi Leonard Crow Dog – a Sioux spokesman – forgave the veteran military members present for the past actions of their government. In turn, he asked for forgiveness for the Battle of Big Horn – also known as Custer’s Last Stand – when Sioux warriors killed approximately 268 U.S. soldiers affiliated with the 7th Cavalry.

Redhawk wrote that they were “forgiven for actions taken to dehumanize the indigenous of this country, and a step towards solitary has been made.”

After the moving ceremony, the two groups made a unified call for world peace.

What’s happening at Standing Rock is no longer a fight between the indigenous and those employed by an affluent oil company. The uprising has morphed into a battle between those who understand that all life is connected and that by honoring the Earth, everyone benefits – especially future generations.


December 8, 2016

'This is an awakening': Native Americans find new hope after Standing Rock
For those who left behind communities ravaged by poverty and substance abuse, their time spent at this historic gathering has been transformational

By Julia Carrie Wong
The Guardian

Frank Archambault’s tent sits on top of a small hill in the middle of Oceti Sakowin, the largest encampment at Standing Rock. It is easy to spot him on the small rise, wearing a long black coat, feathered hat, and yellow, red, white and black ribbons on his arm that mark him as a member of Iktčé Wičháša Oyáte – A Common Men’s Society.

Archambault founded Iktčé Wičháša Oyáte shortly after he arrived, with his five children and grandchild, at the “water protector” encampments in August. He saw that there was work around the camp that wasn’t getting done, and he saw that there were men around camp not doing work. Now the group helps run security and coordinates work crews.

It’s a big change from Archambault’s previous life in Little Eagle, South Dakota, a community of about 300 people within the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. A recovering meth addict, Archambault describes the existence he left behind, before he joined the movement fighting the Dakota Access pipeline: “Sad.”

“Back home, it’s drugs, alcohol, no jobs. People don’t really know how to survive. It’s hopeless,” he said. “All we have left is the river.”

Many of the Native American activists, also known as water protectors, who have gathered on the windswept plains of North Dakota to defeat a multibillion-dollar pipeline, come from reservations ravaged by poverty, substance abuse, and a legacy of historical traumas that reach well into the present.

“This is like an awakening,” Archambault said as he surveyed the camp from his spot on the hill. “Something I’ve been struggling with my whole life is doing something to be proud of.”

‘You can’t leave’

Before Lauren Howland travelled to Standing Rock, she was back home at the Jicarrilla Apache Nation reservation in Dulce, New Mexico, taking a break from the University of New Mexico to help her family through some hard times.

“I was a bad kid,” she said of her life before Standing Rock. “I was always drinking, always with my hoodrat friends doing hoodrat stuff, just being a typical Native American, giving into the stereotype that we’re all drunks and druggies and we just get our checks and get drugs.”

“It’s not hard to be that way when it’s all you see,” she added.

Howland, who is San Carlos Apache and Navajo, calls herself a “recovering alcoholic”. When we spoke, in early November, she was 31 days sober.
“Back on the rez, there’s nothing really to do. All there is do is drink and kill yourself,” she said. “I’m only 21 and I’m an alcoholic. I know 13-year-old alcoholics, 11-year-old alcoholics. I started drinking when I was, like, seven.”

Surveys by the National Institute of Health conducted in 1991-1992 and 2001-2002 showed that Native Americans were almost twice as likely as other racial and ethnic groups in the United States to be alcohol dependent. However, a more recent study by researchers at the University of Arizona, looking at the period from 2009-2013, found no elevated rate of alcoholism in Native American populations.

And among young adults, Native Americans are more than twice as likely to take their own lives than other racial groups, according to a 2015 study by the US Centers for Disease Control.

For the Cheyenne River Sioux, the crisis is even more acute. Between 2002 and 2003, the tribe suffered 17 youth suicides, according to multiple news reports.

In 2005, Julie Garreau, the executive director of the Cheyenne River Youth Project, told the Senate Indian Affairs Committee that there were between three and seven attempted suicides on the reservation every week.

Before getting involved in the Standing Rock movement, Jasilea Charger, 20, was working at a Taco John’s and living on the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation, in her hometown of Eagle Butte, South Dakota.

On the reservation, she said, she felt “stuck”. She lost friends and family to the suicide epidemic. Her father died before she was born, and her mother has “lost her way”.

“She taught me what not to do by doing it,” Charger said of her mother. “It’s a gift on its own because it taught me forgiveness.”

“It’s kind of hard living there, but then again you can’t leave,” she said, while cooking slices of spam over a fire pit on a sunny day. “I don’t want to leave home because I feel like I’m running from the problem.”

‘A family gathering’

Hunter Shortbear always wanted to serve in the military. He wanted to join the marines, but a March 2010 beating left him with a fractured skull and just one eye.

At Standing Rock, he has become a “warrior”.

Shortbear’s black eye patch, barrel chest, and proud carriage set him apart in a crowd. He speaks deliberately and eats voraciously. He describes the tasks he has been assigned on the security team by his “superior officer” as “an honor and a privilege”.

It wasn’t until I came here that I realized it’s a powerful thing to learn your traditions and ways
As a child, the 29-year-old Oglala Hunkpapa Lakota was adopted by a white family and grew up one of the only Native Americans in Carrington, North Dakota. But at Standing Rock, he has reconnected with his roots.

“I consider it a family gathering,” he said. “The Shortbear family is here.”

The way of life at the camp – communal kitchens, work crews chopping firewood and building shelters, medics and healers providing care, councils coming together to make decisions, and everyone keeping an eye out for each other – has been a revelation for Shortbear.

He compared it to a mural of a historic Sioux tribe living in tipis on the wall of the casino restaurant where we were eating.

“It’s all coming back,” he said. “I don’t want to lose this.”

In every moment, Standing Rock is suffused with indigenous ceremony and prayer, from the women who walk down to the water at sunrise to the singers who gather at the sacred fire.

