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March 3, 2017

Pope goes electric, sets example for world leaders

By Julia Travers
NationofChange

“Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it.”

[Pope Francis](#), long known for his [commitment to environmental stewardship](#), has taken his call for [climate](#) action one step further. He now owns an [electric car](#), a Nissan [LEAF](#).

The LEAF was given to [the Pope](#) in late February by German asset manager and mathematician Jochen Wermuth. The Pope’s Nissan LEAF can travel up to 107 miles with a 30 kilowatt-hour battery. Wermuth tried to give the Pope a Tesla Model S electric limousine but the Pope preferred a smaller vehicle. The two men took a small test drive through the Vatican. Wermuth drove and the Pope sat next to him in the front seat.

Pope Francis is “the last superstar of mankind,” Wermuth [said](#). He also described the Pope as an example for other heads of state as well as every man on Earth.

Wermuth’s connection with the Vatican extends beyond this eco-friendly gift. Wermuth’s asset management firm is working with the Vatican to update the [Holy See’s](#) investment strategy in line with the Pope’s climate views. They are using his 2015 [encyclical](#), *Laudato si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, as a guide.

“Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it,” the Pope [said in his encyclical](#).

Wermuth is known for giving the largest donation ever to the Greens, Germany’s environmental party. The 47-year-old Protestant supported the Greens’ election campaigns in Berlin, Baden-Württemberg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, donating around \$630,000. Wermuth worked for Deutsche Bank in Russia in the 90s and is now a proponent of [divesting](#) from fossil fuels, Spiegel Online [reported](#).

<http://www.nationofchange.org/2017/03/03/pope-goes-electric-sets-example-world-leaders/>

March 9, 2017

Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious inspires eco-citizens

By Gail DeGeorge
Global Sisters Report

As the Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious XVII wrapped up March 3 in Yangon, Myanmar, participants said they would carry with them a renewed commitment to their responsibility as eco-citizens, the message of environmental care to their congregations and beyond, and an affirmation of the meeting's importance in strengthening the work of religious in the region.

The conference's theme, "A Call for Global Ecological Conversion," used Pope Francis' encyclical "[*Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home*](#)" and his papal bull, [*Misericordia Vultus*](#), which introduced the Holy Year of Mercy, as spiritual frameworks in exploring issues related to the environment and climate change.

Participants said the message of caring for the Earth, countering climate change and helping communities that global warming affects most will continue beyond the five-day Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious, known by its acronym, AMOR.

"By doing this, we have done something for the whole Catholic church and the church in Myanmar," Sr. Margaret Maung, president of the Catholic Religious Conference of Myanmar, a [*Sister of Our Lady of the Missions*](#) and chairwoman of the 19-member working committee, said in an interview. "By the presentations and the table sharing and interacting, we came to know each other and the reality of the church, and that we are one with the Earth and the strengths and weaknesses of the environment and climate change."

A [*keynote address*](#) by Yangon Cardinal Charles Bo on the first day, Feb. 27, set the tone for the gathering of 132 participants from 21 countries. Country reports from Bangladesh, India, Korea, New Zealand and others showed the effects of climate change and pollution, as well as specific concerns, such as use of nuclear power in Japan in the wake of the 2011 [*Fukushima nuclear disaster*](#).

In subsequent days, participants explored more deeply the meaning of eco-spirituality and the inherent Asian spirituality that celebrates "contemplative consciousness" and "ecological consciousness understood as awareness and sensitivity to the interconnectedness of all beings and things on Earth," as Claretian Fr. Samuel Canilang, director of the [*Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia*](#), said in his presentation.

"Asians don't need anyone to tell us the environment is sacred," he said. "It is natural to us."

Not long ago, Canilang said, Asians may have felt self-conscious focusing such attention on the spirituality of the natural world, lest others accuse them of being pantheistic. But *Laudato Si'* is liberating Asians to speak of their relationship with nature, he said.

Moreover, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in its document "[Contemplate](#)" reminds consecrated men and women of the call to ecological conversion, he said.

"The new relationship with the natural environment, which the congregation describes as 'relational circularity,' calls for a new spirituality, one that is ecological and contemplative," Canilang said.

Among other presentations, participants listened to best-selling Myanmar author Sayama Ju, whose novels and writings often focus on ecological themes. They heard from Caritas Myanmar about its work with ethnic populations and small farmers in encouraging sustainable crops and agricultural methods, as well as the organization's continued recovery for the thousands affected by [a 2008 tropical cyclone](#).

They visited a government-run agricultural research center that focuses in part on the development and use of organic fertilizers and seeds.

In his homily during closing Mass, Bo said participants should not fear taking on corporate giants and governments that would harm the environment.

"You are like David," he said. "You face the Goliath of governments, cronies, business interests who would like to mutilate our Earth, our mother, our sister. But be armed with conviction."

In a follow-up interview with *GSR*, Bo said in urging religious women and men to take on corporate and government interests, the needs of people who live in poverty and ethnic communities caught in the middle of conflicts over natural resources have to be a key concern.

He hoped the AMOR conference would serve as inspiration for women and men religious to "be more outspoken regarding ecological issues and destruction of natural resources and deforestation, especially connected with armed groups and ethnic groups and military armed groups," he said. "More and more, we are trying to speak out, especially the religious as well as some of the bishops, for ecological justice and economic justice. These two things are linked together."

Yet amid the need for strategic planning, fundraising and other aspects of undertaking missions, he cautioned religious communities about losing their spiritual dimension and encouraged them to focus on people who live in poverty.

"Our biggest temptation today is to become an NGO," he said in his homily, underlining Francis' message for all religious "to return to simplicity."

Many participants took heart particularly that the conference was in Myanmar, itself a country emerging from 60 years of military rule and isolation.

"We are coming from the area where we had war for many years and always feeling like we were the people who suffered," said Sr. Christa Mariathas of the [Holy Family](#) province in Sri Lanka, a country that endured [a 25-year civil war](#) that ended in 2009. "Sometimes we become furious because we didn't have opportunities, but [Myanmar] is opening once again to be with other countries. We feel that we are the same and we can come out of our boundaries just to embrace all nature."

Several sisters told *GSR* that they were going to adopt practical means of furthering the recycling and ecological efforts of their communities.

Sr. Angelina Ng, a contemplative [Carmelite](#) nun from Singapore, said her community has been doing a renovation project, and workers have strewn trash around the worksite. She said she would get recycling bins and start recycling materials from the site.

Others mentioned expanding gardens, using more organic fertilizers and undertaking more awareness-building at parishes and schools on the need to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Many say the meeting was important not only for the ecological message but for the opportunity to connect with women religious from other countries.

"I love AMOR," said Sr. Maria Vianney Hoang Thi Diep, an Our Lady of the Missions sister in Vietnam. "I love the way we put energy together to find ways to become ecological citizens. That is new for me, to become an ecological citizen."

She said she plans to tell her sisters to be more aware of ecological sensitivities and raise awareness with those they work with.

"I also like the connection between contemplation, communion and mission," which was a focus of the meeting, she said.

"When you contemplate, you are one with God, and you feel God's love for oneself, and you can see the love of God is present in nature," she said. "When you have deeper communion with God, you can have deeper communion with self, with another and with nature. And then it links to mission to do something to care for others and do something to care for our Earth."

AMOR began in 1972 as a forum for women religious in Asia to meet every two to four years to focus on particular themes. This year, men for the first time were invited to attend, as a recognition of the broadness of the topic. Women religious will continue to organize AMOR, but men will continue to be invited to participate in future sessions. The next gathering will be in Indonesia or Bangladesh in 2021.

Sisters from different congregations and countries networked during meals and tea breaks. During an evening of entertainment, some performed impromptu songs from their countries, and all sang a united rendition of "Lord, We Thank You" in English.

The event and the participation pleased AMOR organizers.

"We became close with each other and shared how we are doing with our ministries, to share resources, share materials and whatever we come across in congregations," Maung told *GSR*.

Sr. Eden Panganiban, one of the event's facilitators, said she hadn't participated in previous AMOR gatherings and said she found the networking and interaction valuable. Yet follow-through is important so connections continue, she said.

"Part of the reawakening or rebirth would be that AMOR is to really take up a mission for Asia-Pacific on how consecrated women with the support of men could be a voice in the region," she said. "AMOR would have its own particular mission for that and become even a prophetic voice within the church structure."

A statement summarizing the theme and goals of the meeting was drafted and discussed. Participants received this version March 5:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/341326224/Asia-Oceania-Meeting-of-Religious-XVII-statement>

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<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/asia-oceania-meeting-religious-inspires-eco-citizens-45421>

March 10, 2017

Native Americans march to the White House in spiritual battle against pipeline

By Lilly Fowler
Religion News Service

Washington - On a cold rainy morning, members of the American Indian tribes shouted "Water is sacred" and "Keep it in the soil; can't drink oil" as they marched toward the White House.

The March 10 protest against the Dakota Access pipeline included hundreds of Native Americans, some dressed in traditional feather headbands and ponchos.

They beat drums and danced as they made their way through the streets.

The march came after a federal judge on Tuesday denied a request by the Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River tribes to halt construction of the pipeline.

American Indian tribes have long argued that the \$3.8 billion underground pipeline — which would run nearly 1,200 miles from oil fields in North Dakota to an existing pipeline in Illinois — endangers cultural sites and drinking water that comes from the Missouri River. The pipeline's path would come within a half-mile of the Sioux reservation.

The government had intended to further study the environmental effects of the Dakota Access pipeline, but President Trump directed an expedited approval process after assuming office.

The protest, which began at the Army Corps of Engineers office, included a stop in front of Trump International Hotel in downtown D.C.

Faith leaders and members of various religious denominations featured prominently among protesters.

Colin Douglas, 32, a pastor of Nixa Christian Church in Springfield, Mo., said eight Disciples of Christ ministers traveled to participate in the event, dubbed "Native Nations Rise."

"This is a personal fight for me," Douglas said, noting that his family has Native American roots. "I also believe water is a gift from God. Whenever we endanger it, we sin."

Muslims, too, stood alongside the American Indian tribes.

Yasmin Rizvi, 52, a retired schoolteacher, and her daughter Hena Rizvi, 25, a sales representative, traveled from Pennsylvania. As Shiite Muslims, they said, they could identify with the threat Native Americans face because history tells them other Muslims have confronted similar obstacles.

"Water is the basic need of life," Yasmin said.

The Rev. Jakob Thibault of Providence, R.I., said he believes "there's kind of a blindness to indigenous issues" in much of the country.

But he said Christianity teaches him "that we don't accept the status quo."

<https://religionnews.com/2017/03/10/native-americans-march-to-the-white-house-in-spiritual-battle-against-pipeline/>

March 10, 2017

Pope receives electric car, as studies for an all-renewables Vatican underway

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

El Papa's got a brand new car. And it's electric.

In December, Pope Francis received a Nissan Leaf electric car as a birthday present from Jochen Wermuth of Wermuth Asset Management, a German investment firm focused on sustainability. The gift was made public in late February.

Later this year, the firm itself plans to make an additional 10 electric vehicles accessible for a three-month period as part of a Vatican electricity mobility pilot project.

In addition, Wermuth Asset Management has pledged to prepare for the pope four studies that aim to make the Holy See one of the first nation-states in the world to be completely emissions-free and run entirely on renewable energy. Specifically, the studies will examine how the Vatican can:

- run on 100-percent renewable power;
- move to 100-percent emissions-free mobility;
- use electric vehicle batteries for power storage;
- align its capital with the goals of Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home."

Taken together, the studies hope to show that such sustainable steps are not just good for the environment but can be done by any group today in a way that's ultimately profitable, said Wermuth, the firm's chief investment officer, in a press release.

As for Francis' new ride, he said that the pope using an all-electric car "is great news for the world" and sets an example for other heads of state, and all people, to follow.

"Today it is no longer just morally right, it is also cheaper to own an electric car compared to a combustion engine car," Wermuth said. "The Pope is moving from sharing his views on the world via his encyclical *Laudato Si'* ... to implementing the *Laudato Si'*."

In his June 2015 encyclical, Francis said, "There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy."

The pope later in the document stressed "the use of high polluting fossil fuels ... needs to be progressively replaced without delay," but also recognized that there currently is minimal access in the world to clean and renewable energy. While some countries have made progress, Francis said, "There is still a need to develop adequate storage technologies" for renewable energy more widely.

"Investments have also been made," he noted, "in means of production and transportation which consume less energy and require fewer raw materials, as well as in methods of construction and renovating buildings which improve their energy efficiency. But these good practices are still far from widespread."

A global effort, Francis said, is essential to addressing environmental and social problems. "Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*," he wrote in the encyclical.

The pope reiterated that message ahead of the two United Nations climate summits that followed the encyclical's release.

Before COP 21 — which resulted in the Paris Agreement among 195 nations to hold average global temperature rise between 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees Celsius — Francis said [at a U.N. office in Nairobi](#) that the meeting must develop a new global energy system based on minimal fossil fuel use, energy efficiency and "use of energy sources with little or no carbon content."

Ahead of COP22, he stressed that individual or national action "is not enough" to address a complex issue like climate change, but, quoting *Laudato Si'*, "instead it is necessary to implement a responsible collective response truly intended to 'work together in building our common home.'"

At COP22, held in November in Marrakech, Morocco, the Climate Vulnerable Forum — consisting of 48 developing countries most vulnerable to climate change — pledged to meet 100-percent domestic renewable production "as rapidly as possible," and by no later than 2050. Along with Germany and Mexico, the United States also submitted a long-term low-emissions strategy that sought to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent below 2005 levels by 2050. That plan, introduced under former President Barack Obama, was viewed as "[somewhat wishful](#)" at the time, and now is unlikely to be acted upon by the Trump administration, which has promised to increase fossil fuel production and cut environmental regulations.

Francis is not the first pope to drive electric. In 2012, French carmaker Renault [donated two electric vehicles](#) to Pope Benedict XVI, himself [nicknamed the "green pope"](#) for his own writings on ecology and creation care, as well as overseeing the installation of a solar array atop the Paul VI audience hall and plans for \$660 million solar power plant. In 2011, an auto contest sought designs [for an "eco-friendly" popemobile](#).

Before the Nissan Leaf, Francis was driven around Rome in a compact Ford Focus, which he swapped in lieu of a Mercedes limo. During his U.S. visit in September 2015, he was ushered around in a tiny Fiat 500L. [According to the German newspaper Der Spiegel](#), Francis was first offered a Tesla Model S but declined, opting for the more modest Leaf.

"A car is necessary to do a lot of work, but please, choose a more humble one. If you like the fancy one, just think about how many children are dying of hunger in the world," Francis [told a group of young priests](#) in July 2013, adding "It hurts me when I see a priest or a nun with the latest model car."

A goal of the Wermuth EV pilot project is to show that electric mobility can be both good for the environment as well as profitable for the Vatican or any community when compared to combustion-engine cars.

During a conference in January on *Laudato Si'*, Catholic investing and clean energy, Wermuth argued that electric vehicles have reached a level where they're economical alternatives to combustion-engine cars, which he linked to a bevy of health conditions, beyond climate change, that are exacerbated by the burning of fossil fuels: among them, cancer, asthma and allergies.

"It is economic nonsense today, when a Nissan Leaf costs Euro 20,000 and consumes only one-third the energy," he said of combustion-engine vehicles.

Wermuth, who is Protestant, added later in an interview with NCR at the conference that "A green industrial revolution is under way because renewable power and electric cars are now competitive.

"This means that the goals of *Laudato Si'* can now be profitably implemented while serving the poor. Anyone staying invested in fossil fuels risks losing its capital in addition to causing cancer and climate change," he said.

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<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/pope-receives-electric-car-studies-explore-all-renewables-vatican-underway>

March 10, 2017

Strengthened by Standing Rock, Native Americans march on D.C. What's next for the movement?

By Elizabeth Flock and Iman Smith
PBS

Despite bitter cold, wind, rain and hail, hundreds of members of Native American tribes and supporters from around the country turned out Friday to march on the White House, in an effort to turn the momentum of the [Standing Rock protests](#) into a more sustained movement for native rights.

The march and a rally in Lafayette Square across from the White House came after four days of [protest, prayer and lobbying](#) on Capitol Hill, where Native communities called for the protection of natural resources and demanded the new administration honor treaties with indigenous peoples.

Those issues were drawn into sharp focus last year during the months-long fight over the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#) at the Standing Rock reservation. Oil is set to flow [as early as next week](#) through the pipeline, a \$3.8 billion, 1,172-mile project running from North Dakota to Illinois.

“Since the very beginning, we understood that Dakota Access was just one part of a greater fight for indigenous rights and indigenous sovereignty,” said Dallas Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network, one of the more active groups behind the Dakota Access protests at Standing Rock.

Last July, the Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes [filed a lawsuit](#) to stop the pipeline’s construction, sparking months of protests. In court filings, they said the pipeline “threatens the Tribe’s environmental and economic well-being and would damage and destroy sites of great historic, religious and cultural significance.”

On his fifth day in office, President Donald Trump [gave the green light](#) to the Dakota Access Pipeline, as well as the Keystone XL pipeline, which indigenous groups have also protested. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which issues permits for all water crossings, [granted a final easement](#) required to complete for the Dakota Access Pipeline last month.

The executive order and Army Corps decision was a blow for opponents of the pipeline. But Goldtooth said the momentum from the fight signaled the start of a larger movement.

“That resistance is growing,” he said. “The fire of Standing Rock burns brightly in countless communities across the country, native and non-native.”

On Friday, indigenous groups were joined by Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, along with celebrities, environmental groups, peace activists, veterans, college students and nonprofits working on First Amendment and LGBT rights.

Logan Betts, a student at George Washington University, decided to come to the march after following the protests at Standing Rock — including reports of [violent confrontations](#) between law enforcement officials and protesters in November — for months in the news.

“Today, if they can stand out in the cold, then we can come out and support them,” Betts said.

Veterans for Peace, a nonprofit that promotes alternatives to war, said members of the group from Arizona, New York, Michigan, North Carolina and Mexico traveled to Washington to participate.

Douglas Ryder, 70, a veteran from Durham, N.C. who attended the march, said he was concerned that President Trump was too focused on strengthening the military instead of providing more federal funding for issues like environmental protection.

“I’m here to speak for those who have no voice: the water, the children, the seven generations coming down the road,” Ryder said. “Our policies are taking away resources from essential issues.”