At home, Howland said, tribal elders would tell young people to “get back to prayer and get away from drugs and alcohol” but it never made sense to her.

“It wasn’t until I came here that I realized it’s a powerful thing to learn your traditions and ways,” she said. “We do everything in prayer. This morning I woke up in prayer. You wake up and you smudge and you pray. At home, I would wake up and open a bottle and drink.”

‘Take this fire’

On Sunday, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it was denying an easement for the Dakota Access pipeline to cross the Missouri river. It’s a victory for the movement, though many don’t trust the government or the company not to figure out another way.

With the temperatures dropping, a blizzard raging through North Dakota, and the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux asking people to leave, the camps are at a crossroads.

Xhopakelxhit was an activist before she arrived at camp. A member of the Nuu-chah-nulth, Coast Salish, and Cree nations from the Village of Maaqtusiis in Sovereign Ahousaht Territory, Canada, she grew up reading Mao with her father.

As a member of the Red Warrior Camp, a group within Oceti Sakowin responsible for many of the direct actions against the pipeline, like chaining themselves to machinery, Xhopakelxhit carries a certain amount of mystique. “The joke around Red Warrior Camp is we eat rubber bullets for breakfast,” she said while receiving a large tattoo on her chest.

The challenge now, Xhopakelxhit says, is ensuring that everyone stays in the fight.
“One-hundred percent of indigenous people who leave here have a battle at home they weren’t taking care of. So maybe they can go home and fight.”

Howland agreed: “Imagine if we go back to our different reservations and start implementing tradition and prayer. Think about how much change we can make.”

“When I go home, I’m not going to be the same,” said Charger. “People back in our community deserve to know what it feels like to stand strong and pick each other up.”


December 12, 2016

Moroccan mosques go solar

600 Moroccan mosques are installing solar to save money and inspire people.

By Diana Madson
Yale Climate Connections

In the North African kingdom of Morocco, religion and technology are joining forces on a project that will reduce global-warming pollution.

The goal is to retrofit 600 mosques so they use more clean energy and become more energy efficient.

Kuntze: “The project aims to equip mosques with mainly three technologies: with LED lighting, with solar water heaters, and with photovoltaic panels.”

That’s Jan-Christoph Kuntze, principal technical advisor for the project. He says the benefits go beyond reducing pollution. In fact, the effort was developed to increase public awareness of energy efficiency and to create jobs in Morocco.

The project is already creating jobs in engineering, manufacturing, and in new fields such as energy auditing.

Retrofitting any public buildings would have provided the same benefits. But Kuntze says the team deliberately chose to start with mosques.

Kuntze: “Mosques play a quite central role in the social lives of many Moroccan people.”

The idea is that when the Moroccan people see the benefits, they will be inspired to invest in the same solutions for their own homes and businesses — creating even larger environmental and economic benefits.
Listen to this story here:

http://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2016/12/moroccan-mosques-go-solar/

December 13, 2016

Rock and a Hard Place

Recent events at Standing Rock spark new questions about sacredness, environment, tribal nation sovereignty

By Rob Enslin
Syracuse University College of Arts & Sciences

When Brian Patterson heard the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) was being delayed and possibly rerouted, he let out a whoop of joy. For him and thousands of others, particularly those at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in the snow-covered Dakotas, it was a victory more than two years in the making. “There’s a sense of relief I cannot fully express,” says Patterson, a Bear Clan representative to the Oneida Indian Nation’s governing body. “I believe it’s linked to generational, historical trauma.”

Speaking by phone from his home in Central New York, Patterson says the Dec. 4 announcement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to legally block construction of the DAPL, denying an easement it needs to drill under the Missouri River, is the latest, most substantial blow to the 1,172-mile pipeline, first proposed in 2014. Currently, more than 90 percent of the project is done. If the remaining section is ever built, a leak, rupture or spill could spell disaster for the reservation and approximately 17 million other people who depend on the river for clean water.

Patterson also is guarded. “In many ways, our struggles are just beginning,” he says, referencing an incoming oil-friendly president and Canada’s recent approval of two controversial pipelines, one of which would link Alberta to the United States. “It’s time to build and leverage our many ‘water protectors’ [what Standing Rock protesters are called] and alliances. For now, we sing and dance our victory song.”

Phil Arnold, director of the Ská·noñh-Great Law of Peace Center in Syracuse, says the Army Corps’ decision to look for alternate routes for the $3.8 billion pipeline, presaged by an environmental impact statement (EIS), could delay construction for months, maybe years. “It’s a significant victory, but it’s temporary,” cautions Arnold, who also serves as associate professor and chair of religion in the College of Arts and Sciences. “When an EIS was done for a proposed expansion of the Keystone XL Pipeline, the project was shelved because the environmental risks outweighed the economic benefits. An EIS hasn’t been done yet for the DAPL. Drillers may wait for President-elect Donald Trump, whose interests are aligned with fossil fuel development, to take office in January and reverse the decision.”
News of the Army Corps’ decision spread like wildfire through the Sioux’s Oceti Sakowin camp, situated on a sprawling grassland, south of Bismarck, North Dakota. (“Oceti Sakowin” is the proper name for members of the Sioux people and means “Seven Council Fires.” They are part of the Dakota and Lakota nations.) Native members celebrated by parading around on horseback and singing and dancing into the wee hours of the morning.

Since April, Oceti Sakowin has hosted tens of thousands of activists, environmentalists and tribal nation representatives, who have joined in solidarity with the people at Standing Rock. It is with a trace of irony that the Army Corps’ announcement came hours before the North Dakota governor was scheduled to evacuate Oceti Sakowin for the winter—and hours after the arrival of more than 2,000 U.S. military veterans and first responders, hoping to serve as an unarmed militia and peaceful human shields for the protesters.