Before taking office, Trump's transition team met twice with tribal leaders from around the country, according to [reports from Politico](#) and the [Indian Country Media Network](#). But the community remains wary. The White House did not respond to NewsHour's request for comment on its relationship with the Native American community.

Four Arrows, an indigenous member of Veterans for Peace, said the country's hawkish foreign policy and approach to energy development began negatively impacting indigenous people and the environment long before Trump got elected. Still, he said, he appreciated that people were becoming aware of the issues.

"When Trump was elected we had a lot of non-Indians supporting us, almost 15,000 people at Standing Rock, crying and mad, and the Indian people, we were all just sort of smiling," said Four Arrows, a former dean of education at Oglala Lakota College. "And finally one Lakota woman went over to a lady ... and said, 'Honey welcome to our world.' Because we've been living with this for 200 years."

"This is in your face now. Americans are waking up."

The good news, he added, "is this is in your face now. Americans are waking up, and starting to realize what we've done in killing the indigenous worldview [and] the biodiversity of the planet."

Though the battle over the Dakota Access Pipeline may be lost, indigenous advocates on Friday said they are seeking to use that battle — and the tactics they learned there — as a segue to launch a broader fight over other pipelines.

One of the targets is the 148-mile [Trans-Pecos Pipeline](#), which will carry natural gas to Mexico, passing through the Big Bend region's Chihuahuan Desert, one of the [most biologically diverse areas](#) in the country. The Society of Native Nations has erected a camp there to help stop the pipeline, in collaboration with local communities.

The Trans-Pecos pipeline is being constructed by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners — the same company building the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Vicki Granado, a spokeswoman for the company, wrote in an email that while "we respect that there are a number of opinions on our country's need for more infrastructure," domestic demand for oil, gas and other fossil fuel-based products "is only increasing, not decreasing."

Trans-Pecos isn't the only pipeline indigenous groups plan to protest this year. Others include the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, which would transport oil to refineries in Louisiana and cut across the Atchafalaya Basin, the country's largest swamp and a natural heritage area; and the Sabal Trail Pipeline, which would carry natural gas from Alabama to central Florida. Environmentalists say the Sabal Trail Pipeline [could damage the Floridan aquifer system](#), which provides drinking water to millions of people in the region. Protests over the Sabal Trail Pipeline have already led to [dozens of arrests](#).

The march on Friday was about more than just pipelines, however.

Krissy White, 22, and Steven Thompson-Oakes, 26 –members of the Mohawk tribe who came to Friday’s event from Akwesasne, New York — said they opposed the continued contamination of water from old power plants near their reservation. [According to NOAA](#), Alcoa and General Motors plants dumped toxic pollutants into the Grasse and St. Lawrence rivers around Akwesasne over several decades.

Thompson-Oakes said the showdown at Standing Rock encouraged him and White to fight back in their community.

“We’ve got cancer in our reservation in Akwesasne to this day, and our women can’t even breast feed because of the chemicals,” he said. “And so now, we’re just hoping we get the community support, to [say] to the government: This is your mess, you need to clean this up.”

In a speech near the White House on Friday, Standing Rock Sioux Chairman David Archambault II urged protesters to remain active even if they didn’t see immediate results.

“During the last year, people around the world have sacrificed and traveled and stood with us as Standing Rock,” Archambault said. “We face a lot of obstacles and we face a lot of setbacks, but we’re not defeated.”

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/strengthened-standing-rock-native-americans-march-d-c-whats-next-movement/>

March 14, 2017

Vatican investment conference explores clean energy 'for our common home'

By Marie Venner
National Catholic Reporter

[Vatican City](#) - In late January, I had the opportunity to attend a small conference at the Pontifical Lateran University on Catholic actions, financial and otherwise, to resolve the climate crisis.

The tagline for the Jan. 27 conference — titled “*Laudato Si’* & Catholic Investing: Clean Energy for our Common Home” — came by way of the October 2015 statement [issued by the heads of Catholic continental bishops’ conferences](#) ahead of the COP 21 international climate change summit in Paris: “Put an end to the fossil fuel era, phasing out fossil fuel emissions and providing affordable, reliable and safe renewable energy access for all.”

Among the leaders who spoke were Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the Vatican’s new dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, and Christina Figueres, the former executive secretary for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, along with:

- Mark Campanale, founder of the Carbon Tracker Initiative;
- Franciscan Sr. Sheila Kinsey, executive co-secretary for justice, peace and integrity of creation commission of the International Union of Superiors General;
- Lutheran Rev. Henrik Grape of Sweden from the World Council of Churches;
- Papua New Guinea Cardinal John Ribat, president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania.

The experience of attending as a participant left me feeling surprised to see how far we have come in a few years, in our understanding and willingness to speak to the grave urgency of the climate crisis. Figueres was definitive on the need to ween the world off fossil fuels in the next few years. Though not often seen first as a Catholic, her call to metanoia was the sharpest and clearest of any of the speakers.

“This is a moral responsibility that we all share,” she said. “That moral responsibility, how are we going to ensure that it is achieved before it is too late for the most vulnerable? We need to align our moral compass ... we need to be clear that fossil fuels kill.”

Other speakers were also compelling with their words.

Cardinal Ribat said those on Pacific islands are facing rising seas on all sides. They are helpless in the face of this challenge, so even while they switch to renewable energy sources in their own lands, this effort must be taken up by us all, without delay, to protect all life.

Some of us at the meeting spoke about what it would take to bring clean renewable energy to those still without electricity and truly take responsibility for our brothers and sisters.

The discussion reminded me of something Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a climate scientist at the University of California-San Diego and member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said during a Global Catholic Climate Movement webinar last summer [marking the *Laudato Si'* one-year anniversary](#). Ramanathan argued that if the top 1 billion people in the world each paid \$150, those funds would cover the electricity needs of those who lack it (1 to 1.2 billion) or have intermittent energy (about 800 million).

Closer to home, one idea we came up with was advocating our local energy systems to quickly shift toward renewables sources. That level of engagement can often offer more impact than contacting state or federal representatives. A friend of mine who's worked in this area said that just 15 minutes a week can make a real difference. I've contemplated making this a Lenten practice.

The work of Campanale and the Carbon Tracker Initiative has been critical in comprehending the situation. In his presentation, he said that while fossil fuel companies are projecting increases in fossil fuel usage in the next two decades, those forecasts don't align with current energy demand, the increasing role of renewables and looming changes in energy. Studies show that to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, only a third of existing fossil fuel reserves can be burned — and even less to keep average global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees, which was

deemed necessary to protect those people on Pacific islands from losing their homes entirely to rising seas.

Campanale added that fossil fuel companies “need to wind down or be wound down in an orderly fashion,” but that we shouldn’t wait for them to talk about the future.

It became apparent that we need to turn off the spigot to avoid surpassing what our atmosphere and oceans can absorb. Roughly 20 percent of carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for 1,000 years, so what we put in the atmosphere now will remain there for generations to come. And every year we wait makes the year-on-year reductions sharper, deeper and more difficult — but it doesn’t have to be that way. The difficulty comes with continuing to delay.

Cardinal Turkson called attention to paragraph 165 of Pope Francis’ encyclical “*Laudato Si’*, on Care for Our Common Home,” in which the pope stated “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.”

The message was clear — it’s a moral issue — and was reinforced recently after German sustainable investment firm Wermuth Asset Management announced it would [provide the Vatican a series of studies](#) on how it can shift toward the use of 100-percent renewable energy — and along with it, zero emissions.

Rev. Grape of the Church of Sweden reminded us: “Our action must be driven by our belief that another world is possible ... We must have a vision, that is fed and nurtured by faith communities, transforming to a low-carbon society as an earth community, beyond borders.”

He continued: “Justice and equity are part of the spiritual vision that faith communities can bring, along with hope. Hope is a first step in walking the path of transformation. Hope has two beautiful daughters: anger and courage. Courage to start the transformation is so needed.”

Figueres, who recently launched the [Mission 2020 project](#) focusing on global development in response to climate change, said that “*Laudato Si’* must be put starkly into numbers. We must bend the curve [of fossil fuel emissions and carbon in the atmosphere] by 2020.” She pointed out that “temperatures are on a rapid upward curve,” with average global temperatures now having [broken the roof on records](#) the past three years.

Figueres focused her remarks through the church’s and Francis’ mission to assist refugees. The number of refugees and displaced people eclipsed 60 million for the first time in 2015, the highest point since the agency began record-keeping. Figueres estimated as many as 100 million to 300 million people displaced in some way if the world doesn’t address climate change.

Further, she said, we’ll be “condemning the 1 billion still in extreme poverty to perpetual, extreme poverty. The impacts of climate change will grow exponentially both in intensity and in frequency, and that requires investing very scarce resources into rebuilding very basic, scarce infrastructure that then won’t get to devote that to health, education and well-being.” By directing investments away from fossil fuels and toward renewables would also allow those

poorest people energy access while also improving health, increasing food security and creating new jobs.

In closing, Figueres said, “We must achieve the bending of emissions — work together, act together, decide together, show that the arc of compassion, the arc of solidarity, the arc of love is not broken. We have to keep our own moral call awake.”

Asked often what keeps her up at night, she said there are seven little pairs of brown eyes, which she understands now represent seven generations in the future. “They are asking, ‘What did you do? What did you decide and what action did you take to prevent disaster?’ We must answer: ‘We collectively did not what we thought was possible but what was necessary.’”

I couldn't agree more.

[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.]

<https://www.nronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/vatican-investment-conference-explores-clean-energy-our-common-home>

March 15, 2017

Have faith in religion's ability to bridge the political divide

By Robyn Purchia
SF Examiner

Since the George H.W. Bush administration, Mustafa Ali has worked to reduce the violence that pollution and climate change wreak on marginalized, struggling communities. But last week, after 24 years at the Environmental Protection Agency's Office on Environmental Justice, he resigned. Ali said proposed deep budget cuts to EPA programs would dismantle his office, eliminate key grant programs and harm the people he serves.

“Each new administration has an opportunity to share what their priorities and values are,” Ali [told Mother Jones](#). If the proposed cuts are an indication, the Trump administration and GOP-led Congress don't value the safety of minority, poor and indigenous neighborhoods.

It feels hypocritical. Republican leaders tout their pro-life values, but want to kill off the Clean Water Rule that keeps children healthy. They call themselves Christians while attacking climate programs that attempt to reduce risks vulnerable populations face from extreme heat, flooding and air pollution. They prioritize pipelines above our water, our history and our livelihoods.

It's hard to imagine Jesus putting the profits of a few above the needs of many. Why isn't Ali's work valued universally? How can environmentalism breach the political divide?

"I think conservation has largely failed to really capture the public imagination and to get underneath politics to something deeper," said David Kurz, a Christian and Ph.D. student at UC Berkeley, to an audience at the [Religion and Ecology Summit](#) last Friday in San Francisco.

Kurz later told me he feels like he lives in two worlds: a world of academia and a world of faith. Some of his environmental friends won't set foot in church. Some of his Christian friends don't understand his environmental work. There's very little overlap in the things they discuss.

"I just rub against these broader, national political gridlock things," he told me.

Kurz believes rooting environmentalism in Christian traditions can help breach this divide. He described the gospel's power to transform movements. Christian social leaders, like William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King Jr., invoked this power to abolish the United Kingdom's participation in the slave trade and promote civil rights in the United States. Linking the environmental movement to Christian tradition might give it wings.

But Christian groups and religious leaders, like Pope Francis, already advocate for climate change policies, clean air and water. Almost two decades ago, Rev. Sally Bingham founded what would become the environmental nonprofit Interfaith Power and Light in San Francisco. Catholics and evangelicals strongly opposed the Dakota Access pipeline. If rooting environmentalism in Christian traditions were the only answer, Ali would still be at the EPA.

Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, a theological and social ethics professor, presented another idea at the summit. Speaking specifically about climate change, she also proposed reframing public discourse. But instead of tailoring the issue to specific groups, she advocated exposing the brutal realities of social inequality.

"The race and class dimensions are stark," Moe-Lobeda told the audience. "Caused overwhelmingly by the world's high-consuming people, climate change is wreaking death and destruction first and foremost on impoverished people who are, disproportionately, people of color."

Moe-Lobeda urged us all — Trump supporters and liberal activists — to look at the way our consumption, choices and climate mitigation schemes hurt communities. She pointed to the crucial role religion plays in both exposing this truth and "igniting and sustaining hope in the face of unbearable realities that truth telling may reveal." We need a slap in the face and a soft pillow to cry on.

But the slap doesn't need to be hard or delivered by someone in the religious community. Simply by walking away, Ali conveyed a broader message underlying both Kurz and Moe-Lobeda's talks. Environmentalism isn't only about the science and burdensome regulations many Republicans distrust and hate. It's also about children, families and neighborhoods.

Religion can certainly help the movement capture a wider audience. But environmentalists should emphasize this simple, unifying message again and again: We want to empower people.

Robyn Purchia is an environmental attorney, environmental blogger and environmental activist who hikes, gardens and tree hugs in her spare time. Check her out at robynurchia.com.

<http://www.sfexaminer.com/faith-religions-ability-bridge-political-divide/>

March 16, 2017

New Zealand river granted same legal rights as human being

By Eleanor Ainge Roy
The Guardian

In a world-first a [New Zealand](#) river has been granted the same legal rights as a human being.

The local Māori tribe of Whanganui in the North Island has fought for the recognition of their river – the third-largest in New Zealand – as an ancestor for 140 years.

On Wednesday, hundreds of tribal representatives wept with joy when their bid to have their kin awarded legal status as a living entity was passed into law.

“The reason we have taken this approach is because we consider the river an ancestor and always have,” said Gerrard Albert, the lead negotiator for the Whanganui iwi [tribe].

“We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as in indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management.”

The new status of the river means if someone abused or harmed it the law now sees no differentiation between harming the tribe or harming the river because they are one and the same.

Chris Finlayson, the minister for the treaty of Waitangi negotiations, said the decision brought the longest-running litigation in New Zealand’s history to an end. “Te Awa Tupua will have its own legal identity with all the corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a legal person,” said Finlayson in a statement.

“The approach of granting legal personality to a river is unique ... it responds to the view of the iwi of the Whanganui river which has long recognised Te Awa Tupua through its traditions, customs and practice.”

Two guardians will be appointed to act on behalf of the Whanganui river, one from the crown and one from the Whanganui iwi.

Albert said all Māori tribes regarded themselves as part of the universe, at one with and equal to the mountains, the rivers and the seas.

The new law now honoured and reflected their worldview, he said, and could set a precedent for other Māori tribes in New Zealand to follow in Whanganui's footsteps.

"We can trace our genealogy to the origins of the universe," said Albert. "And therefore rather than us being masters of the natural world, we are part of it. We want to live like that as our starting point. And that is not an anti-development, or anti-economic use of the river but to begin with the view that it is a living being, and then consider its future from that central belief."

Financial redress of NZ\$80m is included in the settlement, as well as an additional NZ\$1m contribution towards establishing the legal framework for the river.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being>

March 16, 2017

Tribes March in DC for Water and for Mother Earth

By Ethan Goffman

E – The Environmental Magazine

On February 22, police removed Native American protestors outside the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. The protestors were trying to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline, which crosses sacred tribal ground and threatens to pollute their drinking water. With final approval at the onset of the Donald Trump presidency, the pipeline seemed inevitable.

"A lot of people were sad to see us forcibly removed at gunpoint," says Kandi Mosset of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nations. "We wanted to make sure fight didn't end [so] we said we'll go to DC," adds Mosset, a spokeswoman for the Indigenous Environmental Network. Thus was born the Native Nations March on Washington.

The march itself took place on March 10 beneath an eerie snow that turned to water at our feet, like some deity weeping frozen tears. Following a beautiful spring day, this weird weather seemed part of a changing climate.

Beginning at the Army Corps of Engineers, which gave the pipeline's final go-ahead, the march encompassed a vast column, snaking through the heart of DC. There was much whooping and beating of drums, punctuated by chants of "Water is life," "Honor treaty rights," and "You can't eat oil / keep it in the soil." Banners of various tribes, of Mother Earth, and proclaiming "I stand with Standing Rock," punctuated the scene.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is one of a host of issues highlighted by the march, although it has been in the public eye since August 2016. That was the start of an unprecedented gathering to block the pipeline, eventually swelling to over a hundred tribes, as well as supporters including U.S. military veterans. Such a gathering “hadn’t been seen in living memory,” says Dallas Goldtooth, an organizer for the Indigenous Environmental Network.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is essentially complete and could be in operation “as early as next week,” says Mosset. However, she adds that “Standing Rock is still in court.” Therefore, “even if oil is flowing through the pipeline” it will stop if the tribe wins a motion for summary judgment.

The Dakota Access Pipeline has come to represent environmental encroachment on tribal land that has gone on for decades. Goldtooth explains, “Standing Rock is only the tip of spear.” The protests will “elevate issues beyond Standing Rock.”

The overarching issue is tribal sovereignty. Environmental projects that affect tribes often pay only lip service to consultation. The tribal goal is embodied in the slogan “consent, not consultation.” Full tribal participation, as well as environmental review, is needed for every pipeline or coal mine that will affect indigenous territory.

The legacy of exclusion and broken promises stretches through 500 years of European contact with the Americas. Mosset points out that, of over 450 treaties signed between different tribes and the United States, “out of all, not one has been upheld. Right now the U.S. is in violation of its own constitution.” In the case of the Standing Rock Sioux, this applies to a pair of treaties signed at Fort Laramie in 1851 and 1868.

Native nations continue to oppose fracking, drilling, and mining on a slew of fronts, particularly in the west, including the Bakken formation, Choctaw Canyon, and the Powder River Basin. “Native communities are fighting the extrajudicial leasing of federal lands to oil and gas interests,” says Goldtooth.

Climate change is also at the forefront of the united tribes’ consensus. The protests are “about the fossil fuel industry all over the world, the regime that really controls government,” says Mosset.

An array of speeches in front of the White House to conclude the march hammered home respect for the environment and the dangers of corporate greed. “At the beginning of time, the creator called a special and strong people to Turtle Island, the four corners of this nation,” proclaimed Fawn Sharp, President of the Quinault Indian Nation before a cheering, fist-pumping crowd. “They instructed, protect Mother Earth as you would protect your birth mother.”