Clutching a microphone at the camp’s central fire, Standing Rock Chairman Dave Archambault II praised supporters for their months of prayers and protests. “It’s wonderful,” he said, amid cheers and shouts of “Mni Wiconi” (Lakota for “Water is life”), Standing Rock’s oft-repeated mantra. “You all did that. Your presence has brought the attention of the world.”

Reaction has been swift—from Energy Transfer Partners, which owns the Dakota Access company, saying it intends to complete the pipeline (“The White House’s directive is the latest in a series of overt and transparent political actions,” the company states) to Greenpeace lauding the decision as a “monumental victory in the fight to protect indigenous rights and sovereignty.”

Jo-Ellen Darcy, the Army’s assistant secretary for civil works, says there still is more to be done. “The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously,” she writes, “is to explore alternate routes for the pipeline crossing.” The Army Corps is part of the Department of the Army.

Scholars believe the bigger story here is a renewed awareness of indigenous knowledge and values. The traditional narrative, Arnold says, is that Native Americans have felt invisible or relegated to the past. Standing Rock, a global flashpoint for environmental and indigenous activism, has become the exception. “Seeing different people, especially different religious groups, rally around climate change is remarkable,” he adds. “I think we’ll start seeing more of these collaborations, as the Old World view of conquest, domination and extractive economical uses of the planet reveals itself to be counterproductive to human survival.”

Arnold’s colleague, Scott Manning Stevens, calls the decision a victory for all indigenous peoples—from the “water protector” at Standing Rock to native students, activists and allies around the globe who have organized protests and rallies. “The struggle at Standing Rock is about several things: the environment and health of our homelands, U.S. treaty commitments, Native sovereignty and the importance of the sacred,” says Stevens, associate professor and director of Native American studies, as well as associate professor of English. “We will continue to fight for those rights wherever they are threatened and fight for the future of this planet for everyone else.”

Leave it to Patterson, who recently honeymooned at Standing Rock with his bride, Renée Roman
Water Is Life
In a span of eight months, Standing Rock went from a relatively quiet protest movement to an all-out zeitgeist. When the calendar flipped to December, an estimated 6,000 activists were encamped on the windswept prairie, enduring heavy snow and sub-zero temperatures. Many of them inhabited tents and teepees; others, modern campers and tiny makeshift houses. At night, they dozed off to the sounds of chanting and drumming against the purring of generators.

Kacey Chopito, a history major in the College of Arts and Sciences and Maxwell School, was one of several Syracuse students who made the pilgrimage to Standing Rock, which is tucked in the shadow of the sacred Black Hills near Cannonball River, a tributary of the Missouri River. He spent Thanksgiving learning about, praying for and protecting the sacredness of water and Mother Earth. Chopito says that, as an indigenous person, he has felt called to protect and give back to the planet—a philosophy reflected in the “water-is-life” saying.

“‘Water is life’ has deep cultural and spiritual meaning because water gives us life, and, without water, life cannot continue,” says Chopito, a member of Zuni Pueblo in western New Mexico. “At camp, people didn’t say ‘Water is life’; instead, they shouted it with every part of their being. … Land is more than a place to stay. It includes our culture, our language and our way of life. At Standing Rock, we’ve been standing strong to protect and ensure the survival of Mother Earth and its sacredness.”

Chopito’s travel partner was Cody Jock, a political science major in A&S and Maxwell and one of the organizers of a recent march on campus against the pipeline's construction. “This fight is not over. It’s far from over,” he told the Daily Orange. “We’ve got still a lot of work to do.” Jock is a member of the Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne in Upstate New York.

Standing Rock didn’t become part of the national consciousness until recently, when the Sioux objected to the pipeline’s path being close to their main source of drinking water. A single leak, they argued, could poison water supplies for them and for other reservations downstream. What is less known is that Dakota Access originally had planned to run the pipeline upstream, near Bismarck, but decided otherwise when they thought it was too close to the city’s drinking water.

“Although state and federal regulators had issued permits for the pipeline to proceed, the Army Corps never give permission to drill under the Missouri River, next to the reservation,” says Joe Heath ’68, general counsel for the Onondaga Nation and a New York State attorney. “What worries a lot of people is that Trump wants to finish the pipeline because he’s been invested in it.”

Heath says that, if completed, the DAPL would traverse four states, carrying more than 570,000 barrels of crude every day from the Bakken Formation in western North Dakota to a terminal in Illinois, east of St. Louis, where it would be shipped to refineries and converted into usable fuel.

“If the pipeline comes to pass, it would be another sad chapter in the U.S. government’s long
history of permitting construction of potentially hazardous projects on tribal nation lands and waters, without consulting them,” says Heath, a former adjunct professor of law at Syracuse. “There’s a lot at stake here.”

The Sioux also have been concerned about the DAPL running through a patch of nearby land teeming with burial and prayer sites and culturally significant artifacts. Although the land is not theirs, they claim it has been unilaterally taken away from them by the U.S. government—a violation of the Fort Laramie Treaty, which they and seven other tribes signed in 1851. Drillers have been bulldozing these sites without proper authorization or tribal consultation.

“The legal process behind these environmental and archaeological reviews for energy projects doesn’t always work,” Heath adds. “It’s a potent reminder of how U.S. government treaties with Native Americans are done under what [indigenous author] Vine Deloria has called a ‘cloud of impotence.’ Clear promises often dissolve into rhetoric when put to the test.”

Heath should know. Before taking up with the Onondaga in 1983, he made headlines as one of the attorneys representing inmates involved in the 1971 Attica prison riot in Western New York. (The suit was settled 18 years later to the tune of $12 million, in favor of the prisoners.) Since then, he has gained a reputation for being a “people’s lawyer,” fluent in civil rights litigation.

In October, Heath traveled to Standing Rock, where he saw more than 200 police and National Guardsmen use rubber bullets, pepper spray and water cannons to disperse activists from private land along the DAPL’s proposed route. When the dust cleared, 141 people were charged with criminal trespassing, rioting and endangerment by fire. “[The suspects] were thrown into dog kennels, with numbers inked on their arms, and held without due process of law,” Patterson says. In time, the scene at Standing Rock turned uglier. Clashes between protesters and law enforcement officials, in full riot gear, became regular occurrences.

Even though Oceti Sakowin is officially closed and temperatures are dropping, many protesters have refused to budge. “There are too many uncertainties about the Army Corps’ decision,” Heath says. “Plus, a lot of people have invested too much in the struggle to leave now.”

Chopito puts it this way: “Outside camp, we’re called ‘protesters’ and ‘agitators,’” even though we’ve been protecting water in a peaceful manner. Standing Rock is, and always will remain, unarmed. We are armed only with our prayers and our culture.”

Ride the Snake
When Patterson traveled to Standing Rock in August, he was in the final moments of his decade-long presidency of United South and Eastern Tribes, representing 25 tribes east of the Mississippi River. Like his wife, an actress with ties to Oklahoma’s Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, he is an activist with fire in his blood. In November, this was powerfully evident, when the activist pair whipped the audience into a frenzy at a campus panel discussion about Standing Rock. Patterson doesn’t suffer fools lightly, and often says what others don’t—that oil leaks and ruptures are daily occurrences and drillers rarely catch them; that the United States should do away with fossil fuel; that the Sioux are unlikely to benefit from the DAPL, anyway.
What also makes Patterson’s rap different from others is a willingness to tackle lesser-known yet equally salient issues, such as race, tribal nation sovereignty and sacredness. “They’re applicable not just to Standing Rock, but to all of Indian Country,” he says. A&S professor Sascha Scott says people at Standing Rock call themselves ‘protectors,’ instead of ‘protestors,’ to show they are not aggressors.

Patterson warns of an ancient Lakota prophecy about a “black snake,” which is supposed to rise from the deep and bring with it great sorrow and destruction. The “snake,” he says, may well be one of the more than 2.4 million miles of pipe that pumps black oil throughout the American heartland.

It is against this backdrop that the Sioux and other native people fear oil pipelines of any kind. “Pipelines may be cheaper and less accident-prone than trains, but they still leak or spill, usually with horrible results,” Patterson says, referring to a pipeline break in 2013 that dumped more than 20,000 barrels of oil onto a North Dakota wheat field. “The Army Corps of Engineers wrongly approved the whole DAPL project without adequately consulting Indian Country. This is a violation of tribal sovereignty, where we’re supposed to have a government-to-government relationship with the United States.”

That governments are obligated to consult tribal nations on infrastructure projects is outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which originated at a conference at Standing Rock in 1974. Adopted by the U.N. in 2007, UNDRIP has yet to be ratified by the United States, where the Obama administration considers it an aspirational document, but without any legal weight. “President Obama has done a lot to support UNDRIP, such as advancing the concept of self-determination to tribal nations, but that’s not the same as following international law,” Patterson says. "The situation at Standing Rock might have been avoided if the United States had embraced UNDRIP sooner."

Heath thinks the Sioux, who have been wrangling with the Army Corps in court for most of the year, still have a convincing case. “The area affected by the pipeline is private treaty land, granted to the Sioux as part of the Treaty of Fort Laramie,” he says. “Even though the U.S. government has tried to fix broken treaties by compensating tribes for lost land, none of them, including the Sioux, have accepted payment because they’d have to cede treaty claims.”

Complicating the situation are two laws that are supposed to protect tribal nation interests: the National Historic Preservation Act (1966), which preserves historical and archaeological sites in the United States; and the National Environmental Policy Act (1970), which provides a broad national framework for protecting the environment.

The question on everyone’s minds, says Jack Manno G’03, professor of environmental studies at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, is whether the DAPL has met the requirements of these two laws. “On one hand, the Army Corps and ETP claim the Sioux didn’t respond to their requests to identify sacred and cultural sites near the pipeline,” he says. “On the other, the Sioux feel they haven’t been given enough time to address the environmental-impact
question. All sorts of risks, such as oil leaking into their water supply, haven’t been taken into account.”

Some of that might change, if the Army Corps keeps its word. As a sovereign nation, the Sioux have the right to control their natural resources, as well as their domestic and tribal business dealings. But even with an EIS on the table, the Sioux are at a disadvantage. “Many tribal nations suffer from environmental racism,” says Arnold, adding that Standing Rock’s poverty rate is 43 percent, nearly triple the national average. “Suicide, mortality and dropout rates are some of the highest in the nation, as are rape and sexual assault. Health care is almost nonexistent. Eminent domain [expropriating private property for public use] has virtually obliterated Indian Country.”

Scholars insist the problems at Standing Rock—and the plight of tribal nations—run deeper. Arnold, for instance, points to the Doctrine of Discovery, a notorious papal document that European monarchies have used for centuries to legitimize the colonization of lands outside of Europe. Credit Thomas Jefferson for applying the doctrine to the U.S. government in the 1790s, thus setting the stage for American imperialism and the treatment of conquered indigenous peoples. It quietly was adopted into U.S. Indian law with Johnson v. McIntosh (1823).

Arnold is one of many trying to get the doctrine revoked. “It has justified racism and the enslavement of indigenous peoples since 1493,” he says. “This edict has given Christians the right to exploit any land occupied by non-Christians. It also has allowed them to enslave or kill pagans, if they can’t be converted. Combined with Johnson v. McIntosh, which has yet to be overturned, the doctrine has celebrated genocide on a global scale.”

Says Manno: “The clashes at Standing Rock are rooted in the doctrine principles of greed and subjugation. We must expose and renounce these papal bulls, if we have any hope of creating a more just society.”

Digital Smoke Signals
Bob Wilson, associate professor of geography in Maxwell, has built a career on studying the American environmental movement. He is part of a growing segment of scholars who feel that social media, combined with laptops, tablets and smartphones, is changing the way people engage in nonviolent activism.