The speakers extolled a special duty both to one’s ancestors and to future generations, held together by environmental stewardship. “All are bound in the great web of life” said Tulsì Gabbard, representative of Hawaii and of Samoan heritage, heralding “the fight for clean water, the life blood of the planet.”

Gabbard added that “Native American governance . . . was there from the beginning of Western democracy.” Indeed, some historians credit the Iroquois Confederation as the root of U.S.

democracy. Gabbard explained that “before beginning deliberations” a tribal council would “express gratitude to cousins, the earth, pools, lakes, medicinal herbs, trees, the great creator.”

The Native Nations March, however, is occurring amid gloom regarding democracy and environmental stewardship. While the Obama administration handed native activists key victories on the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, the Trump administration has reversed these. The Environmental Protection Agency, under the leadership of Scott Pruitt, is on the verge of disbanding rules protecting against climate change and ensuring clean air and water.

In the face of this, says Goldtooth, it is important to “mobilize the masses to apply political pressure,” including through nonviolent civil disobedience. The Native Nations March is just one part of a long struggle.

The resurgent native coalition is not acting alone. The Women’s March was just a month ago, and April will see the March for Science and the People’s Climate March in protest of Trump policies. “The struggle for women’s rights is directly connected to our struggle to protect Mother Earth,” exclaims Goldtooth. “You have to have native people involved.” Decrying corporate greed, materialism, and environmental exploitation, he emphasizes that “the same ideologies perpetuate violence upon women and upon the Earth.”

<https://emagazine.com/native-nations-march/>

March 21, 2017

India court gives sacred Ganges and Yamuna rivers human status

BBC News

A court in northern Indian has given the Ganges and Yamuna rivers the status of "living human entities".

The high court in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand said this would help in the "preservation and conservation" of the highly polluted rivers.

It added that the "legal status" ensures that polluting the rivers would now amount to harming a human being.

Both rivers are considered sacred in India and are considered goddesses by the majority Hindu population.

The ruling comes a week after the Whanganui River in New Zealand became the first in the world to be granted the same legal rights as a person.

- [NZ river given legal human status](#)
- [India's dying mother Ganges](#)

- [Indian Ganges floods break records](#)
- [India offers holy water by post](#)

The court said in its ruling that Hindus had "deep faith" in the two rivers and they "collectively connect with them".

"The rivers are central to the existence of half of the Indian population and their health and well being. They have provided both physical and spiritual sustenance to all of us from time immemorial," it added.

It went on to add that both rivers had become heavily polluted due to industrialisation and rapid urbanisation.

Two top state officials have been appointed as the "legal guardians" of the rivers and will represent their rights.

Activists say the order is likely to fast track efforts to clean the rivers.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-39336284>

March 21, 2017

Ganges and Yamuna rivers granted same legal rights as human beings

By Michael Safi
The Guardian

The Ganges river, considered sacred by more than 1 billion Indians, has become the first non-human entity in [India](#) to be granted the same legal rights as people.

A court in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand ordered on Monday that the Ganges and its main tributary, the Yamuna, be accorded the status of living human entities.

The decision, which was welcomed by environmentalists, means that polluting or damaging the rivers will be legally equivalent to harming a person.

Ambitious scheme to channel water from regions with a surplus to drought-prone areas could begin in days, but Bangladesh has raised concerns

The judges cited the [example of the Whanganui river](#), revered by the indigenous Māori people, which was declared a living entity with full legal rights by the New Zealand government last week.

Judges Rajeev Sharma and Alok Singh said the Ganges and Yamuna rivers and their tributaries would be “legal and living entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities”.

The court in the Himalayan resort town of Nainital appointed three officials to act as legal custodians responsible for conserving and protecting the rivers and their tributaries. It ordered that a management board be established within three months.

After 140 years of negotiation, Māori tribe wins recognition for Whanganui river, meaning it must be treated as a living entity

The case arose after officials complained that the state governments of Uttarakhand and neighbouring Uttar Pradesh were not cooperating with federal government efforts to set up a panel to protect the Ganges.

Himanshu Thakkar, an engineer who coordinates the South Asia Network on Dams, [Rivers](#) and People, said the practical implications of the decision were not clear.

“There are already 1.5bn litres of untreated sewage entering the river each day, and 500m litres of industrial waste,” he said.

“All of this will become illegal with immediate effect, but you can’t stop the discharge immediately. So how this decision pans out in terms of practical reality is very unclear.”

Indian courts have been critical of three decades of government efforts to clean up the Ganges, a 2,500km waterway named after the Hindu goddess Ganga. The latest cleanup initiative has set 2018 as its deadline, one that water ministry officials have [reportedly conceded](#) is unlikely to be met.

Thakkar said Monday’s decision could be an effort by courts to broaden their scope for intervention in the river’s management. “[The] government has been trying to clean up the river by spending a lot of money, putting in a lot of infrastructure and technology, but they aren’t looking at the governance of the river,” he said.

He gave the example of the Yamuna, which is monitored by 22 sewage treatment plants in Delhi. “But none of them are functioning according to their design in terms of quantity and quality, and we don’t know the reason,” he said.

“You need a simple management system for each of the plants and give independent people the mandate to inspect them, question the officials and have them write daily and quarterly reports so that lessons are actually learned.”

Environmental activists say many rivers in India have become dirtier as the economy has developed, with city sewage, farming pesticides and industrial effluents freely flowing into waterways despite laws against polluting.

The Yamuna is the main tributary of the Ganges that officials say is tainted with sewage and industrial pollution. In some places, the river has stagnated to the point that it no longer supports life. Water from the Yamuna is treated chemically before being supplied to Delhi's nearly 19 million residents as drinking water.

In New Zealand, the local Māori *iwi*, or tribe, of Whanganui in the North Island had fought for the recognition of their river – the third largest in New Zealand – as an ancestor for 140 years.

Last Wednesday, hundreds of tribal representatives wept with joy when their attempt to have their kin awarded legal status as a living entity was passed into law.

“We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that, from our perspective, treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as an indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management,” said Gerrard Albert, the lead negotiator for the *iwi*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/21/ganges-and-yamuna-rivers-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-beings>

March 22, 2017

On World Water Day, African church leaders highlight shortages

By Fredrick Nzwili
Religion News Service

NAIROBI, Kenya (RNS) As she drives her family's donkeys to a new borehole at the base of the Uuni Hills in eastern Kenya, Eunice Wambua says the water it provides is much cleaner than what she used to get from a dam several miles away.

“It was dirty water and we believed it colored our teeth brown,” she recalled.

Wambua, 17, used to have to skip church services to walk to the dam, where in the dry season, many from her village would scoop the sand on a nearby riverbed to get water because the level had dropped so much.

The borehole, which community leaders said was drilled with help from World Vision, also helped her recover part of her life.

“This water is clean. It's a blessing,” she said. “Now I have more time for schoolwork and church activities.”

On a continent where people spend long hours trekking and queuing for water that is not always clean, such projects, initiated by church groups and NGOs, improve the livelihoods of women and children.

But they don't solve the problem of water shortages, and amid drought conditions the aquifers that the boreholes tap are also under threat.

The World Health Organization has [designated](#) March 22 as World Water Day. The U.N. agency estimates that there are more than 663 million people “living without a safe water supply close to home, spending countless hours queuing or trekking to distant sources, and coping with the health impacts of using contaminated water.”

This year's theme is “Why waste water?,” with an emphasis on reducing, treating and reusing wastewater.

The drought in the Sahel — a region that forms a dry belt across northern Africa — has left millions without any water to drink and is being linked to three deaths in recent days in Kenya due to consumption of unsafe water.

“There are no drops to reduce, recycle or reuse,” said professor Jesse Mugambi of the University of Nairobi, who added that many in the region are spending World Water Day “praying for drops of rain to quench their thirst and that of their livestock.”

In Machakos, a county about 40 miles southeast of Nairobi, Anglican Bishop Joseph Mutie Kanuku said people in his diocese walk as many as 10 miles or more to find water.

“The people — many women and children — are suffering serious shortages. The journey they take also slows down development and church work,” he said.

Evangelical pastor Mutua Munyaka of the nearby Kavunyu Africa Inland Church said his church can only do so much.

“We have drilled boreholes, built community dams and surface dams across streams, but still the demand is much higher,” Kanuku said. “The church's help can go far, but the government must shoulder the bigger responsibility.”

Kanuku blamed climate change for much of the problem and said more trees and sand dams are needed to keep water from flowing out to the Indian Ocean.

He fears that drilling more boreholes — a common practice at the moment — will worsen the water crisis in regions.

“By drilling, we are not adding water to the ground. Within a few years, the water table will sink further,” he said.

(Fredrick Nzwili is an RNS correspondent based in Nairobi)

<http://religionnews.com/2017/03/22/on-world-water-day-african-church-leaders-highlight-shortages/>

March 23, 2017

A wall in their river: Flooded Ngäbe communities continue to fight dam

By Tracy L. Barnett
Global Sisters Report

Kiad, Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca, Panama - "Bulu Bagama is my positive name. Luis Jiménez, my negative one," the Ngäbe elder began, standing on an expanse of cracked mud that covered what for generations was his family patrimony. A tumbledown shell of a house lay in ruins, and a few dead leaves clinging to one remaining tree provided scant shade from the sweltering midday sun.

The words, referring to his indigenous name and the one imposed by the dominant Spanish culture, summed up the feelings of betrayal from a people that has fought bitterly for nearly two decades to stop the Barro Blanco dam, a hydroelectric project that to local communities and environmentalists has become a symbol of everything that's wrong with the current model of development in Panama.

Bulu and his wife, Adelaida González, stood in the mud and recalled that terrible night last August when they awoke to find the waters of their sacred Tabasará River seeping into their home. They scrambled to collect their children and as many of their possessions as possible. Neighbors weren't so lucky; their houses were completely washed downstream. A child narrowly escaped drowning in those harrowing hours.

They had been given no warning, he said, and since negotiations with the government and dam builder were ongoing, the family had thought they were safe. The affected communities of Kiad, Nuevo Palomar, Quebrada de Caña and Quebrada de Plata weren't consulted about the flooding of their lands, they say, which directly affects around 500 people but also has an important impact on the entire Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca, an autonomous territory that is home to more than 150,000 individuals of the Ngäbe and Buglé indigenous groups. The Tabasará River in itself is sacred for them, as is the ceremonial site that is now submerged.

Despite the years of fierce resistance, the dam was built downstream, and last May the reservoir began to fill. Now the residents of the flooded communities are just asking that the water level be brought down to the boundary of their territory, consistent with the law.

Kiad is an important cultural and ceremonial center for the Ngäbe; there along the river lay two sets of ancient petroglyphs that contain the clues to the wisdom of their ancestors. The boulders are now completely submerged, cutting off their connection to their past.

The Honduras-based company Genisa said it was conducting a "test flooding" of an area that, according to its environmental impact statement, was uninhabited. Just another deception, opponents claim, in a long line of them, including carbon-credit certification under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), a program designed under the Kyoto Protocols to allow

industrialized countries to "offset" their greenhouse gas emissions by supporting sustainable development projects in less-developed countries.

International human rights and environmental groups have [maintained](#) that Barro Blanco was anything but sustainable, and that the history of human rights violations associated with the dam project should make it ineligible. Finally, the Panamanian government [withdrew](#) the CDM registration last November — a first for the CDM program.

"The tactics this company used were pretty much what all companies have used — [falsifying studies](#), not doing interviews or doing them [far](#) from the affected communities," said Fr. Joe Fitzgerald, a member of the Vincentian community of Soloy who has ministered to the Ngäbe people in the region for 12 years.

"Genisa has been horrible in their whole treatment of the situation."

The project was [temporarily suspended](#) in part for noncompliance with the environmental impact assessment, but the suspension was eventually withdrawn and the project continued.

Genisa, contacted by telephone and Twitter, has not responded to requests for an interview.

The flooding was a bitter anticlimax to a battle that has incited thousands across the country to take to the streets, and the government to go to extreme measures to ensure the dam's completion.

Barro Blanco is just one of more than 30 dams that have been built, with [dozens](#) more proposed or underway in Panama, and it is far from the largest, at a generating capacity of just 28 kilowatts and an affected territory of fewer than 18 hectares. Severe police repression against the mostly indigenous protesters has drawn fire from the international community, and on March 17 the case was one of several heard by the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) in Washington, D.C. ([See related story.](#))

"They know it's a minor project," said Osvaldo Jordán, executive director of the Panamanian nonprofit Alianza para Conservación y Desarrollo (Alliance for Conservation and Development), one of the groups that requested the hearing. "If there was a functioning rule of law in this country, it would have been canceled long ago. However, there is a symbolic element that the government did not want to allow to happen ... which is that a group of people would take a firm position without major resources and make a project like this go down."

A sister's role

At its peak in 2011, and again in 2012, the battle to stop the dam effectively [shut down commerce](#) in the western part of the country, as thousands of Ngäbe protesters and their allies [blocked](#) the Pan-American Highway. Mercy Sr. Edia López was among them.

"I came into the area just to ask for a service job as a missionary with the poorest population of the country, without realizing that they were facing a very big problem with land and water,"

said López, known as "Hermana Tita" throughout Chiriquí province. A native of Chiriquí, she has been working in the *comarca* since 2010, when she moved from another district near the Costa Rica border. A small, animated woman with an easy laugh and a quick wit, she has witnessed the severe police repression that has occurred. She was moved to tears as she recalled seeing several indigenous activists injured in clashes.

Long before Pope Francis released "*Laudato Sí, on Care for Our Common Home*," López was focused on land and water issues. "I was always interested in the struggle before the pope's call and had a passion for the matter of caring for the common home, and I became involved in the mining struggle of the indigenous population and the local leaders," she said. "It was a tremendous struggle."

In the beginning, the fights against the mining and against the hydroelectric dams were linked, she said. The movement won a [victory](#) with a law to stop international investment in the mining industry in 2011 and with a [new law](#) to prohibit mining in the *comarca* in 2012. But a growing number of hydroelectric dams were still underway, including Barro Blanco, and the fight went on.

"I honestly didn't know what to do, but there we were in the streets, in the protests, and in meetings with the leaders, the coordinators, the grassroots leaders," López said. She found herself helping with logistics, with mediation with government leaders and police — roles that were beyond anything she'd imagined, but it was what needed to be done, and so she did it.

"I was just a witness, a logistical support, a moral support, a spiritual support, a friend of the leaders. I supported in any way I could."

Dead forest

The Jiménez family lost everything they owned in that flood. Bulu's anguish turned to rage as he recounted all that his family has lost, and then related the way the government first denied his people's existence, and then tried to buy them off.

Just upstream, the Miranda family also struggles with the loss of their river and their farmland, and continue what looks to be a losing battle to maintain their homes and way of life.

Göejet Miranda's face was grim as he dipped the paddle into the cloudy, foul-smelling waters of the Barro Blanco dam reservoir through a corridor of death — grand old trees that once shaded a clear, free-flowing river now gray skeletons against a dry blue sky. The trees had provided essential food for a wide variety of fish and freshwater shrimp that were a big source of people's livelihood, said Miranda; most of the fish species have died out since the dam began operating, and the shrimp as well.

He docked the boat and clambered out onto the mud alongside the dead remains of what modern agroforesters would have called a diverse food forest, which the community had cultivated for generations. Once, it had produced a life of abundance — mangos, bananas, papayas, quince, oranges, pineapple, cacao, coffee, yams, beans, corn and much more were their main source of

income as well as food. More than 40 types of medicinal herbs that served as a natural pharmacopoeia now lay under a thick layer of mud.

The Miranda family compound is on higher ground than the Jiménez's, so water has not yet reached their homes. At the heart of their land is the cultural and educational center where their father, Manolo Miranda, developed the written form of Ngäbere, the language of the Ngäbe people. The reservoir now cuts off the village of Kiad and the educational center from the rest of the world — what was once less than an hour's walk to the closest town is now two hours.

Miranda's sister Weni Bagama is a leader of the April 10 Movement — the first of two different Ngäbe movements aimed at stopping the dam — and a deputy of the Ngäbe-Buglé General Congress, as is Miranda. She struggles to cope with the loss of their spring-fed river, where they bathed three times a day and washed their clothes and played — now a stinking mosquito breeding ground surrounded by acres of mud. She trudged uphill to their only source of clean water, a trickle from a spring uphill. As of early March, the waters had dropped enough to reveal the devastation of what had been their food forest. Now they were enduring a dry season hotter than any they remember, fearful of a rainy season and a rise in the waters that may spell the end of their lives in Kiad.

At the encampment

López is a frequent visitor to the encampment of the September 22 Movement, which lies along the Panamerican Highway, next to the entrance to the office of Genisa. She arrived just in time for the sunset prayer service and headed down the embankment into a rough-hewed settlement among the sparse trees. Some 30 practitioners of the Mama Tatda religion, practiced by a majority of Ngäbe, gathered under the palm-roofed shelter that serves as the encampment's church. Their haunting voices rose in the falling light as they sang and prayed in their native Ngäbere.

Their leader is Clementina Pérez Jiménez, a fiercely spiritual woman who paints her face before she goes into battle. Besides being a local chief, Clementina is national coordinator of the September 22 spiritual protest movement, named for the date in 1962 when their prophet, a woman named Besiko, had a vision that exhorts them to leave behind the modern materialist lifestyle and to protect the Earth and their cultural traditions.

"The Blessed Virgin said clearly that if the Barro Blanco project is not canceled, there will be disaster in the world," warned Clementina, 43, who was just 15 when she joined the student movement. She was the leader of the encampment in front of the entrance to the dam last May when police sent riot squads to forcibly remove them. She has laminated copies of the newspaper articles dated May 25, 2016, that show a cluster of police surrounding and grabbing her as she lay in front of the machinery, prone in her traditional white *nagua* dress.

"We have to respect the life of nature, in order to have the peace of God, because if we do not respect the legal norms of the life of God on Earth, then we cannot exist in the world," she told me earnestly. "It is clearly stated, 'If the indigenous peoples are beaten, the water will dry up or it

will become blood.' We do not want that to happen with the peoples of America or any other people."

Police repression reached a climax under former President Ricardo Martinelli, 2009-2014, when hundreds of indigenous protesters were injured and several were killed. Current President Juan Carlos Varela sought a softer image and initially promised to cancel the dam, and began 12 months of negotiations with the Ngäbe leaders.

Eventually, however, he switched sides and persuaded the current chief of the *comarca*, Silvia Carrera, to sign an agreement last August allowing the nearly finished dam to proceed in exchange for certain goods and services for the *comarca*.

A celebration soured

Llano Tugrí, the capital of the *comarca*, is a remote, wind-beaten outpost among the peaks of the Cordillera Central, reached in a more-than-two-hour, white-knuckled ride in a pickup with 15 people in the back, sitting on wooden benches.

Among them was the dignified Ngäbe deputy and dam opponent Weni Bagama. The group was heading to the capital to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the *comarca*. They arrived at midnight and slept a few hours in a rustic shelter. Despite the buffeting winds and cold temperatures, Weni awoke early to bathe in the river, a treasured ritual no longer possible in her own beloved Tabasará. She emerged glowing and resplendent in her bright blue *nagua* dress, ready to face the day.

She had waited for today to do her interview, in the capital of the *comarca* on its 20th anniversary, to emphasize her point. The creation of the *comarca* was gained after years of struggle, giving the Ngäbe people authority over their own lands. Barro Blanco is in clear violation of that law, Weni said, as well as a number of others, national and international, which she enumerated, and its presence threatens the integrity of the *comarca*.

"The government makes it seem like this is a great thing, without taking into account the human rights that are being violated, without seeing that our homes are being flooded," she told me.

"What we want to clarify to the public is that this wall was imposed upon us. When they began this project, it began with the intervention of the police. The public forum was held with police. When they built the walls, it was with the police. Every step of the process was imposed by the police."

What the April 10 Movement is asking for now, she said, is that the reservoir levels be lowered to below the limits of the Ngäbe territory. It's not enough to repair the damage or even the river, but it's a solution they can live with.

On a day dedicated to celebration, many present were in no mood to celebrate — partly because of Barro Blanco.

Carrera, the current *cacica*, or chief, surveyed the crowd from the back, serious and tired-looking under her broad-brimmed white hat. The Ngäbes' first woman cacique, she had been a strong voice at the forefront of the marches and the roadblocks. But something changed last August, when she signed the agreement with Varela there in the capital of Llano Tugrí. She was nearly thrown out of office afterward by her own people, who were furious about the agreement.

She continues to oppose the dam, she told GSR, and any other extractive project in the *comarca*. She only signed the agreement because the dam was done, and she felt it fell to her to negotiate some benefits for the *comarca* in exchange for their lost territory and ruined river: jobs for the people, a certain percentage of profits, goods and services. She ended up feeling bitter as her people opposed the agreement, the dam was finished and the *comarca* ended up with nothing but conflict.

"We learned when the Spaniards came and took our gold for mirrors," she said sadly. "The resources are our Mother Earth and they are ours to care for."

López is among those witnessing the potential of an even greater threat. One of the harshest impacts of the continuous pressure on Ngäbe authorities to open their resource-rich lands has been to intensify the fissures that open among the communities as deals are cut without community support. Ultimately, the interference has affected governability among the Ngäbe, she said.

Evidelio Adames, a biology professor at the University of Panama who grew up with the Ngäbe and has served as an investigator, witness and mediator throughout the conflict, agreed.

"They have their own wisdom, and they have the capacity to prevent such problems, but the government and the corporations are entangling them," he said. He traces the roots of the conflict to 2007, when the government opened bids to companies interested in building a hydroelectric plant on the Tabasará. "That auction was without consultation, and that was the first capital sin," he said. "Now cultural patterns have been affected, a watershed fragmented, and that impacts everything."

Back in Kiad, Manolo Miranda, brother of Weni and Göejet, sat on a hammock in the open-air schoolhouse and gently rocked back and forth, creating his own breeze as he reflected on the irony of a village without electricity being submerged by a hydroelectric dam. Kiad counts on one solar panel to charge its cellphones and computers; they have no need for hydro power.

It's been a tough fight, he said, and it's not over yet. But no matter what happens, he said, the battle against Barro Blanco has won more than it has lost.

He pointed to the success pressuring the Panamanian government to take away the company's capacity to issue carbon credits — thus far, it's the only case in the world where this has happened — and the embarrassing lobbying efforts against the Dutch and German development banks that helped to fund the project.

"We know that this struggle for justice has won. And we know that even if the project ends up operating in the end, it will do so with shame. What we've done, we've done with dignity and fairness.

"The eyes of the world are still on Barro Blanco. It has been an experience not only for the government, and for Panama, but it's been an experience for the corporations, and also for the financial institutions. And the resistance hasn't ended. The banks will see what happened at Barro Blanco and will apply this experience in other examples. This experience is absolutely not just for Panama, it's for the world."

[Tracy L. Barnett is an independent writer, editor and photographer specializing in environmental issues, indigenous rights and sustainable travel.]

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/wall-their-river-flooded-ng%C3%A4be-communities-continue-fight-dam-45661>

March 24, 2017

Legal challenges await Keystone XL pipeline after Trump grants permit

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The Keystone XL transnational pipeline received a long-sought presidential permit Friday as the Trump administration granted a green light to the \$8 billion Canadian tar sands oil project. But hurdles still remain before construction can begin — starting with route approval in Nebraska, and promises from opponents to fight the pipeline on the ground and in the courts, specifically the legality of relying on a 2014 environmental review.

The permit allowing construction at the U.S.-Canada border in Montana was issued Friday, March 24, by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon Jr. An executive order from President Donald Trump four days after taking office directed the department to conduct an expedited review of the project.

Once completed, Keystone XL would carry up to 830,000 barrels of tar sands oil 1,179 miles from Alberta, Canada, through Montana and South Dakota, to Steele City, Nebraska, where it would then connect with already constructed Keystone pipelines that would move the oil to Gulf Coast refineries in Texas.

In a statement, Russ Girling, TransCanada president and CEO, said the permit approval was "a significant milestone," and added "We greatly appreciate President Trump's Administration for reviewing and approving this important initiative."

At the White House Friday morning, Trump said the permit approval "is part of a new era of American energy policy," and Keystone is "just the first of many energy and infrastructure

projects that my administration will approve," promising additional announcements soon. Under his direction, the Army [granted in February](#) a final easement for the Dakota Access Pipeline, which could begin carrying oil [within days](#).

As for Keystone XL, Trump said, "It's going to be an incredible pipeline, greatest technology known to man or woman. And frankly, we're very proud of it." Despite Trump's [repeated insistence](#) that Keystone and new pipelines would be built with American steel, the White House confirmed earlier this month that [Keystone will not](#), since it was considered already under construction.

TransCanada has pursued the presidential permit — required since it crosses an international border — since September 2008. Since then, the controversial project had undergone a series of reviews, environmental impact statements and a political gauntlet that led former President Barack Obama to refer to the pipeline as a "campaign cudgel" in [rejecting the permit](#) in November 2015.

Patrick Carolan, executive director of Franciscan Action Network, told *NCR* he was "very disappointed" but not surprised that Trump granted the permit, and took it as further indication that the president doesn't care about climate change or the environment.

"This pipeline is detrimental to the earth and our water and will not create the abundance of jobs it claims ... As people of faith, we will not stop fighting for climate justice and access to clean water for all," Franciscan Action Network said in a statement.

Rallies against the decision were expected to take place Friday evening outside the White House in New York City.

Advocates for the pipeline have argued it would create jobs and further American energy security. The latest State Department report estimated the project would create 42,100 temporary construction jobs, but once operational would require just 50 employees, only 35 of which would be permanent positions.

Beyond miniscule long-term jobs prospects, Keystone opponents have said the project will exacerbate climate change, in that tar sands oil emits greater amounts of greenhouse gases than crude oil, and sends a signal of continued fossil fuel reliance at a time when the global energy systems need to shift toward renewable sources.

In addition, they raise concerns about the threats the pipeline poses to indigenous communities along its route, and the effects a spill could have on the Ogallala Aquifer, one of the country's largest underground freshwater deposits that rests beneath eight states.

Dallas Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network told journalists on a teleconference March 24 that the route comes within 200 yards of the Rosebud Sioux tribal land and crosses water systems for multiple Sioux tribes and 15,000 non-native people in South Dakota.

The pipeline has yet to have a route approved through Nebraska, where a five-member public service commission hold jurisdiction. Jane Kleeb, president of the anti-Keystone Bold Alliance, said she anticipates numerous legal challenges ahead from ranchers and landowners, and that the process could take two to three years to play out.

The Nebraska pathway was among the "significant legal and regulatory barriers" identified by other environmental leaders on the call; another regarded the State Department's reliance on a [2014 environmental impact statement](#) in issuing the permit.

Anthony Swift, director of the Canada project of the National Resources Defense Council, said the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act requires decision-makers to act on the best information available and to give the public opportunity to engage in the process.

"The world has changed dramatically since the January 2014 review was published," he said. The '14 environmental report Swift said didn't factor in oil prices falling below \$100 a barrel (currently under \$50 a barrel) and couldn't take into account new findings, such as a 2015 report [from the National Academy of Sciences](#) that indicated current spill response inadequate for dealing with sludgy tar sands oil.

Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, said their lawyers are reviewing the State Department report and could challenge it in court within days.

"We will defeat this pipeline in the courts and in the court of public opinion," Brune said during the press call.

A [February Quinnipiac survey](#) found 51 percent of American voters opposing a restart of both the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, with 38 percent supporting them.

When Obama denied the permit in November 2015, he said did so in part because approving the tar sands oil pipeline would "undercut" U.S. leadership on climate change as it headed into the Paris climate negotiations a few weeks later.

As a result of the rejection, TransCanada brought a \$15 billion trade lawsuit against the U.S. under the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA. (It suspended the suit Feb. 28.) Chloe Schwarbe, the faith economy ecology program director for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, said that suit is a sign of the "fingerprints of corporate influence" on the permit approval.

"This case is emblematic of the other kinds of cases that we see around the world," she said, where corporations use trade agreements to bypass environmental protections and concerns of local communities to move projects like Keystone forward.

"The Trump Administration is putting corporate profits over the rights of people and the environment on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border," Schwarbe told *NCR*.

Carolan of Franciscan Action Network said he expected Keystone to take a central role in the People's Climate March on Washington, set for April 29, Trump's 100th day in office. The march will be the third environmentally focused rally in two months, with the Native Nations March occurring on March 10, and a scientists' march in D.C. scheduled for Earth Day (April 22).

[Brian Roewe is an *NCR* staff writer. His email address is broewe@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: [@BrianRoewe](https://twitter.com/BrianRoewe).]

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/legal-challenges-await-keystone-xl-pipeline-after-trump-grants-permit>

March 25, 2017

Holy See calls for 'intergenerational solidarity' to deal with climate change

Independent Catholic News

The Holy See has called on the United Nations to promote "responsibility for those who come after us", in the areas of climate change and justice for the poor. Archbishop Bernardito Auza's words came in an address to a high-level discussion at the UN on "Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda".

The Holy See's Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer to the UN cited Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'*: "how inseparable the bonds are between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and our own interior peace".

He also repeated the Pope's exhortation not to separate human existence from nature.

"The Holy Father thus urges us to consider that 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."

Archbishop Auza concluded with a call for "intergenerational solidarity" ... "My Delegation urges generosity, solidarity and selflessness as we implement both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, in order not to leave future generations pay the extremely high price of environmental deterioration."

The full text of the address follows:

High-Level Event: Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda New York, 23 March 2017

Mr President, The Holy See wishes to thank you for gathering together the various stakeholders to explore the connections between climate change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in view of invigorating both the momentum and the will to propose and

implement concrete solutions for the benefit of all the people of the world and the "common home" that we share.

Pope Francis reminds us that "the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development." [1] In the same manner, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda that represents the most ambitious universal development agenda ever. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is similarly ambitious. Together they reflect the reality that global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. As this gathering seeks to pursue these two ambitious plans together, we are reminded that without a commitment to specific, coordinated, quantifiable and meaningful steps forward, these plans will fail to live up to their potential and remain mere rhetoric. As specific solutions are sought, we should also be mindful of "how inseparable the bonds are between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and our own interior peace". [2]

Our concern to take greater care for nature should also arouse in us an empathy with those left behind, those who are affected by environmental degradation, and those who are excluded from economic and political processes. Pope Francis warns 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." [3]

The Holy Father thus urges us to consider that 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. This symbiosis implies that a crisis of the environment necessarily means a crisis for us. 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. Thus, "strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and protecting nature". [4]

The same principle of interconnectedness binds together the three biggest United Nations processes in 2015, namely, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. There are not three separate challenges of financing development needs, agreeing on new development goals and tackling climate change, but one overarching challenge of how to orient our politics, economies, technology, businesses and personal behavior -- indeed, all our efforts -- toward a sustainable, integral and authentic development in harmony with nature. "It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected." [5]

Mr President, My Delegation welcomes the way in which both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement acknowledge the central importance of the human person. The 2030 Agenda rightly begins by noting that "the dignity of the human person is fundamental." In the same vein, Pope Francis has urged that all environmental and development initiatives focus on the innate dignity that we all share in equal measure. This dignity must remain at the center of our debates. In particular, those who are weak and marginalized, those who are poor and ill, the unborn and the elderly alike, the refugees and victims of war and violence, and those disproportionately impacted by greed and indifference must have a special place in the initiatives we pursue. Their

sufferings and anxieties, their fears and hopes should not fail to raise an echo in our hearts. The 2030 Agenda's "determin[ation] to end poverty and hunger... and to ensure that all human beings live in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment"[6] should lie at the heart of our efforts.

My Delegation would also like to underline our responsibility for those who come after us. As Pope Francis affirms, "Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us". [7] We cannot speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. My Delegation urges generosity, solidarity and selflessness as we implement both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, in order not to leave future generations pay the extremely high price of environmental deterioration.

Mr President, The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement separately and in harmony with each other involves complex technical, economic, social, political, and legal aspects. Goals and targets will be thoroughly evaluated using indicators and all sorts of measures to gauge success or failure. At the end of the day, their positive impact on the human person, particularly on those left behind, will be the true measure of our success.

Thank you, Mr. President.

1 Pope Francis, Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, n.13 [hereafter "LS"].

2 LS, n.10.

3 LS, n.111.

4 LS, n.139.

5 LS, n.138.

6 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Preamble.

7 LS, n.159

Source: VIS

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=32207>

March 29, 2017

Father James Martin: Why is climate change a moral issue?

By James Martin, S.J.

America Magazine: The Jesuit Review

President Donald J. Trump has just signed measures rolling back significant parts of President Obama's moves to protect the environment. Among other things, President Trump wants to withdraw and rewrite the Clean Power Plan, the centerpiece of Mr. Obama's policies to fight global warming. These may seem like political questions, but they are also moral ones. Pope Francis made that clear in his encyclical "Laudato Si'" in 2015. There he called for a conversion in the way we think about what the pope calls "our common home."

Let's consider three reasons why caring for the environment is a moral issue and why policies that fail to protect our planet are not only against Catholic teaching but are also immoral.

1. Creation is a gift from God.

All creation is a holy and precious gift from God, to be revered by all men and women. The call to care for our planet extends as far back as the Book of Genesis, when humankind was called to "till and keep" the earth. But we have done too much tilling and not enough keeping.

The theme of loving creation runs through both the Old and the New Testaments. In Jesus Christ, God not only became human but also lived in the natural world. Jesus himself appreciated the natural world, as you can see in the Gospel passages where he praises creation and speaks about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Basically, the world is not only holy—it is also not ours, much as we would like it to be. It is God's.

2. The poor are disproportionately affected by climate change.

The disproportionate effect of environmental change on the poor and on the developing world is well documented. This is not simply because the rich often make economic decisions that don't take the poor into account but because the poor have fewer financial resources to help them adapt to climate change. They cannot move, protect their houses or switch jobs as easily as the rich can.

The Gospels, Catholic social teaching and the statements of recent popes all critique the exclusion of anyone from the benefits of the earth's goods. And in decisions regarding the environment and the use of the earth's common resources, we are called to appreciate the needs and dignity of the poor. Remember, Jesus said that we would be judged on how we treat the poor. That includes how our decisions on climate change affect them.

3. Greed is not good.

In "Laudato Si'" Pope Francis reserves his strongest criticism for the wealthy who ignore the problem of climate change and especially its disproportionate effect on the poor. Why do so many wealthy people turn their backs on the poor? Not only because some view themselves as more "worthy," but because frequently decision-makers are far removed from the poor, with no real contact with their brothers and sisters.

Selfishness also leads to the evisceration of the notion of the common good. This affects not simply those in the developing world but also those living on the margins in more developed countries—in the inner cities, for example. But in the Christian worldview, there is no room for selfishness or indifference. You cannot care for creation if your heart lacks compassion for your fellow human beings.

So the next time you speak to your legislator or vote about climate change, think not only about you but about the other person. Think not only about your own city but about the cities, towns

and villages in the developing world. Think not only about the wealthy but the poor. In other words, think not only about your wallet but your soul.

James Martin, S.J., is editor at large at **America** and the author of *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*.

<http://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/03/29/father-james-martin-why-climate-change-moral-issue>

March 30, 2017

Keystone XL: Environmental and Native Groups Sue to Halt Pipeline

Native American groups as well as environmental advocates are challenging the State Department's approval, based on its about-face on the environmental impact.

By Phil McKenna
Inside Climate News

Several environmental and Native American advocacy groups have filed two separate lawsuits against the State Department over its approval of the [Keystone XL pipeline](#).

The Sierra Club, Northern Plains Resource Council, Bold Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth and the Natural Resources Defense Council [filed a federal lawsuit](#) in Montana on Thursday, challenging the State Department's border-crossing permit and related environmental reviews and approvals.

The suit came on the heels of [a related suit](#) against the State Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service filed by the Indigenous Environmental Network and North Coast Rivers Alliance in the same court on Monday.

The State Department [issued a permit](#) for the project, a pipeline that would carry tar sands crude oil from Canada to Nebraska, on March 24. Regulators in Nebraska must still review the proposed route there.

The State Department and TransCanada, the company proposing to build the pipeline, declined to comment.

The suit filed by the environmental groups argues that the State Department relied solely on an outdated and incomplete environmental impact statement completed in January 2014. That assessment, the groups argue, failed to properly account for the pipeline's threats to the climate, water resources, wildlife and communities along the pipeline route.