Since the fall, social media has been covered Standing Rock with a focus and seriousness that is virtually unprecedented. “We’ve come a long way from the famous 1970s ‘Crying Indian’ anti-littering commercials or the how-to tips [to lower greenhouse gas emissions] at the end of ‘An Inconvenient Truth,’” Wilson says. “Live streaming videos and photographs showing police shooting tear gas into the crowd or spraying water cannons have captured the chaos at Standing Rock. The ‘water protectors’ have been narrating their own history.”

Fine by Sascha Scott, who says that mainstream media have been guilty of “rewriting the narrative” to suit their agenda. “Throughout American history, even when American Indians have been fighting to defend and protect their families, their land, their sovereignty, their way of life—even when they have been under fierce attack by the U.S. government and other forces—they have been depicted as the aggressors,” says Scott, associate professor of art history in A&S, where she specializes in American Indian visual culture. “That’s why [at Standing Rock] the
people have called themselves ‘protectors,’ instead of ‘protesters’—to make it clear that they are not the aggressors, that they are protecting their land and water and the rights of those living downstream.”

Stevens thinks social media activism is the way forward. He references the more than 1 million people who checked into Standing Rock’s Facebook page in October, in a show of support. “There was a rumor on social media that local police were using Facebook check-ins to track activists protesting the DAPL,” he says. “Organizers then called on ‘everyone’ to check in at Standing Rock to ‘overwhelm and confuse’ police. It was a great demonstration of solidarity.”

Based in A&S, Stevens says this “new kind of activism”—consistent, persistent reporting by people on the ground, without aid from mainstream media and their “profit-driven motives”—changes how indigenous people and their allies interact with one another. “At Standing Rock, we’ve been connected by the Internet and by a common cause,” he continues. “With the new [presidential] administration, new tactics will need to counter new threats. The academy is vital to this process, as we think about educating the current and next generation of students about respecting the planet.”

Ostensibly, Standing Rock raises important questions about tribal nation sovereignty and the legacy of colonialism. “Opposition to the pipeline always was more than threats to water posed by the pipeline, itself,” Wilson explains. He is concerned, however, that the Army Corps’ decision will be a short-lived victory for the Sioux. “Many of the people Trump has appointed to key positions in his administration are supportive of the pipeline and of increased oil development, more generally. More worrisome, the president-elect seems intolerant of dissent. Future protesters … may be met with a harsh response by the federal government.”

Which is where social media comes in, bridging distances and connecting cultures. The first thing Patterson did at Standing Rock was whip out his phone and send some “digital smoke signals.” “Indigenous networking picks up where other communications leave off,” he says. “We’re finally seeing humanity respond to our traditional knowledge and value systems. This response will help turn all of us into more responsible stewards of the environment, making Mother Earth better for our children and our children’s children.”

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http://asnews.syr.edu/newsevents_2016/releases/standing_rock.html

December 13, 2016

Pipeline 150 miles from Dakota Access protests leaks 176,000 gallons of oil

By Derek Hawkins
A ruptured pipeline has spilled more than 176,000 gallons of crude oil into a hillside and a Little Missouri River tributary about 150 miles west of Cannon Ball, N.D., where thousands of activists have spent months fighting construction of the Dakota Access oil pipeline, state officials said Monday.

A segment of the Belle Fourche Pipeline near Belfield, N.D., began leaking earlier this month, contaminating nearly six miles of the Ash Coulee Creek before cleanup workers contained it, Bill Suess, an environmental scientist from the North Dakota Department of Health, told the Associated Press. An estimated 130,200 gallons of oil spilled into the creek, and another 46,200 gallons leaked onto a hillside, Suess told Forum News Service in a separate interview.

The spill dirtied private and federal land along the waterway, but no drinking water sources were affected, Suess said. About 37,000 gallons of oil have been recovered so far, he said, and a crew of about 60 workers were averaging 100 yards of cleanup per day, though snow and single-digit temperatures have complicated the response.

“It’s going to take some time,” Suess told the AP. “Obviously there will be some component of the cleanup that will go toward spring.”

The incident stirred up fears among opponents of the Dakota Access pipeline about what could happen if project developer Energy Transfer Partners builds a segment of pipe under a Missouri River reservoir that provides drinking water to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

The spill occurred about a two and a half-hour drive west from Cannon Ball, where members of the Standing Rock Sioux and other Native American tribes, as well as environmental activists from around the country, have camped out since April in an ongoing demonstration against the Dakota Access pipeline. Opponents of the $3.8 billion project, many of whom call themselves “water protectors,” argue that the pipeline will pollute Standing Rock’s water supplies and damage burial grounds and other sacred lands. Energy Transfer Partners has said that leak detection equipment and the pipeline’s thick steel walls would prevent a major accident.

Earlier this month, the Army Corps of Engineers denied Energy Transfer Partners an easement that would have allowed the company to drill under the reservoir. The 1,172-mile pipeline is nearly complete, but the Army Corps said it will weigh alternate routes.

The Belle Fourche Pipeline, owned by Wyoming-based True Companies, was immediately shut down after a local landowner reported the spill to regulators on Dec. 5, company spokeswoman Wendy Owen told the AP. Electronic monitoring equipment failed to detect the leak, according to Owen, who said the pipeline may have ruptured when the hillside slumped.

“That is our number one theory, but nothing is definitive,” she said. “We have several working theories and the investigation is ongoing.”
Built in the 1980s, the pipeline is six inches in diameter and transports about 1,000 barrels of oil daily, Suess told Forum News Service.

The Dakota Access pipeline is 30 inches in diameter and could transport more than 500,000 barrels of oil daily.

Shortly after the leak was discovered, a labor group in the region with members working on the Dakota Access pipeline criticized True Companies for what it called a track record of accidents.