"In their haste to issue a cross-border permit requested by TransCanada Keystone Pipeline L.P. (TransCanada), Keystone XL's proponent, Defendants United States Department of State (State Department) and Under Secretary of State Shannon have violated the National Environmental

Policy Act and other law and ignored significant new information that bears on the project's threats to the people, environment, and national interests of the United States," the suit states. "They have relied on an arbitrary, stale, and incomplete environmental review completed over three years ago, for a process that ended with the State Department's denial of a crossborder permit."

"The Keystone XL pipeline is nothing more than a dirty and dangerous proposal that's time has passed," the Sierra Club's executive director, Michael Brune, said in a statement. "It was rightfully rejected by the court of public opinion and President Obama, and now it will be rejected in the court system."

The suit filed by the Native American groups also challenges the State Department's environmental impact statement. They argue it fails to adequately justify the project and analyze reasonable alternatives, adverse impacts and mitigation measures. The suit claims the assessment was "irredeemably tainted" because it was prepared by Environmental Management, a company with a "substantial conflict of interest."

"President Trump is breaking established environmental laws and treaties in his efforts to force through the Keystone XL Pipeline, that would bring carbon-intensive, toxic, and corrosive crude oil from the Canadian tar sands, but we are filing suit to fight back," Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network said in a statement. "For too long, the U.S. Government has pushed around Indigenous peoples and undervalued our inherent rights, sovereignty, culture, and our responsibilities as guardians of Mother Earth and all life while fueling catastrophic extreme weather and climate change with an addiction to fossil fuels."

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/30032017/keystone-xl-pipeline-lawsuit-trump-state-department>

April 4, 2017

Religion is important in protecting the environment - interfaith groups

Astro Awani

Kuala Lumpur: Religion plays a significant role in ensuring environmental sustainability and mankind, as God's steward on Earth, has the responsibility to protect it.

This was the message conveyed by interfaith groups dedicated to tackle issues relating to climate change through a religious perspective.

During the dialogue session themed 'Inter-Religious Harmony and Sustainability, representatives from all faiths shared a common ground on the environment.

One of the panelists, Datuk Dr Azizan Baharuddin of Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) said in Islam the term 'caliphate' or stewardship was a calling by God for all

humans to look after this planet He created. "We are all entrusted by God to look after the environment, the world which He created for us.

"Religion can give ethical values on environmental care, which is a responsibility of all despite the differences of faith.

"In Islam, we have a concept relating to the environment called 'green jihad' or an exerted effort to take care of the environment," said Azizan, who is also IKIM director-general, to a crowd of university students during the dialogue held at Tunku Abdul Rahman University College, here today.

Azizan's view was shared by University Malaysia lecturer Dr Esther Sarojini Daniel who said the word stewardship was also mentioned in the Bible as a call for Christians to look after the environment created by God.

Azizan's view was shared by Universiti Malaya lecturer Dr Esther Sarojini Daniel who said the word stewardship was also mentioned in the Bible as a call for Christians to look after the environment created by God.

Representing the Hindu faith, Malaysian Hindu Sangam Cooperative Society director Dr M Bala Thamalingam said there was the 'karma' effect which befell each man based on their good or bad deeds on the environment.

The final panelist, a Buddhist from the International Network of Engage Buddhist Vidyananda K.V Soon said there needs to be an awareness for society to recognise the power of religious institutions to highlight the importance on environmental sustainability.

"The problem is that we are not playing the role on protecting the environment during religious sermons, there is almost zero talk on environmental sustainability," he said.

The dialogue was held to explain the religious perspective each religion shared on sustainable development for future generation and build awareness among organisations and individuals to ensure environmental sustainability.

The event was jointly organised by IKIM and TAR UC and was attended by some 1,000 university students from TAR UC, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and University Kuala Lumpur (UniKL). -- *Bernama*

<http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/religion-important-protecting-environment-interfaith-groups-138039>

April 4, 2017

St. Francis Alliance proclaims protection of all God's creatures

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

Just before Lent, about two dozen people gathered for three days at the [San Damiano Spiritual Life Retreat Center](#) in White Post, Virginia, to reflect on their various faith calls to protect all of God's creation — and creatures.

Led by Dominican Fr. Hyacinth Cordell, chaplain of the Washington, D.C., Archdiocese's Care for Creation Committee, the participants reflected on Catholic teaching about animals and examined them from the Dominican and Franciscan traditions, as well as what other Abrahamic traditions have said.

What prompted the retreat, though, was a desire to engage the whole message of Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)," particularly the interconnected relationship among humans and other animals.

The retreat, possibly one of the first devoted to *Laudato Si'* and animal protection since the encyclical's June 2015 release, was hosted by the [St. Francis Alliance: Faithful Voices for Animals](#), a newly formed nationwide group intent on proclaiming the Catholic Church's teachings on God's creatures.

Formed shortly after the encyclical's debut to honor its critter protection message, the St. Francis Alliance is open to "Catholics and other people of good will committed to seeking a just and compassionate world for all creatures," its website states. Its members hope to foster dialogue, educate and, ultimately, inspire others "to act faithfully in our daily choices to promote the inherent value of animals who share our common home."

Even with the far-reaching impacts already seen in just under two years since *Laudato Si'* was published, what has largely gone unnoticed has been the papal letter's reflections on the care and protection of animals, said Sarah Spengeman, one of the founders of the St. Francis Alliance.

Francis addresses animals and creatures in more than three dozen of his encyclical's 246 paragraphs, and includes them within the first three lines of the two prayers he offered at its conclusion:

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. ...
(A prayer for our earth, *Laudato Si'* no. 246)

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!
(A Christian prayer in union with creation, *Laudato Si'* no. 246)

Throughout *Laudato Si'*, Francis points to animals' roles as reflections of God's love, the inherent value they possess, the interconnectedness humans have with all of God's creatures and humankind's misunderstanding of "dominion" as described in the Book of Genesis.

"Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another," Francis wrote, later adding that God giving humans dominion over the Earth doesn't justify "absolute domination over other creatures." At one point, the pope lamented development projects that do not consider the impact on biodiversity, "as if the loss of species or animals and plant groups were of little importance."

"Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever," Francis said. "The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right."

In *Laudato Si'*, the pope states, "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, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things."

Members of the St. Francis Alliance surmised theirs may be among the first Catholic animal concerns group to emerge in the U.S. in response to *Laudato Si'*. Another group, [Catholic Action for Animals](#), similarly formed in the United Kingdom, which is also home to perhaps one of the older Catholic animal-focused organizations — [Catholic Concern for Animals](#), which held its first meeting in November 1929. Since then, that organization, which has as its president Liverpool Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, has since expanded to form branches in more than a dozen countries, including the U.S.

Chris Fegan, chief executive of Catholic Concern for Animals, also attended and presented at the February retreat.

On its website, the St. Francis Alliance offers Catholic resources beyond *Laudato Si'* regarding compassionate care for animals. Among them is Franciscan Fr. Jack Wintz's book *Will I See My Dog in Heaven?* on whether or not animals go to heaven (he says yes). Other recommended reads are books on animal compassion from various faith traditions, and a collection of Pope Benedict XVI's statements on environmental justice.

The alliance has also compiled recipes for people interested in exploring a vegan diet, and updates its blog with the latest regarding animal activism and legislation. It plans to add soon a pocket-sized brochure with all of Francis' quotes about animals.

The diverse collection of readings make it clear that *Laudato Si'* is far from the first church document to address compassion for animals.

From Genesis through the New Testament, the Bible describes the value of animals and humans' role in tending to them. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in the [section on the Seventh Commandment](#) (You shall not steal) states, "Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness."

The writings and spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi led him to be named the patron saint of animals and ecology. More recently, Popes John Paul II and Benedict also emphasized the care of animals, but even with Francis continuing that message, the topic has yet to gain widespread consciousness at the parish level, said Heather Young, another alliance founder.

A lawyer who at one point studied vegetarianism in 19th-century American Christianity while completing graduate work in religious studies at George Washington University, Young didn't find much support within her Catholic tradition as she made the switch herself to a vegetarian and ultimately vegan lifestyle.

About five years ago, she finally connected with a group of Catholics in D.C. who shared her animal beliefs. Among them were Spengeman and three animal protection attorneys for various humane organizations: Akisha Townsend Eaton, Jessica Almy and Elizabeth Holtz. The women are now all part of the St. Francis Alliance team, which formed in the wake of their excitement with the encyclical.

During a 2014 trip to Europe — which included stops in Assisi and Rome, Italy, and in Oxford, England, to meet with local animal protection groups — Eaton and her husband, Jack, both lifelong animal advocates who live in Kentucky, heard rumors that a papal encyclical on the environment would be released within the next year.

Akisha Eaton remembers the two waking up at the crack of dawn on June 18, 2015, the day the encyclical was released, "thinking we'd need to strain our eyes to see one mention of 'animal' buried as a footnote in the middle of a massive document. But what we actually encountered was beyond our wildest expectations."

"We had to do a double and a triple take," she said. "The encyclical not only gave mention to animals, but covered what our relationships with them should look like in tremendous breadth and depth throughout the entire document."

One passage that immediately jumped out at Eaton was where Francis quoted from the catechism: "It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly." That the excerpt was among those tweeted by the pope on the day the encyclical published emphasized its importance, Eaton said.

Unable to stop talking about *Laudato Si'*, the Eatons created a Facebook page and hosted small group teleconferences on specific themes the encyclical raised about animals. They reached out to Catholic creation care activists in Baltimore and D.C., and slowly grew from a two-person ministry to a larger membership, eventually naming themselves officially over a vegan potluck at a farm animal sanctuary in Maryland.

"Our hope was to continue the conversation on what a Christ-modeled relationship with animals should look like in today's world, using *Laudato Si'* as our initial conversation-starter," Eaton said.

Since then, the St. Francis Alliance has hosted several international teleconferences, as well as the pre-Lenten retreat in February.

During the retreat, Cordell shared how after watching Al Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006 he began delving into the issue of climate change more, from religious and scientific perspectives. The process prompted Cordell in the past year to become totally vegan.

The 39-year-old priest also announced a 10-week summer series titled "Faith and Earth" that he has organized for his parish, [St. Dominic Church](#) in Washington.

At other points of the weekend, the 21 participants — Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim — shared their own stories, spent time studying Scripture and church teachings, and made commitments to act to protect all God's creatures. They also watched the documentary "Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home" about farmers examining their long-held beliefs about the morality of meat-eating.

For Akisha Eaton, the link that connects all people, regardless of their background is this: "I believe that when we improve our relationships with God's creation, we improve our relationships with God."

"It falls upon us as people to do our best to protect creation, because God's creation is so abundant and good," added Jack Eaton in an email. "In doing so, I believe that we bring about aspects of our highest good when we show mercy to animals in the same manner that God shows mercy upon us."

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/st-francis-alliance-proclaims-protection-all-gods-creatures>

April 6, 2017

Climate change is the prophetic call to repentance of our time

By John Surette
National Catholic Reporter

In biblical times, repentance manifested itself in external signs such as fasting, public lamentations, loud cries and in the wearing of sackcloth and ashes. These external signs indicated a change of heart, a radical turning about. Repentance signified a turning in direction, not a minor one, but a 180-degree turning away from one's previous path.

When an individual person or an entire civilization is headed full speed toward a precipice, the smartest and holiest thing to do is to repent, to make a total change in direction. What kind of turning is required of humanity in our 21st century?

We are approaching a planetary precipice. We are increasingly aware of climate change, or what is more accurately called catastrophic climate disruption. Forests are disappearing, water tables are falling, soils are eroding, fisheries are collapsing, rivers are running dry, glaciers and ice caps are melting, the ocean is becoming more acidic, plant and animal species are going extinct, and the children of all species are increasingly being born sick.

All of this casts a dark shadow over our lives and has become the overarching issue of our time.

This climate issue is the context within which all of our future efforts to nurture greater justice and more authentic relationships will become increasingly difficult. By mid-century, our children and grandchildren likely will be living on a severely compromised planet. Later in the century, they will possibly be facing more serious and catastrophic disruptions within Earth's web of life.

For some of us, this reality is too fearsome to face and so we move into denial or paralysis. This fear is understandable because we are the first humans ever called to face such a planetary precipice, such an ultimacy. No previous humans could even have imagined it. Even our genetic endowment does not seem that helpful in helping us to act.

Things, however, are not hopeless. Our hope is to be found in a present-day radical 180-degree turning in our consciousness and actions — a repentance. Never before has such a change of heart been required of us. It is a change that is difficult to fully imagine. It is the prophetic call of our time.

Our turning will require that we reinvent ourselves. For example, we will have to move out of the illusion of human separateness into the truth that we are integral members of Earth's web of life. We will have to experience ourselves not as being on Earth but as being of Earth. We will have to nurture our awareness that we have a role to play in the sacred drama of Earth's evolutionary unfolding.

The challenge before us is soul-sized. Some questions for our Lenten observance, in its final days this year, as individuals and as a human community are: Do we want to repent? Do we have the courage to make that 180-degree turn? What will we humans choose to do?

Our children, grandchildren and their children are awaiting our answer.

[Fr. John Surette is a member of the Jesuit New England province, and for the past 26 years he has been giving retreats on eco-spiritual themes.]

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/climate-change-prophetic-call-repentance-our-time>

April 8, 2017

Animal Ethics Centre Fellows Exceed One Hundred

EIN Presswire

The appointment of eight new Fellows of the [Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics](#) takes the total number of Fellows to over one hundred international academics.

“The Centre’s Fellowship is a prestigious academy that pioneers ethical perspectives on animals through academic research, teaching and publication”, said its Director, the Revd Professor Andrew Linzey. “We started ten years ago with just a handful of academics, and now we have exceeded one hundred from ten different countries”.

The Fellowship is international and multidisciplinary, drawing together academics from both the humanities and the sciences, including subjects as diverse as philosophy, theology, law, biology, the social sciences, environmental science, criminology, history, cultural studies, literature, and politics.

“We use a variety of insights from many disciplines to illuminate the moral dimension to our treatment of animals”. Research by Fellows is published in the *Journal of Animal Ethics* published with the University of Illinois Press, and in the *Animal Ethics Book Series* by Palgrave Macmillan.

Under the rules, appointment is offered only once to successful individuals within their lifetime, and appointment is by invitation or nomination only. Only a small proportion of those nominated are eventually selected. The process of selection is rigorous, painstaking, and frequently lengthy, and individuals appointed have to have made (or be capable of making) an outstanding contribution to the field.

The eight new Fellows are:

- Professor Boris Bakota (Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek, Croatia), Fellow
- Sidney Blankenship (Independent Scholar), Associate Fellow
- The Revd Dr Susan Bubbers (Center for Anglican Theology in Orlando, Florida), Fellow
- Professor Alice Crary (New School for Social Research, New York), Fellow
- Professor Keri Cronin (Brock University, Canada), Fellow
- Professor Kumju Hwang (Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Korea), Fellow
- Dr Violette Pouillard (University of Oxford), Associate Fellow

- Steven M. Wise (Nonhuman Rights Project), Fellow
- Also Dr Natalie Thomas (Evans) (University of Guelph and the University of Guelph-Humber, Ontario, Canada) Fellow transfer from Associate Fellow

“All these individuals are pioneering new work in Animal Ethics – helping to press the envelope in terms of new thinking”, said Linzey. “The Centre extends its warmest congratulations to the successful individuals”. Their biographies can be viewed [here](#).

ends

Notes to editors

- The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics is an independent centre, founded in 2006.
- Its Director, the Revd Professor Andrew Linzey is a member of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oxford. He is author of *Why Suffering Matters* (Oxford University Press) and editor of *The Global Guide to Animal Protection* published by the University of Illinois Press.

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<http://www.einpresswire.com/article/375119849/animal-ethics-centre-fellows-exceed-one-hundred>

April 10, 2017

Greenhouses open doors for sisters who farm difficult land

By Rose Achiego
Global Sisters Report

In the dry season, Juja is hot, windy and dusty. Vegetation is completely brown, and the sun beats down overhead during the annual drought from December to March. But step inside the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart's greenhouses and life is very different. The fresh smell of vegetables replaces the dust outside. Mouthwatering tomatoes, healthy and red, hang on the branches, while outside, plants wither and die. It is so green and cool in the greenhouses that you quickly forget about the scorching sun.

In Kenya, farmers have traditionally chosen not to farm arid and semiarid lands like those in Juja, a town in the Nairobi metropolitan area, due to the difficulties in raising crops. But religious sisters are proving that, with some initial financial support, the nation can be fed by farming the less popular land.

The key is the greenhouse, where sisters can control a harsh environment to grow high-yield crops on a small footprint of land.

These sisters are using innovative farming methods to combat poverty and to create jobs for struggling youth, by planting vegetables atop land previously considered dry and infertile. The sisters prefer using the greenhouses because they can reduce the sharp variation of outdoor temperatures, control rainfall and keep the plants safe from the devastation of insects, rodents and other animals in the wild.

By using greenhouses, the Dimesse Sisters (Daughters of Mary Immaculate) in a Nairobi suburb and the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Juja are now able to produce vegetables for both income generation and food consumption in their communities. They share this farming knowledge and skill with the children in their care, the novices who will become future leaders, and the community members surrounding their convents.

Dominica Mwila, a Dominican Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart, learned farming at her home in Zambia, where her father was a district agricultural officer in the federal government. Upon her 2014 appointment to direct St. Dominic's Technical and Agricultural Training Institute in Juja, less than 20 miles north of Nairobi, she decided to replicate what she had learned from her father.

St. Dominic's, known as TATI, is a project the Dominican sisters started in 2013. They live in a convent in St. Augustine Parish, about 2 miles from the school and greenhouses.

Few people in Juja practice farming, due to poor soil fertility, irregular rainfall patterns and inadequate water. Traditionally, the people around Juja occasionally have grown sisal (a plant that produces long, green leaves with natural fiber used for making rope and twine) because it is drought-resistant, or maize for their own consumption. They are forced to purchase the rest of their vegetables.

The training institute is a school for older students who have difficulty paying for secondary school and younger students who are orphans and refugees. When the sisters first built six greenhouses there, nothing was growing, due to bacteria that caused wilt disease, a [common problem in Kenyan greenhouses](#) that is traced to high humidity. When Mwila took over management in 2014, she decided to research what could grow well on their farm and how to improve the soil fertility.

"Nothing was doing well in the greenhouses so we decided to contract some people to bring us [uninfected] red soil and manure from the locality," she said. "After this, we planted tomatoes but before the fruits could mature, they started wilting again due to bacterial infection."

Because the problem was so persistent, Mwila decided to consult with the [Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology](#), situated a couple miles from St. Dominic's institute. She also engaged other specialists in horticulture, who introduced the sisters to grafted tomatoes that are disease-resistant.

"We were given the seedlings, and we are happy that we can now produce healthy tomatoes in our greenhouses and share the knowledge with the community members by inviting them to our greenhouses to see the farm progress and borrow our ideas, since they had the same soil problem," she said.

By selling milk, eggs and chickens produced on other parts of the institute's farm, Mwila raised \$6,480 to buy 54 tons of wilt-free red soil to fill in the six greenhouses. She is hopeful that the pepper and tomato plants will help them recoup their investment in the future.

"Now we are doing selective harvesting, whereby we do not pick all the ripe tomatoes at once," said Mwila.

Generally, commercial farms harvest everything from a greenhouse at the same time to minimize labor costs and maximize profit, but the sisters are not using that tactic. "We want the community members to come and see how the mature tomatoes are and learn from us. We do not want to be selfish," she said.

The soil hasn't been the only challenge, said Mwila. They also suffered from strong winds that ripped off one of the greenhouse roofs, but through a Rotary Club in Germany and a local flower company known as Selecta, the roof was repaired. They had no running water for two and a half years due to scanty rains that could not fill the borehole the institute had dug. Even though today the borehole has water, some of the drip irrigation to the greenhouses and garden is blocked and needs to be replaced, she said.

Three years after Mwila took over at Juja, the sisters now sell to the local community and the supermarkets in the area because they produce more than they can consume. This surplus pays the salaries of the farmworkers and tutors at the training institute. The tomatoes are selling at a dollar per kilogram, and they harvested more than 700 kilograms in January alone. The neighbors happily buy from the sisters because this represents a new market for Juja. Previously, the nearest market was a 2-mile walk away.

The sisters also use the farm produce to feed the 80-100 children coming from a nearby slum who live full-time at the institute's dormitory.

However, Mwila believes that, in order to break even on their investment, the sisters need an additional five greenhouses, at a cost of \$2,500 to \$3,000 each, to increase vegetable production. They will also need to fill the greenhouses with new soil.

Apart from growing tomatoes and peppers in the greenhouses, the sisters have also planted maize, onions and cabbages. They have 20 dairy cows for milk, more than 4,000 chickens for eggs and meat, and plan to open a fishpond and goat shed soon.

Growing their way to feed and employ those made poor

The Dimesse Sisters in Karen, a suburb of Nairobi, are another example of how sisters who began farming for domestic consumption have now gone commercial.

Farm project manager Sr. Eva Atieno said the sisters began the farming project two years ago with dairy farming. Later, they did an extensive market survey, and found that since they are located in the city, the demand for pepper, tomatoes, broccoli and eggplants is high. The Pontifical Missionary Society of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops gave them a \$36,000 grant, and the Dimesse Sisters decided to venture into greenhouse farming.

Atieno's congregation started the farm in order to create job opportunities for the impoverished residents living near the convent. Additionally, they wanted to empower the novices in the congregation so that they may be able to go and evangelize among the poor by providing job opportunities.

"The best knowledge you can give to the poor is to teach them work in order to get food for themselves, and these young sisters will be able to do just that," she said.

Atieno also said that the sisters realized they should put their available land to work, to address issues of food insecurity and malnutrition in the communities around their convent.

At their orphanage in Laikipia, 125 miles from Nairobi, the Dimesse Sisters care for 86 orphans, as young as 1 year old, "infected and affected" by HIV/AIDS and the rejection that goes with it, Atieno said. "They depend on us entirely in terms of food, shelter, medication and education until they become adults. So we saw the great need to have an income-generating activity since the support we get from well-wishers is not enough."

Atieno said the farm also helps orphaned and vulnerable children integrate back into the society after they graduate from secondary school. Because they are equipped with skills and knowledge in farming and other courses, they have a foundation to start their own projects. The income from the greenhouses pays for the young adults to pursue other fields, she added, "because not everyone is interested in farming."

In addition to the center for people with HIV/AIDS, the Dimesse Sisters also run a retreat center, where they host 300-350 guests every week. The center has cut its expenditure on food by 65 percent since they started growing their own vegetables in the greenhouses.

Most of the workers at the Dimesse Sisters' farm come from a nearby slum called Kalinde. The sisters are committed to training them in innovative farming, even though the students cannot pay for the education, said Atieno. The sisters hope the new skills will enable them to support their families, avoid the lure of criminal activity and spread their new knowledge to others. And, with a new steady income, many of the workers have been able to move away from their shanty houses in the slums, where there is poor sanitation, lack of water and poor lighting.

Atieno said that, by sharing farming knowledge with the local youth, the sisters have helped them to be self-reliant and to replicate this attitude within their communities.

The sisters' main challenge is to find the right people for the right job, because farmers need passion in order to succeed, Atieno said, adding that employing unskilled people from impoverished urban conditions can be difficult in the beginning.

Both the Dimesse Sisters in Nairobi and Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Juja encourage the trainees to take the knowledge and skills they acquire in greenhouse farming and start their own projects. "Self-sustainability is a tough and challenging affair, but venturing into greenhouse farming is one way to ensure we have food and money," said Mwila.

As she gives a tour of the greenhouses, she can't hide her joy as she picks tomatoes and full-grown peppers to show visitors. Though the greenhouses seem small, the vegetables inside take up every available inch. Tomato and pepper plants reach up toward the ceiling, requiring support from extra strings to contain their overwhelming bounty.

Mwila said the farmers, government agricultural workers and experts from Jomo Kenyatta University who witnessed the sisters' frustrations now rejoice with them. "They said, sisters, you have worked miracles from here; this place was absolutely dry like a desert," Mwila recalled.

"It is just incredible to see this because we have seen this place from the beginning — it was dry and there was not even a single tree here," she said. "Even me, I stand in the garden and marvel that it is possible that this place can be productive."

[Rose Achiego is a freelance writer and radio program producer based in Nairobi, Kenya.]

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/ministry-environment/greenhouses-open-doors-sisters-farming-difficult-land-45951>

April 11, 2017

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda & Scott Thalacker on Access Utah

By Tom Williams
Utah Public Radio

This interview links climate change to economic and racial injustice, and addresses it all through a theological lens.

Listen to the interview here:

<http://upr.org/post/cynthia-moe-lobeda-scott-thalacker-access-utah>

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, a professor of Christian ethics, is the author of the 2013 book, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Fortress Press). She gave a lecture yesterday at USU in the Tanner Talks series from the College of Humanites and Social Sciences. Dr. Moe-Lobeda joins us for Access Utah today, along with Rev. Scott Thalacker, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Logan.

The central tenet of Dr. Moe-Lobeda's work is that the increasingly pressing situation of Planet Earth poses urgent ethical questions. In her view, the earth crisis cannot be understood apart

from the larger human crisis – economic equity, racial justice, social values, and human purpose are bound up with the planet’s survival. With climate change, humankind hovers on a precipice. Dr. Moe-Lobeda argues that a “great work” is now before us: To forge ways of living together that allow Earth’s life-systems to flourish and that diminish the soul-shattering gap between those who have too much and those who have too little. For this – the testing point of human history – all forms of human knowledge have a role to play.

Dr. Moe-Lobeda has lectured or consulted in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and many parts of North America in theology and matters of climate justice, economic justice, environmental racism, economic globalization, moral agency, public church, and eco-feminist theology. She currently holds a joint appointment at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. Previously, she taught Christian ethics at Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry and in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. She is the author of *Healing a Broken World* (Fortress Press, 2002) and, most recently, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Fortress Press, 2013).

<http://upr.org/post/cynthia-moe-lobeda-scott-thalacker-access-utah>

April 14, 2017

Easter and the environment

Catholic Church Head Archbishop Peter Loy Chong
The Fiji Times

Peace — Shalom! (May you have fullness of life). Peace is the first word uttered by Jesus to his disciples after he rose from the dead. Jesus greets the disciples who were still traumatised by his humiliating and brutal death.

Easter celebrates the most important event of the Christian tradition, namely the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, the writings of the New Testament have no record of Jesus' actual rising from the tomb. Instead it only has accounts of the appearances of Jesus to the disciples. This means that the disciples' knowledge and experience of the Risen Jesus was given to them. In other words revelation is a gift from God. Therefore, to understand what happened on that original Easter and to reinterpret its meaning for Fiji today we turn to the disciples' experiences of the risen Jesus.

The Easter-experience took place in the context of Jewish peoples' suffering and hope for liberation. Ever since the Babylonian exile around 587BC, the Jews have always looked forward to their liberation when God will send a messiah. One of the earliest records of Easter is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor.15:3-5); "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." The New Testament Easter narratives taken as a whole hold the following structure:

- * Jesus revealed God to the disciples,
- * The disciples had to overcome a certain doubt or disbelief,
- * The Risen Lord charged them with a mission.

Easter began with an experience. Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, suffering and death gave new meaning and purpose to the disciples. They experienced liberation, truth and hope. In other words they came to know Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one, the messiah. In Jesus they found the truth that was worth living and dying for. Easter and Jesus' resurrection is not only about the dead body of Jesus coming back to life, rather it was more about how the spirit and life of Jesus lifted up the lives of believers. Easter charged them with a mission for the whole world. This is the Easter Good News.

What is the Easter mission for Fijian Christians? In this reflection I want to focus on our Easter mission in the context of climate change and caring for our environment or in the words of Pope Francis I, Our Common Home.

Today the message regarding the vulnerability and destruction of our common home, the earth, has been made clear. Pope Francis' letter addressed to all the peoples of the world, "Laudato Si: Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home" states that the earth, our sister, now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her." (Laudato Si no.2) He adds that "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth." (Laudato Si'no. 66) Human beings are responsible for the cry of the earth, our sister and mother.

Pope Francis raises important questions that challenge our Easter mission to protect and raise our fallen home and all that live in it.

- "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?"

- "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 as the basis of social life: "What is the purpose of our life in this world? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?"

- "Unless we struggle with these deeper questions I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results."

Last week I came to know of a quarry operating near Natadradave, Dawasamu that intends to crush all the stones and rocks it can find in the river alongside the village and sell the crushed stones locally and overseas. They have carried out an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and hence given a licence to operate a quarry. I am deeply concerned how the extraction of

stones from the river will affect the environment in the nearby villages of Natadradave and Delakado. What impact will it have on the fishes, prawns and other creatures that depend on the river including human beings? What will happen if there is heavy rain and flooding?

The people of Natadradave are not the only victims of some so-called development projects. We already have bauxite mining in Bua. There is mining interest in Wainunu, Bua. A mining company has been carrying intensive mining explorations in Namosi for the last 40 years. Some reliable sources state that their licence for Deep Sea Mining in Fiji's ocean has been issued. Along with the extractive industries we have to take into account the logging industry and any industry that exploits our natural resources. All these projects carried out in the name of development must be evaluated and questioned in regard to social and ecological justice. How do they develop and protect human beings, creatures and the environment?

Easter brings the message of hope to the Jews and early Christians who have been oppressed for years. Easter message therefore speaks against the destruction of peoples, the environment and the planet. May the Easter services and prayers give us the strength to follow the Risen Lord courageously in his suffering, death and resurrection. Alleluia!

<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=396701>

April 15, 2017

Bishop ask Christians to be guardians of the environment

News Ghana

The Most Reverend Joseph Osei-Bonsu, the immediate past President of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, in his Easter message has asked Ghanaians to take care of God's creation in view of the many threats to the environment.

He noted that sanitation menace, rapid rate of deforestation, bush fires, the clearing of natural habitats for mining, especially surface mining or "galamsey" were threats that could have socio-economic consequences on the nation if not stopped immediately.

Most Rev. Osei-Bonsu, who is also the Catholic Bishop of Konongo-Mampong Diocese, in a telephone interview with the Ghana News Agency, on Friday, condemned the widespread use of agro-chemicals and harmful weedicides and pesticides.

He said these chemicals would harm the soil, plants, animals, human beings, lakes, underground water and rivers and advised Ghanaians to exercise extreme precaution when using those chemicals.

He also advised Ghanaians to avoid littering the environment with plastic waste like; sachet water bags and non-organic substances since they would have environmental consequences.

Commenting on Easter and the essence of Christ's death, he asked Christians not to take Christ's salvation for granted but should work out their own salvation "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

He said Christians' acceptance of Christ as their saviour must show good works and lead Christ-like lives worthy of the calling.

This, he said, implied that Christians must obey God's commandments and lead morally upright lives in view of the judgment after death.

He urged Christians to celebrate Easter by reflecting on Christ's victory over death, instead of engaging in social vices.

"Easter is not for excessive drinking, eating, adultery, fornication and engaging in all sorts of social vices that defeat the purpose of Christ's death," he added.

Easter Sunday is a festival and holiday celebrated by millions of Christians and people around the world who honour the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It is described in the New Testament as having occurred three days after Jesus Christ crucifixion at Calvary.

Easter is Christianity's most important holiday and has been called a moveable feast because it doesn't fall on a set date every year, as most holidays do.

<https://www.newsghana.com.gh/bishop-osei-bonsu-urges-christians-to-safeguard-environment/>

April 17, 2017

The mystery at the intersection of science and religion

By Michele Morek
Global Sisters Report

Meditating on the daily liturgical readings sometime during Lent, a daydream about Moses and his staff distracted me. He held it out over the Red Sea and got rid of the water. He hit the rock with it and *found* water. Wow, a magic wand worthy of a Harry Potter story!

Now, I know that it's probably heresy to refer to what he did as "magic" since God was involved, but remember, this was just a daydream. However, it got me thinking about my own experience of using a different "magic wand" to find water.

If you live in a big city, you may not be familiar with the work of a water [dowser](#). Some folks who want to dig a well in a rural area might hire a dowser, or "water witch," to find the best place to dig.

Dowsing is considered a special talent. The dowser might use a forked branch as a "divining rod," holding it by the two branches. When the rod passes over a place where water is near the surface, the free end of it supposedly is pulled down.

On a summer visit to my uncle's cattle ranch, I was talked into trying out his new "modern, scientifically proven" divining rods: two L-shaped copper rods set into hollow handles that allowed them to swing freely. Now, even at the tender age of 12, I had a healthy skepticism but set out to employ the scientific method to test the rods.

I walked down the road toward the barn, rods sticking straight out in front. As I crossed over a particular spot, the rods swung toward each other and crossed. "I didn't do anything to them," I protested.

I walked back and forth, testing my first observation. Every time, the rods crossed over the same spot — which, I learned later, was right over a water pipe that drained water into a nearby pond from an old buried cistern.

My uncle maintained that it was something about the electricity in my body and the copper and some hypothetical attraction the water generated. I always wondered if it could be a reaction to metal in the pipe.

The U.S. Geological Survey [remains skeptical](#) about whether dowsing works, but something observable had happened. My experience remained a mystery. But I was willing to accept the title of Local Dowser/Water Witch, especially since my competitive cousin could not get the rods to work for him.

Many theses and dissertations have been written on the topic of the intersection of magic and/or science and/or religion, so I know my particular daydream does not break new ground.

Leaving magic out of it — magic is basically a way to explain and control unexplainable physical or biological phenomena — the intersection of theology and science holds more promise for rich exploration. Thanks to the writings of [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#), [Fr. Thomas Berry](#), and Global Sisters Report's own contributor [Sr. Ilia Delio](#), we have seen the boundaries between science and religion become more permeable.

Science and religion do not contradict each other. Both science and religion deal with truth, and truth cannot contradict itself. My dowsing rods led me into mystery, and mystery is a good place to start if you are exploring the land that lies in the intersection of science and religion.

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<http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/spirituality/mystery-intersection-science-and-religion-46061>

April 17, 2017

Nichiren Buddhist club advocates for environmentalism, peace and personal revolution

By Parker Shea
State Press

The Soka Gakkai International-affiliated club seeks to promote individual change through Nichiren Buddhism

Buddhists for Peace is an on-campus club dedicated to educating people on the tenets of [Nichiren Buddhism](#) and advocating for peace and environmentalism.

The club is an affiliate of [Soka Gakkai International](#), or SGI, an organization committed to "Buddhism in Action for Peace," according to its website.

ASU alumnus Siddhanth Paralkar graduated from the School of Sustainability last May and is currently the president of Buddhists for Peace. He has been a practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism through SGI since he was in high school in India, and he said his practice has been an important motivating force in his life. He chose his major for graduate studies: sustainability, based on his own Buddhist beliefs.

"Through reading Buddhist literature that we have, I was able to really find this coherence between Buddhism and sustainability," Paralkar said.

Paralkar said he thinks Nichiren Buddhism's value for society can be found in its ability to revolutionize each individual's life.

"One of the things that we do I wouldn't term as the usual form of activism that you see," he said. "We try to create events where people can conduct dialogues, and that's the main tool that we use in Buddhism. So the main goal of Buddhism is to work towards the happiness of ourselves and others, and the best means is to create platforms of dialogue. Through dialogue, we are able to break stereotypes and the negativity within people."

Paralkar said Nichiren Buddhism is an environmentalist philosophy, but at the same time, it is fundamentally a philosophy for individual change.

In a world in which people are often concerned with sweeping changes to industries and institutions, many don't consider individual change the fastest way to a healthy environment. That is where Paralkar and many other Buddhists think Buddhism can be a powerful force for change.

"In general, the main focus of our practice of Buddhism is human revolution, which is not like any political revolution or coup or any kind of physical revolution," he said. "It's basically a focus on how we can transform our own lives, and there's this concept (in) Buddhism that says

'oneness of life and its environment.' So the moment you create a change in your own life, it reflects in your environment and vice versa."

This idea is not confined to Nichiren Buddhism. Many traditions hold that individual change is the path to a better society and a [healthier environment](#).

For example, the 14th Dalai Lama, who practices Tibetan Buddhism, [penned a similar thought](#): "As far as the individual is concerned, the problems resulting from our neglect of our natural environment are a powerful reminder that we all have a contribution to make. And while one person's actions may not have a significant impact, the combined effect of millions of individuals' actions certainly does."