“Our members take pride in their work, and we won’t just stand by and allow an irresponsible pipeline operator to harm North Dakota’s natural resources or damage reputation of our industry,” Evan Whiteford, a spokesman for the Laborers District Council of Minnesota and North Dakota, told Forum News Service. “We think it’s time for state officials to step in and force the True organization to clean up its act.”

True Companies has a history of oil spills in the region, reporting three dozen spills totaling 320,000 gallons of oil since 2006, according to the AP. Federal pipeline regulators have hit True Companies with 19 enforcement actions since 2004, resulting in nearly $400,000 in penalties, the AP reported.

The Poplar Pipeline, operated by a True Companies subsidiary, leaked about 30,000 gallons of crude oil into the Yellowstone River in eastern Montana in 2015, prompting a town to shut down its drinking water service to 6,000 residents, the Casper Star Tribune reported. Belle Fourche Pipeline Co., also part of the True Companies family, has reported 10 oil spills since 2011, totaling nearly 5,000 barrels and resulting in more than $2 million in property damage, Reuters reported.

A representative from True Companies did not immediately respond to a request for comment.


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**December 14, 2016**

RCBWG Releases Summary of Best Practices Survey on Engaging Faith Communities

By Jame Schaefer
Society for Conservation Biology


Conducted on behalf of RCBWG from May 31-September 10, the results of this survey underscore the benefits to conserving biological diversity when researchers and practitioners relate positively to faith leaders and communities.
Respondents to the survey also shared their approaches to engaging leaders and members of faith communities in ways that might be helpful to other SCB members. Societal support for conservation has become increasingly vital for approval, collaboration, and advocacy of scientific solutions aimed at mitigating threats to the loss of biological diversity on the land and in the water. Results of the survey point to religious and native faith communities as allies in this quest.

Prepared by Jame Schaefer (Marquette University) and Susan Higgins (Center for Large Landscape Conservation) who serve on the RCBWG Board, “Best Practices Survey—Promising First Step toward Developing Guidelines” provides an overview of the responses to ten questions submitted by thirty-nine SCB members who have engaged leaders and members of faith communities in conservation projects. The faith communities represent the major world religions--Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism--and a diversity of native spiritualities including Australian Aborigine and Native American.

The projects on which SCB members reported occurred on all continents except Antarctica. Among the foci are aging polar bears, bison, climate change, coral rehabilitation, fish, iguana, kangaroo, rattlesnakes, terrestrial vertebrates, wildlife used for bush meat, forest management and restoration, restoration of rivers, and protective management of shrines and sacred places.

The Best Practices Survey was launched by the RCBWG as the first step of the three-year Best Practices Project aimed at producing guidelines for SCB members to consider when planning and conducting conservation research and application. During the second step proposed for ICCB 2017, the successful practices of some SCB members who participated in the survey will be highlighted in a symposium followed by a workshop during which best practices guidelines will be drafted. They will be refined subsequently, processed through several iterations, and presented to the SCB Board of Governors for recommending to SCB members.

Established in 2007, the RCBWG focuses on strengthening dialogue between biological conservation and faith communities and promoting within the SCB an awareness of the importance of their collaboration. The working group has engaged in a variety of activities including collaborative research on religious practices that affect biological diversity, sponsoring symposia at ICCBs and regional congresses to highlight projects in which SCB members have engaged faith communities, and the three-year Best Practices Project. During ICCB 2017, the RCBWG will be presenting the first Assisi Award to a faith community that has demonstrated a commitment to biological conservation.

Contact Jame Schaefer and/or Sue Higgins for additional information about the Best Practices Survey and Project.


December 20, 2016
Standing Rock 'water protectors' dig in for the winter

As winter rages over the Dakotas and temperatures plummet below freezing, NoDAPL protest movement members hold ground.

By Avery White
Al Jazeera

**Standing Rock Indian Reservation, United States** - When word came down from the Army Corps of Engineers to the Oceti Sakowin camp that the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) had been denied the final easement to drill below the Missouri River, residents of the camp celebrated the victory with hundreds of veterans who had come to protect natives and their allies.

The excessive force used by authorities in recent clashes near the drilling site had spurred a public outcry on behalf of the unarmed occupants, who call themselves "water protectors", of Oceti Sakowin, and many veterans saw it as a call for action. For the veterans, native and non-native alike, of every age and from every war, travelling to Standing Rock was an extension of their lifelong commitment to serving the country.

Successive blizzards have left the camp thickly blanketed with snow.

Even as winter rages over the Dakotas and temperatures plummet below freezing, members of the movement are not ready to pack it in yet. Those who have chosen to hold the ground at Oceti Sakowin have doubts that Energy Transfer Partners, the company behind the DAPL, will honour the Army Corps' decision.

With the rapidly approaching term of President-elect Donald Trump, who has been vocal in his support of the pipeline, many fear that the struggle has only just begun.

View photos here:


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**December 21, 2016**

Standing Rock Sioux - A Model for Protection of Planet and its People

By David Schilling, Senior Program Director, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
Institute for Human Rights and Business

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe met with representatives of Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) on October 30, 2014 and learned of their plans to build the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), a 1,172 pipeline from North Dakota to Illinois that would carry 470,000 to 570,000 barrels of oil per day. A tribal spokesperson told us this month that their response to ETP was clear: they opposed a
project “that would jeopardize our water and sacred sites.”

With most of the DAPL completed, the Standing Rock Sioux, after a months-long campaign against the pipeline, has won a major victory when, on December 4th the Army Corps of Engineers announced it will not grant the permit to drill under the Missouri River, near Sioux lands. Assistant Secretary for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy said they would need to explore alternate routes for the crossing.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, the Elders, International Indigenous Youth Council, and Oceti Sakowin Camp led a movement that touched tens of thousands of people, many of whom came to Standing Rock to show solidarity with the “water protectors”. Tribes across the US and Canada, veterans, religious leaders, human rights and environmental activists all came to stand with the Standing Rock Sioux. On a conference call with over 100 investors the day after the decision, Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II said to us: “For once our voices are being heard and the right decision was made.”

The struggle is not over. The new US President-elect has declared his strong support for the project and the Army Corps of Engineers’ decision could be reversed. Security and law enforcement has used violent tactics against the nonviolent water protectors, yet support for the movement to protect water, sacred sites and the right to self-determination remains strong.

The investor community can play an important role, particularly in engaging the seventeen banks that have provided loans for DAPL. On the December 5th investor call, organized by the Standing Rock Sioux, First Peoples Worldwide, and the Investors & Indigenous Peoples Working Group, information was shared about the risk to banks lending to the project because the oil markets have changed drastically since ETP negotiated the contracts in 2014, putting their investments at risk. Clark Williams-Terry, director of energy finance for Sightline Institute and co-author of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis’s report, The High-Risk Financing Behind the Dakota Access Pipeline: A Potential Stranded Asset in the Bakken Region of North Dakota, said that there is a contractual obligation for ETP to complete the project by January 1, 2017, which is not going to happen. Companies that have committed to ship oil through the pipeline have a right to back out of their commitment.

The current situation creates an opening to press the banks and energy companies to adopt strong human rights criteria that recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as determined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility have already filed shareholder resolutions with a number of companies, including Enbridge Energy, Phillips 66, Marathon Petroleum, Wells Fargo, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, with more to come. The resolutions call on the banks to issue a public report on the North Dakota DAPL, describing its financing of companies involved in the pipeline and whether its Indigenous rights policy was applied, and to consider policy options to improve implementation, including enhancing the risk metrics and due diligence process. Free, prior and informed consent is central to any meaningful criteria to assess whether or not to invest in projects that impact Indigenous lands and communities.
With the Brexit decision in the UK in June and the results of the November US presidential election, the human rights and business community is doing some soul-searching about what serious challenges it might face in 2017 and beyond. In this context the Standing Rock Sioux and its supporters present an example of effective action and the ripples of hope have gone out to a wide circle of humanity with the message that committed leadership, nonviolent action and respect for the earth can create transformative change.


December 21, 2016

Ecuador’s Standing Rock? Tanks and Helicopters Deployed Against Indigenous Shuar People Defending Ancestral Territory From Mega-Mining

Chakana Chronicles

The Shuar community of Nankints in Ecuador’s Southern Amazon region was evicted in August 2016 to make way for a Chinese copper mega-mining project. The mining company, through a court order, has claimed these indigenous territories without prior consultation or consent from the affected communities, who have lived there for hundreds of years. The land allocated for the project covers over 41,000 hectares and the forced evacuation of other Shuar communities is expected.

Since the August eviction, the county of San Juan Bosco has been militarized to quell protest. In November, several Shuar people attempted to reclaim the indigenous territory of Nankints within the San Juan Bosco county. Clashes broke out with police and military personnel guarding the mining camp, leaving several injured. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), called for dialogue with the Government to avoid further confrontations but no resolution was reached.

On Wednesday December 14th, a new confrontation took place in the mining camp, leaving one police officer dead and others wounded. After these events, the Ecuadorian Government announced a state of exception throughout the Morona Santiago province, stripping residents of the rights to freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and inviolability of the home, among others. The Government also deployed over 700 elite soldiers and policemen, military tanks, trucks and helicopters to San Juan Bosco to join the existing military presence there. According to witness testimony, army rifle blasts have caused women and children to seek refuge in the mountains. Military personnel and police are patrolling the streets in armoured vehicles. The community is in a state of terror.

A statement from the President of CONAIE, Jorge Herrera, reads: “We fear that the direction [the Ecuadorian President] has taken will lead to a massacre of Ecuadorians, and it is the absolute priority of CONAIE to avoid this. We are strongly requesting that the Church and
international organizations intervene and mediate to find a dialogue that does not deepen and aggravate the existing conflict.”

An online petition has been addressed to key decision makers in the Ecuadorian Government demanding:

- the demilitarization of San Juan Bosco and dialogue to avoid further confrontation and acts of violence.
- adherence to international law and the Ecuadorian Constitution, both of which forbid the presence of military personnel in indigenous territories and require prior, informed and free consultations before the implementation of mining or oil projects.

Dr Carlos Perez, President of the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations (CAOI) has issued a statement expressing “solidarity with the family of our brother, the fallen police officer, and those wounded, who are also our brothers, knowing that no extractive project, no matter how profitable, nor any amount of bloodshed is a justification for violence. We demand a rigorous judicial investigation into the acts of violence to find those responsible for these criminal acts”.

Dr Perez went on to demand an investigation into the unsolved murders of Bosco Bisuma, Fredy Taisha and José Tendenza, leaders of the anti-mining resistance movement in Ecuador, killed in 2009, 2013 and 2014 respectively.

Protests in solidarity with the Shuar people have been mobilized in cities across Ecuador.

For more information about mining in Ecuador, see the documentary “Paradise Under Threat: The Mirador Mine in the Condor”. The film presents information about the Chinese copper mine and its potential impacts on the environment; shows the biological and cultural diversity that is at risk; and presents some of the perspectives of the local people and other Ecuadorians about the mine project. The trailer can be viewed below.


To see Dr Carlos Perez talking about why he fights against mega-mining projects in Ecuador, see this short interview from 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irw-d-xhOIA&feature=youtu.be

Sign this petition to show solidarity with the Shuar people of Ecuador.

#SOSPuebloShuar

December 22, 2016

Latinx Christianity and religion/ecology are focus of new M.A.R. concentrations

Yale Divinity School

Yale Divinity School is launching two new concentrated programs of study in the Master of Arts in Religion (M.A.R.) degree path: Latinx and Latin American Christianity and Religion and Ecology.