Nichiren Buddhism does not exclude practitioners from having other religious beliefs. As such, Buddhists for Peace has members of varying religious backgrounds and persuasions.

For example, religious studies sophomore Rachel Sondgeroth is a member of Buddhists for Peace. Coming from a Christian background, she originally found Buddhism through the club. She has not distanced herself from her Christian beliefs, though, saying she works to reconcile them without being untrue to herself or either spiritual philosophy.

"It was a really hard — and it continues to be kind of confusing — journey of just wondering, 'How does this practice fit in with the concept of appreciating and loving a god?'" Sondgeroth said. "It might be too blasphemous, for lack of a better phrase, but at the end of the day, I have a really strong sense that I'm in the right places for the right reasons."

Nikhil Sonawane graduated from ASU with a master's in mechanical engineering in December 2016. He also holds religious beliefs outside of Buddhism, namely Hinduism.

Sonawane said he realized the value in studying with Buddhists for Life when he reconnected with a friend after she started attending the club meetings.

"She started practicing, and I saw her transform over that period of seven to ten months," Sonawane said. "And it really got me interested. How can a person change from within? I decided to (start) going to the meetings."

Buddhists for Peace meets every Monday at 5 p.m. in the Memorial Union on the Tempe campus.

<http://www.statepress.com/article/2017/04/spartcult-buddhists-for-peace-advocates-for-environmentalism-and-peace>

April 18, 2017

Can a renewal of inner space help heal the Earth?

By Ilia Delio
Global Sisters Report

At a recent workshop on "*Laudato Si'*: On care of our common home," a professor from the engineering department laid out the numbers on global warming, indicating that in the next 10 years the warming trend will dramatically increase. Despite all the information available and the seemingly infinite number of workshops and conferences on the environment, our impending ecological crisis is getting worse instead of better. Fifty years ago, the historian Lynn White claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis are religious in nature. The primacy of spiritual reality over material reality has led to a mood of indifference with regard to the natural world. Because the roots of the problem are religious, he said, the remedy must be religious as well.

What does he mean by the "religious roots" of the environmental crisis? For White, it meant that Christianity, by emphasizing spiritual reality over material, has rendered us other-worldly and somewhat indifferent about creation. With all but humans excluded from grace, Christians are decidedly anthropocentric. Surprisingly, he named St. Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology. Francis was a materialist who rejected the intellectual emphasis of his time (Neoplatonism) and focused on concrete reality. He found the otherness of God in the nearness of the leper; the splendor of divinity in the humility of a flower. Francis' world was charged, as Gerard Manley Hopkins [wrote](#), with the grandeur of God. His world was a spiritual reality at the heart of the physical world, and this reality held a place for his soul to ascend to God.

In her book [The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace](#), science writer Margaret Wertheim offers an insightful discussion on the paradigm shifts of space. She suggests that the medieval Christian world picture had both a physical and spiritual realm. It incorporated a space for the body and a space for the soul. The physical and the spiritual mirrored one another, and the link between the two resided in the human person as the cosmic center. While the Earth was physically at the center of the cosmos, surrounded by the heavens and the firmament of stars, humanity was the center of an invisible spiritual order.

The whole of the universe and everything in it was linked by a great spiritual hierarchy, the [Great Chain of Being](#) that descended from God. Humans stood halfway between the ethereal beings of the heavens and the material things of Earth. As material beings with spiritual souls, humans were the linchpin of the whole cosmic system. The human person as the center of the universe meant not an astronomical position, but the center of the spiritual and material orders.

Within this finite physical universe one could imagine room beyond physical space, since the cosmos was governed by the Primum Mobile, the outermost sphere of a series of concentric "celestial spheres" that formed the universe. Beyond the Primum Mobile and literally outside the universe was the Empyrean Heaven of God which was beyond space and time. Both Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure wrote their theological works in light of this cosmology of medieval space, and both insisted on the reality of an immaterial, nonphysical domain.

The rise of modern science brought with it the conquering of space. Between Aristotle and Einstein, a truly revolutionary shift occurred in our conception of space. For Aristotle, space was

but a minor and rather unimportant category of reality. By the 17th century, space meant the "whole of reality," leaving no room for any other kind of space to exist. The concept gave rise to a bold new mechanistic philosophy that saw the world not as a great spiritual hierarchy but as a vast machine. Newton made space the formal background of the universe, the absolute frame of all action. Yet Newtonian space possessed no intrinsic qualities of its own; space played a secondary, subservient role — a backdrop for the action of matter.

Modern mastery of the physical world is shown in our scientific understanding of physical space. In the last five centuries, we have mapped the whole of terrestrial space, as continents, ice caps and ocean floors have yielded their secrets to science. Our understanding of physical space now extends beyond our Earth, to the moon and other planets. On the micro level, particle physics has been mapping subatomic space; neuroscientists are now mapping the space of our brains. While we have been mapping and mastering physical space, we have lost sight of any kind of spiritual place in which spirits or souls might reside. It is a modern cosmological fact that the whole of our reality is taken up by physical space, and there is literally no place within this scheme for anything like spirit or soul to rise above the physical world.

Wertheim sees the conquering of space by modern science and the eviction of the spirit — both the divine Spirit of God and the transcendent human spirit — as the impetus behind the exponential rise of cyberspace. Just as medieval Christians believed in a physical space described by their science (natural philosophy) and a nonphysical space that existed outside the material domain, so too the advent of cyberspace returns us to a dualistic world view. Once again, we have a material realm described by science and an immaterial realm that operates on a different plane of the real. Cyberspace offers the space of infinite possibilities where the human spirit can soar. It is the new space of transcendence, the realm of the new empyrean heavens, now readily accessible by a touch of a button.

Wertheim's thesis is compelling, since the discoveries of modern science have centered on cosmological shifts and new understandings of space. Cyberspace is the new frontier of the spiritual transcendence that eludes the grasp of modern science. It is interesting that White wrote his famous article on "The Historic Roots of our Ecological Crisis in 1967" around the same time Gordon Moore of Intel [predicted that computing power would rise exponentially](#). Indeed, his prediction has come true. Computer technology has changed the landscape of modern culture while the ecological crisis continues to deepen.

The truth is we need a spiritual outlet, a place to transcend ourselves through imagination and creativity. Institutional religions offer old cosmologies of closed space. On the positive side, the church offers a place for the soul to ascend to God; on the negative side, this space is closed and bounded by the Dionysian hierarchies: the ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies. The space of the institutional church is a patriarchal space with no room for democracy, mutuality or shared power, all of which can be found in cyberspace. The church portrays heaven as the place of spiritual perfection; computer life sees the space of unlimited possibilities as virtual heaven. Cyberspace is an open "ecclesia" where gender, race, color or creed make no difference whatsoever. One can join a networked community without having to argue or defend gender or patriarchy. In the infinite landscape of cyberspace, we can transcend our prosaic lives defined by gender, race and creed.

Technology has taken over the space of religion, and the trend will not reverse any time soon. We long to transcend ourselves, to strive for the more, to become different persons. Technology is no longer a tool; it is an existential reality. We in the Global North are computer-dependent in just about every facet of our daily lives. We created the tools of technology, but now the tools are creating us. The term "cyborg" symbolizes the new hybrid of human and machine organized by a new configuration of networked information.

Despite the lure of cyber transcendence, our souls are not at rest; we cannot find the peace we long for. Loneliness has increased in our cyberworld; we are more wired together than ever before and yet more lonely. The human brain is literally changing with constant computer use. [Studies show](#) that constant computer use is enhancing the narrow left brain of logic and analysis, to the exclusion of the capacious right brain, which is connected to the body and the wider world. The brain is a "use it or lose it" organ. By spending the majority of our waking hours in Googleland, [we are becoming more forgetful](#), impatient and narcissistic; even worse, our [capacity to think is diminishing](#) (due to a "thinning out" of the frontal cortices).

Yet the space of cyberspace, like the medieval heavens, is transcendent, alluring and spiritually seductive. We can find or become anything we dream or imagine online. Just as the saints of old imagined and undertook heroic sacrifices for the greater glory of God, we, too, long to become something different — but without sacrifice. The computer circumvents the arduous process of conversion by creating a "wormhole," a bending of space-time that enables ready access to other worlds. Our alternate lives are a mere click away, keeping us tethered to our devices. This cyber soul-space is much more enticing than planet Earth because the infinite possibilities of cyber space keep the flames of human desire enkindled 24/7.

In a sense, Lynn White was correct. Our ecological problems will continue to deepen unless we recognize the heart of the problem is the existential need for spiritual space. Our institutional religions do not provide a breathtaking openness for the human soul to soar. Teilhard de Chardin saw the problem early on. He spoke of Christianity as passive, resigned and consigned to a cosmos that no longer exists. Because spiritual energy is vital to the evolution of life, Teilhard thought that we must reinvent ourselves religiously, and he set about his life's work toward this goal.

We have yet to realize, however, a new synthesis between science and religion, a type of religion that is at home in an unfinished universe. But this is the key to a renewed sustainable Earth. By conquering physical space, science has unwittingly shown our deep, felt need for religion. Our souls need a place apart from the physical world of everyday stuff, a place to stretch toward the infinite and wonder about things that do not physically exist. How we reconceive religion in a scientific age *is* the basis of a healing Earth. Pope Francis is right to take the lead in this regard, but his spiritual wisdom is not enough. We need a complete religious revolution — to liberate God from the grip of Greek metaphysics, to liberate divine revelation from the institution of religion; to reimagine a new heaven and a new Earth. The Christian tradition has all that it takes to make this revolution possible. In a sense Jesus initiated a new big bang: "I have come to cast fire on earth and how I wish it were ablaze already" ([Luke 12:49](#)).

Computer technology should inspire us to rediscover religion, a technology of the spirit that deepens love, widens compassion, expands forgiveness and radiates beauty; a democracy of the spirit open to healing and wholeness, where neither male nor female, gender or power determine relationships, only love. A new church for a new world.

But the power of newness comes from within. Science has conquered space but it has not conquered the soul. The inner universe is still a vast expanse of infinite love and life. The religious imagination must be set free to realize that all that we seek in the outer life can be found in the inner universe, what the poet [Rainer Maria Rilke](#) called the "outer space within" where "through us the birds fly silently ... [where] in me grows the tree."

The heart is the space of unlimited love and thus unlimited power because at the center of the heart is the pure glory of God. [Etty Hillesum](#) discovered this inner treasure in the midst of war, violence and human destruction. If our souls cannot find a renewed spiritual space on Earth, then we too will face destruction, but this great suffering will be our gift. For in the fires of suffering, love is purified, and only a pure love can open our eyes once more to the gift of life. Then and only then, will we remember the future because memory is not of the past alone. Rather it is our ability to re-connect with our birthright of belonging to the cosmos. Memory is to be membered — to the whole of reality: past, present, and future. Without memory there is no future.

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<http://globalsistersreport.org/column/spirituality-environment/can-renewal-inner-space-help-heal-earth-46041>

April 18, 2017

Detail University Seeks to Turn Pope Francis' Encyclical Message into a Climate Action Plan

By Liz Harman
University of San Diego News Center

The University of San Diego has unveiled a Climate Action Plan that calls for reducing USD's greenhouse gases on campus by at least 50 percent by the year 2035.

The centerpiece of the University of San Diego's celebration of Earth Month in April is a new Climate Action Plan that calls for reducing the university's greenhouse gases on campus by at least 50 percent by the year 2035.

Inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical entitled "Laudato Si" or "On Care for Our Common Home," the plan calls for reducing electricity and natural gas use by 35 percent and increasing the use of clean, renewable energy by 40 percent by 2035.

"Environmental degradation and its disproportionate impact on the poor and most vulnerable represents one of humanity's urgent challenges, and USD has developed a bold and comprehensive plan to turn the Pope's call for dialogue into action," said USD President James T. Harris III, DEd.

Activities on and off campus include an April 18 faculty panel discussion about climate change and the environment in the Humanities Center, Serra Hall 200, from 4-5:30 p.m.; A look at Conscious and Creative Consumption: Five Years of Fair Trade on April 19, 5-9 p.m. at the USD Electronics Recycling Center lot; the USD Earth Day Fair on Thursday, April 20, from noon to 2 p.m. in the plaza of the Student Life Pavilion; an Outdoor Adventure Service Trip on Saturday, April 22, and participation in the San Diego Earth Fair 2017 at Balboa Park on Sunday, April 23. And, on April 26 from 8-9 p.m., all USD residence halls are being asked to turn their lights off for this hour to support and raise awareness of climate change.

"As a contemporary Catholic university committed to its rich Catholic intellectual and social justice traditions, the University of San Diego prepares students to be enlightened, engaged and ecological citizens," Harris added.

The Climate Action Plan outlines how the university will reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions in energy, transportation, waste diversion, water and other areas. Efforts to reduce emissions will take place through a variety of ways including reducing energy and water use and alternative energy and transportation options.

"The plan is a living document that will change over time as new opportunities to improve sustainability unfold," said Michael Catanzaro, Director of the Office of Sustainability.

The plan also highlights progress the university already has made including reducing energy use on campus by 20 percent and diverting more than 2.7 million pounds of electronics from the San Diego waste stream since opening an Electronics Recycling Center on campus in 2011. In 2016, the university had its lowest water usage in more than 25 years.

<http://www.sandiego.edu/news/detail.php?focus=59289>

April 19, 2017

The religious case for caring about climate change

By Nesima Aberra

Vox

Talk about values, not just data: how this minister wants to inspire people to take action on protecting the environment.

What makes a person decide if they want to take action on climate change? According to [a Pew survey](#), Americans say they are most influenced by education, the media, and personal

experiences. One factor that barely plays a role: religious beliefs. Just 6 percent of American adults said their religious views were the most influential factor in deciding whether they think there should be stronger laws on the environment.

[Reverend Brooks Berndt](#) wants to change that — he wants to bring religion into the debate over climate change and the environment. As a pastor in Vancouver, Washington, he started a chapter of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign and worked to transition away from the state's coal plant.

In his current position as the minister of environmental justice at the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio, he has led efforts to divest from fossil fuels, support renewable energy, raise awareness of the Flint water crisis, mobilize at Standing Rock, and work on other environmental issues that particularly affect communities of color and working-class families. Brooks and his church are official partners of the [People's Climate March](#) on April 29 in DC.

“Grief over climate change is real,” he said. “Being in it for the long haul is knowing how to wrestle with things like grief. One of the best ways to deal with challenging issues ... is to not be alone but to be in a community of support.”

I spoke with Berndt about why religious people should prioritize the climate and how faith can be way to influence people on this issue.

Nesima Aberra

Religious people are less likely to believe in climate change and less likely to mobilize around environmental justice causes. Why do you think that is?

Brooks Berndt

When you talk about the Christian faith in the US, you're talking about a huge group of people with lots of diversity. A lot of Christians are not going to identify with that. At the same time, I think there is a sense that we need to own up with what's going on in our own bigger house — that climate denialism is a problem. And there has been a history of Christians not coming down on the right side on the environment with harmful views.

At the same time, when you look at, okay, who's moved the needle the most on climate opinion? The pope! He moved the needle in the right direction on climate issues. There's persuadability and openness. Some good segments of people are persuadable if you present things in a moral framework and relates to their faith and values.

One of the sad realities is that climate became this ideologically polarized issue like marriage equality and other issues. As a denomination, we're not strangers to that. We were the first denomination to come out for marriage equality. We're used to entering into polarizing issues, trying to take a firm public stance and at the same time realizing in our denomination, there is tremendous diversity on any one issue. That's also where we have the most to offer and is our greatest strength.

Nesima Aberra

Why is it necessary to have a religious response to climate change?

Brooks Berndt

As faith communities, we're possessors of a rich language about what fundamentally motivates people to address environmental injustices and address the climate. When I look at what motivates activists, often what gets circulated in some venues is science reports.

But what actually motivates people is what I have found are the three great loves. Love of neighbor: You're aware of the real and present suffering climate or pollution are causing right now, so you're motivated once you have that awareness. Another is love of creation, concern for how our natural world is being decimated, extinction of animals, the acidification of the ocean and deforestation. The number one motive I've come across — although it's not for everyone — is love of children.

Nesima Aberra

How do you make a case for the environment scripturally?

Brooks Berndt

Early on in the history of faith communities addressing environmental issues, a lot of emphasis was particularly on Genesis — that our role as humans is to be stewards of God's creation. I wouldn't detract from that, but I think we're in a time where there are other scriptures and messages that are more relevant.

The whole Christian faith is basically about a vision of community that is in utter opposition to the Roman Empire. We come from a tradition that was very much against structures of power, structures of military might, and very critical of greed in relation to wealth. So I think we have to relate our environmental challenges to those scriptures.

It also relates to Pope Francis. One of his articulations is if you come from a faith where God sides with the poor and stands with the poor, then that's a part of environmental issues today because it's poor people being harmed.

Nesima Aberra

Have you encountered any resistance from your community for the work that you do or the positions you take?

Brooks Berndt

I've had members who would express to me strong opinions that were oppositional or might be categorized as climate denialism, but they also stayed in the community. With trying to transition

away from [a coal plant in the state of Washington], I had members of my church who had at some point worked or had family members in that coal plant. I made plans to have a lunch with one of them and talked about it. It wasn't that difficult once you sit down and have lunch with somebody.

Not too many people are for polluting the water or air but there's a lot to be found in common ground and for people to be able to connect to an issue in a way that goes beyond the ideological or things one is fed in the media. When you can connect it to real life, people can get out of those ideological straightjackets.

Nesima Aberra

A lot of climate activists are concerned about the new administration's approach to the environment. Looking ahead, are you optimistic or worried about climate change?

Brooks Berndt

If you're a pastor, a lot of what you're dealing with on a weekly basis is people caught in grief. Grief over climate change is real and has a significant impact on people. And being in it for the long haul is knowing how to wrestle with things like grief. One of the best ways to deal with challenging issues and things like grief is to not be alone but to be in a community of support and point people to resources around them.

I'm a big fan of the Exodus story. At times we find ourselves with our back against the wall or the sea, but at some point the waters do part and we're able to walk through. Being able to have those stories and connect to what we're going through right now is powerful. So whether it's the Exodus story or the story of crucifixion and resurrection, these have helped us make our way through life, through the climate, and issue after issue over so many years.