The School is accepting applications now for students interested in entering the new programs as they debut in fall semester 2017.

“We are excited to lead the way in these important areas of study, which build on our existing strengths and address important demographic and social trends that are calling out for scholarly attention,” said Jennifer Herdt, Gilbert L. Stark Professor of Christian Ethics and Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. “A rapidly growing percentage of U.S. Christians today are Latinx. As symbolized by Pope Francis, Christianity’s center of gravity is increasingly shifting toward Latin America. And the environmental crisis is the most critical issue facing humanity today.”

The new program in Latinx and Latin American Christianity is led by two new members of the YDS faculty, Erika Helgen and Benjamin Valentin. Helgen’s research focuses on Protestants and Catholics in the struggle for Brazilian national identity and on pluralism and religious history in Mexico. Valentin’s research and teaching concentrate on contemporary theology and culture; U.S. Latino/a Christianity and theology; Christianity in Latin America; liberation theology; and constructive theology.

The program allows students to focus their study on Latinx Christianity in the United States or Christianity in Latin America—or both, with an eye towards developing a more hemispheric perspective in relation to these fields and geographic areas.

The Religion and Ecology concentration draws on faculty resources across the theological disciplines including biblical studies, ethics, liturgical studies, pastoral care, spirituality, theology, and world religions and ecology. It spans the study of eco-theology; eco-spirituality; eco-feminism; environmental ethics; and cosmology. The program grows out of the decades-long work of senior lecturers Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim in building the field of religion and ecology, most recently in collaboration with the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

Faculty and their courses include:

- **Willie Jennings**, “Doctrine of Creation”
- **Eboni Marshall-Turman**, “Race, Gender, and Ecology”
- **Teresa Berger**, “Liturgy and Cosmology”
- **Jennifer Herdt**, “Animal Ethics”
Students in the new Religion and Ecology concentration are also able to take “Introduction to Religion and Ecology,” a joint offering of YDS and Forestry taught by Tucker and Grim, as well as other cross-school courses including “A Communion of Subjects: Law, Environment, and Religion”—a joint offering of Divinity, Forestry, and Yale Law School.

YDS Dean Greg Sterling described the new concentrations as expressions of two of the major goals outlined in the School’s strategic plan: diversity and the effort to build a living-building residential complex.

“Some of our new faculty make the first possible, and widespread commitment of faculty to eco-theology make the second feasible,” Sterling said. “It is essential that we have a curriculum that aligns with our orientation and ambitions as a school. The new programs reflect the commitment of YDS to address two of the most important concerns in our society.”

Added Herdt: “The arrival of our many new faculty makes this the perfect moment to launch these new M.A.R. concentrations. One is highly focused, and one is intensely interdisciplinary. Both signal our presence at the leading edge of theological education.”

Updates to this article:

The M.A.R. Concentration in Religion and Ecology is separate from the Joint Degree in Religion and Ecology offered in cooperation with the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (FES). Learn more about the Joint Degree in Religion and Ecology here.

The M.A.R. Concentration in Religion and Ecology was originally named “Faith and Ecology”. The name was updated to “Religion and Ecology” in this article on Jan 25th, 2017 to reflect a decision approved by the YDS faculty.

http://divinity.yale.edu/news/latinx-christianity-and-religioneology-are-focus-new-mar-concentrations

December 27, 2016

Vermont diocese to celebrate Year of Creation in 2017

By Cori Fugere Urban
Catholic News Service

Burlington, Vt. - The Burlington, Vermont, diocese will observe a special Year of Creation during 2017.
Similar to the global Year of Mercy, which emphasized the role of mercy in the Catholic faith, the diocesan-wide Year of Creation will bring an intentional, heightened focus on ecological justice.

Various events, initiatives and resources will be made available to parishes and Catholic schools to better educate and encourage the embracing of Pope Francis' message in his 2015 encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

The pope's second encyclical is addressed to "every person living on this planet" for an inclusive dialogue about how people are shaping the future of the planet. He calls the church and the world to acknowledge the urgency of environmental challenges and to join him in embarking on a new path.

Burlington Bishop Christopher Coyne is inviting all Catholics to join with him in celebrating this Year of Creation in the diocese.

He noted the pope emphasized that concern for the natural world is no longer optional but an integral part of church teaching on social justice. "While it has been nearly two years since its publication, I think it is time for the church here in Vermont to study, ponder and begin to implement much of what the pope calls for" in the document, the bishop said.

A diocesan Year of Creation Committee comprised of scientists, activists and people of faith has been formed to assist with the initiative.

The committee will be working on an awareness campaign and events throughout the year including a statewide Catholic schools ecological awareness and action project in April; an Ecological Justice conference in September; four creation-themed liturgies throughout the year; a possible "Laudato Si' in the Parish" training program; the spring issue of Vermont Catholic, the diocesan magazine, dedicated to the Year of Creation; and a soon-to-be completed website — vermontcatholic.org/yearofcreation — will provide resources for parishes and anyone interested in learning more.

David Mullin, executive director of Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity and a member of the Year of Creation Committee, said Habitat for Humanity builds simple, decent and affordable housing for families in need: "The indoor and outdoor quality of life go hand and hand. Energy-efficient homes help decrease our dependence on all forms of energy."

The diocese also has formed a partnership with Commons Energy that allows for low-cost energy efficiency audits and energy efficiency/renewable energy projects on many church-owned buildings throughout the state.

Additionally, one of the first steps taken at diocesan headquarters in South Burlington to take seriously Francis' call to counteract a throwaway culture and set an example of ecologically responsible practices is to adopt the practice of composting. It is "a simple way to support circular models of production and consumption," said Stephanie Clary, mission outreach and communication coordinator.
"My work is helping families get into simple, decent and affordable housing. If the earth beneath and around those homes is not healthy, the families will not be healthy — physically or spiritually. It is all connected," Mullin said.