<http://www.vox.com/conversations/2017/4/19/15271166/climate-change-religious-arguments>

April 21, 2017

Toward a Contemplative Ecology: A Conversation with Douglas Christie and Andrew Zoll

By Garrison Institute

In the past two centuries, human health and wealth have advanced as never before. While inequalities still bedevil us, on the whole, the current generation of human beings are living longer, more abundant, and more prosperous lives than any in our history. The product (and propulsion) of this prosperity has been an explosion in human knowledge and capability, unrivaled since the Enlightenment. We know more, enjoy more, and can do more than our forebears could have imagined just a generation or two ago.

Yet this civilizational triumph has come at a profound cost. For ours is also an age of environmental brutality on a global scale—marked by mass extinction, the overfishing and “plastification” of our oceans, and the ever-more catastrophic consequences of climate change, among much other malevolence. Humanity is now not merely influencing the planet, but altering its basic, life-giving systems—and in the process, imperiling ourselves, and countless other living things.

We tend to measure the perverse progress of these environmental catastrophes in the abstract language of accountancy—in hectares lost to deforestation, or metric tons of carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere.

But the ecological crisis also reflects something deeper and more intimate: a *spiritual* crisis—one of perspective, meaning, solidarity, and practice. And therein, perhaps, lies not only our indictment, but our hope.

Douglas Christie is a Christian theologian, professor at Loyola Marymount University, and the author, most recently, of *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*. In the book, Christie interweaves concepts from early Christian contemplatives, the American transcendental tradition, and the contemporary ecological crisis. In so doing, he ties together ancient practices and modern concerns, and provides signposts on the contemplative’s journey to a new relationship with both the self and the world. In this Earth Day dialogue, he explores these ideas with Andrew Zolli, the Garrison Institute’s President.

Andrew Zolli: In *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, you introduce concepts from the practices of early Christian contemplatives and explore their resonance in a modern world marked by a deepening ecological crisis.

I was struck, throughout, by a kind of dual meaning of the subtitle of the book. A “Contemplative Ecology” might be understood as ecology in the traditional, biological “web of life” sense, as filtered through a contemplative’s perspective. It might also be understood as an “ecology” of inner contemplative practices that draw us toward an ever-more deeply-lived life. There is a kind of metonymic relationship between the two.

With that in mind, let’s start with the first concept you introduce, *penthos*, which you frame as a profound experience of loss and grief.

Douglas Christie: *Penthos* is about the gift of tears. We get close to understanding *penthos* in the Christian tradition when we speak of “repentance,” even though that’s one of those words that has a really bad reputation. As soon as you bring up repentance, you start feeling terrible about yourself and everything you’ve ever done. In fact, repentance is a beautiful idea that has to do with practicing a kind of honesty with yourself about the whole of who you are—all of your longings and aspirations for what monks would call “purity of heart,” as well as all the habits and dispositions that have prevented you from opening up to the world.

In the Christian monastic tradition, tears were understood to be a kind of signal or indicator that the heart was breaking open. For the monks, the meaning of these tears was often very

ambiguous. There was sadness and regret around the awareness of your complicity in having caused suffering for yourself and others, but there was also something close to joy. The relief of tears signified a dam bursting, an opening up of the soul to stand more honestly in relation to reality.

These kinds of tears are sometimes seen in our contemporary world when people reflect on our relationship with the natural world. Of course, some might disagree and say that we're simply in denial about the whole situation on a cultural level. But in that case, our inability to mourn and our repression of tears seems like something worth addressing.

Andrew Zolli: Indeed, an honest encounter with the climate crisis often brings deep tears, which can move us from impassivity into either action or despair. I'm sure that at least some climate denialism, and much climate apathy, is rooted in an instinctive repression of those tears—an inability to look at facts that seem too painful to process, and too challenging to the status-quo of our self-constructed lives. It's hardly surprising that a culture of endless distraction and of ecological repudiation emerged at the same time; sometimes it seems to me that in American culture we either recoil from honest tears or drown in false ones.

But, as you've suggested, tears can serve a deep spiritual purpose—to demonstrate an understanding of the mirrored brokenness between the heart inside and world outside.

Douglas Christie: It's worth noting that, in the Christian monastic tradition, tears were bound up and connected with practice. For the monks it was a question of, *How might I turn this poignant moment of self-awareness back into my already seriously considered practice?* And the second thing is that these tears were connected to community. In traditional literature, tears often show up during a conversation between an elder and disciple as the result of some kind of probing of a moral or spiritual question that is of great significance to the one who is seeking help.

What do you do with those tears? Well, inevitably, there was a communal response to this question. You turn your attention back to the community with clearer eyes, with a deeper sense of commitment, and a greater sense of openness. I'm not saying that this simple analogy will tell us how to not feel overwhelmed at the crisis we're facing, but there is a lesson to be learned, I think, in reflecting on how an opening up of the soul or the heart can lead people back to their existing communities. In many ways, that's where an opening wants to be realized.

Andrew Zolli: In these days of polarized, sorted-out communities, that turning back to community can sometimes seem daunting. It can be hard to know where to engage. But in my own work on community resilience, I often see an analogue of the experience you're describing. In the wake of a major disaster, the marks of ordinary time and identity are lost, and the experience of radical loss drives some people to a place that is primal and communal. Connections to people and place intensify. The unimportant stuff falls away, and something deeper takes its place. After devastating tornados rampaged through one town, I observed a man rubbing soil on his arms and face, almost practicing a form of communion with the place. Another began replanting a garden even before her house was mucked out. And it doesn't just occur in disaster-zones: after 9/11, anthropologists working for the National Parks Service found hundreds of makeshift shrines erected in forests and wildernesses throughout the United States.

That all speaks to the critical element of *topos*, which you define as a deep sense of place. Yet I find myself contrasting that idea with our more everyday experience of place in the modern world, which seems increasingly fragmented. Thanks to technology, we often occupy more than one place, space, and community simultaneously: I'm here in my office, on the phone, on social media, sometimes all at once. I can be situated in more than once place—socially, psychologically—from moment to moment. There's a paradox there: on the one hand, I have more places where I might experience meaning, more places to find community; but I can also more easily be dislocated from the place I'm really "in" at the moment. And this seems closely related to the next term you introduce, *prosochē*, which concerns the nature of attention.

Douglas Christie: Well, it seems clear to me that at least part of what the growth of mindfulness in our culture is about is a longing to find a meaningful response to sense of the unbearable complexity of our lives. In our spiritual traditions—whether Christian, Buddhist, or otherwise—there are historical precedents for both individuals and communities who practice some form of retreat or withdrawal. They remove themselves and they give shape to a form of life that narrows down the range of what people are attending to.

In the monastic world, there is a certain amount of time for silence, a certain amount of time for manual labor, and, when the bell rings, you stop what you're doing and go recite or chant the psalms or other sacred texts. Even if that monastic model isn't viable for many of us, I think there's a reason why people are looking to these traditions for help. They point to the possibility that you can strip away some of the extraneous things that are always calling for your attention and be intentional about paying attention to fewer things with greater awareness and greater heart.

In our culture, there's always a danger of turning these practices into individualistic activities, but I think practices of attention can lead us back to a place that roots us in one another's company and allows us to be present with each other in our joys and suffering. It's a way of being present instead of absent.

Andrew Zolli: That presence is, for me, one of the central promises of a contemplative ecology—that by calming our minds and settling our attention, we can amplify our ability to be fully alive to the beauty, inherent strangeness, and interconnectedness of the world as a living system. By reducing our distractions, we're able to discern the interrelationships across this pulsing, creative, dynamic whole, and to commune more deeply with the world as it is.

I think this naturally brings us to *logos*, which is an intrinsic, deep, and creative principle. How does *logos* relate to this larger discussion about attention and place?

Douglas Christie: In the Christian tradition, it seems that the language of creation is often the standard point of reference for how we might revere and respond to the natural world. *The world was created by God and is seen as good, and therefore we have an obligation to respect it and respond to it.*

Of course, that's a beautiful and valuable principle. But I think it's worth noting that it hardly scratches the surface of how the Christian tradition has always understood the created world,

which is that God is pulsing through every living thing. If you take this basic theological idea in Christianity—that everything that exists came into being through the Word of God—then that invites you to really listen to the world itself in a different way. Every living being gives voice to this profound, sacred reality.

If you do this, you're listening to the voice of the beloved in and through everything. You're not flattening everything out, as if the cry of the hawk is the same as the sound the wind makes when it rustles through the trees or the sound of a pinecone that hits the earth. No, they're all manifesting different and distinct tonal qualities. This is religiously important.

Andrew Zolli: This reverence for the symphony of creation sets up the context for love, for *eros*, which you frame as a healing force. How do you distinguish between that kind of love and other ways people talk about love?

Douglas Christie: There are Christian theologians whose theology is informed by the ancient Greek idea of *eros*, which, when it's connected with the understanding of the divine, is the yearning of God for the world. It becomes the source of our own yearning for connection with one another, God, and all of reality.

When *eros* becomes part of a spiritual practice, it's the capacity that we have to open ourselves up to places on the edge. It can foster an experience of being drawn into the life of the other. It's often about surrender, vulnerability, tenderness, and receptivity to the other, who is beckoning to us. We both do and don't want to let ourselves become this vulnerable, but the language of *eros* invites us to consider how enlivening and enthralling these exchanges are.

It's also complicated, of course, as we can see in our ambiguous, often-conflicted responses to the possibility of intimacy in human relationships. Instead of practicing simple openness, too often we project our own anxieties onto the other. We do this out of fear, insecurity, or a kind of uncertainty about whether letting go in love is really possible—or whether we are capable of such release. In the mystical tradition, this manifests itself as an apprehension about letting go to experience the infinite other.

Can we really open ourselves to the life of the other, without the ego closing off this very possibility? Can we inhabit a place of receptivity? Can we allow the life of the other to flow into us and inform and shape us? If so, then we also begin to develop another way of understanding community and our own sense of belonging.

Andrew Zolli: I am reminded of the ecological concept of the *ecotone*, the place where two biomes meet—like a marshland between a river and the riverbank. These can be places of tremendous genetic richness, biodiversity, and flourishing.

Yet there is a hard-edged transactionalism in contemporary society that seems to work against this kind of exchange, in which we open ourselves to being deeply influenced by the other. In every respect—in our psyches, institutions, relationships, and use and stewardship of resources—our culture seem to encourage zero-sum thinking by default.

Here in the West, that's especially true in terms of the climate. Narratives of power, dominance, and a kind of manifest destiny pervade—civilization is seen as a victory *over* nature, and any other response is framed as radicalism or capitulation. But there are interesting signals appearing from the East. In the last few years, China has put forth a different, aspirational model of development—to become an “ecological civilization,” rooted in Confucian concepts of harmonious environmental, material, social, and spiritual development. Of course, nobody fully knows yet what that means in practice, but it's an important narrative opening.

I must say that it was a bit jarring when your book moves from *eros* to the following concept of *kenosis*. What is *kenosis* and how does it fit alongside *eros*?

Douglas Christie: Yes. Well, the idea of *kenosis* was haunting me the whole time I was writing the book. In the Christian spiritual tradition, it refers to the experience of radical self-emptying and the sense of being emptied out completely. *Kenosis* in the context of this book evokes the sense of emptiness and loss that we sometimes feel in the presence of suffering and death, when we sense that the world is not always benevolently oriented toward us. We know this. At least from our limited perspective, the world doesn't always seem to have our best interests at heart. When we reflect on this fact, we sometimes experience an emptying out of meaning from our lives and from the world itself. It takes integrity to stand in that condition of uncertainty without making up some meaning where there isn't one.

For me, the idea of *kenosis* connects deeply with the attitude Pope Francis calls for in *Laudato Si*. As we turn our gaze toward the suffering world, he suggests that we are being called to a deeper, more *painful* awareness: “Our goal is . . . 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.” The joy we feel at our deep erotic intimacy with the living world calls forth from us a painful awareness of all that is being lost, and an ethical call to engage in the work of healing.

Andrew Zolli: I'm struck here by the distinction between empathy, *feeling the pain* of others, and compassion, *feeling a motivating, active concern and solidarity* for the pain of others. In the face of the enormity of others' suffering—and the world's—there is more pain than we can internalize. In an effort to do so, we run the risk of empathy fatigue and burnout. It's critical to transform empathy into compassion and compassion into action—to keep it productive. I was listening to an activist the other day, who said her mantra in the current political climate has become to “turn her pain into political capital”—relentlessly refocusing on purposeful action.

That brings us naturally to *telos*, which is about how we come to embrace a purpose which carries us out back into the world. We start to think about how to re-inhabit the world after we've reconfigured our attention and come into communion with our place. Can you reflect for a moment on *telos* and purpose?

Douglas Christie: Well, it's worth acknowledging that many of our spiritual traditions give careful attention to the idea of purposelessness, a letting things be what they are for their own sake. It is an expression of non-attachment that reminds us that we should take care to avoid turning everything into our own play things that only serve our agendas. Also, it reminds us that

not everything has to be understood as having utility or purpose, which is another way that we visit our obsessions on the world.

I think at their deepest levels our spiritual traditions invite us to recognize that we have a capacity to experience freedom. That freedom alone can be the source of tremendous healing in the world. And, actually, *telos* challenges us to undo our sense of purpose-driven existence that often confuses what is essential for what is peripheral or secondary. It opens up some part of our own awareness to the gift of existence. With that awareness, we can respond to the world.

Andrew Zolli: I think one of the things that's interesting about a contemplative ecology in this time of crisis is that there is this balance to strike between detachment and radical engagement. It's often true that people on the forefront of social action sometimes need to detach. They need to come up for air. They're swimming very deeply in dark water—on behalf of all of us—but, as you say, there's something perfectly divine about experiencing purposelessness—the gift of undirected being—before they dive back in.

Douglas Christie: You're right that there is a sense of urgency to our current situation and contemplative practice can't be allowed to be a kind of vacation from attending to what's happening in the world. Even in our practice we have to be fully alive, alert, aware, and responsive to the realities of the world, including suffering and brokenness. But I'm also convinced that there has to be room in our collective reality for stillness, emptiness, and spaces that aren't filled up. It's just critical to our well-being. Our capacity to make a meaningful response to the fragmentation and alienation we are experience will depend on it.

Whatever new sense of wholeness we're groping our way toward, it needs to include contemplation *and* active engagement. The early Ignatian contemplative tradition has a wonderful phrase: *simul in actione contemplivus*, which can be roughly translated as contemplative even while engaging in action. A rich simultaneity in which contemplation and action are understood as profoundly woven together in our lives.

<https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/toward-contemplative-ecology/>

April 22, 2017

These Native American Scholars Marched For Indigenous Science

“There are numerous contemporary indigenous sciences based on a long tradition and history. They need to be validated as such — not as folklore.”

By Nidhi Subbaraman
BuzzFeed

WASHINGTON— From Sydney to San Francisco, indigenous scientists and scholars celebrated traditional knowledge on Saturday, as [thousands across the world demonstrated at March For Science events](#).

Indigenous knowledge and practices are often dismissed as mythology or “quaint stories,” Melissa Nelson, associate professor of American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University, told BuzzFeed News.

“There are numerous contemporary indigenous sciences based on a long tradition and history. They need to be validated as such — not as folklore,” said Nelson, who is Anishinaabe.

With the global March For Science events being [held on Saturday](#), Nelson was part of a group that [wrote a declaration](#) arguing that indigenous science, including ancient practices of conservation and healing, could complement dominant “Western science” and be useful at a time when people are looking for ways to tackle problems, such as climate change and issues of sustainability.

More than 1,700 people, including members of more than 40 indigenous groups, and allies, signed the statement.

“It seemed incomplete to me that as we celebrate science, we don’t celebrate the other sciences,” Robin Kimmerer, director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at State University of New York, who is Citizen Potawatomi, told BuzzFeed News.

Kimmerer began drafting the petition and looking for collaborators when she saw the movement to make a [public show of support for science](#) gather momentum online.

“People often think about indigenous science as a historical example, as a museum piece,” she said. “It’s a very contemporary problem-solving ability because of the principles it’s based on.”

For example, ecology, biology, and tribal practices [are at work](#) restoring salmon and sturgeon in the Columbia River basin. In Arizona, the Tohono O’odham Nation is turning to traditional grains and diets to combat diabetes.

Though the pursuit of “Western science” has [sometimes antagonized indigenous groups](#), the March For Science is an opportunity to collaborate, and raise awareness that these alternate libraries of knowledge exist, Rosalyn LaPier, a visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School who co-wrote the statement, told BuzzFeed News.

Indigenous communities in the US, from Louisiana to Alaska to Montana, [are already feeling the effects of climate change](#) and preparing to survive despite it, sometimes tapping into indigenous knowledge system.

“Let us remember that long before Western science came to these shores there were indigenous scientists here — native astronomers, geneticists, botanists, engineers — and we are still here,” Kimmerer said, during a speech at the March For Science event in DC.

“There are a lot of people who say when climate change comes to us we’ll just go,” Kimmerer said. “[But] many indigenous peoples are extremely vulnerable to climate change and are in homelands that they cannot leave.”

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/nidhisubbaraman/these-native-american-scholars-marched-for-science>

April 22, 2017

Christian Earth Day lessons: worship by protecting creation

By Paul Douglas
The Guardian

Climate change is a global pro-life issue

Readers of this column know that I tend to focus on breaking science in the climate and energy areas. Sometimes, I stray into politics and other times, I venture further afield. Today, on Earth Day, I was reflecting on best ways to move real action forward and it is clear to me, and almost everyone in this industry, that building bridges between like-minded groups is key.

Frankly, it isn't just scientists that are concerned about climate change. Our concerns are shared by business leaders, the insurance industry, defense industries, people who enjoy the outdoors, farmers, and many more. Recently, there has been a movement amongst persons of faith as well. In fact, for some people of faith, taking care of the Earth is a mandate from a higher authority. In this light, and to celebrate a very different voice from my own, the following is a guest post by a well-known meteorologist in the USA, Paul Douglas. It turns out he is also a man of faith as well as a business leader. Thanks Paul.

-John Abraham

Christians just celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I'm a Christian, husband, father, businessman and scientist; a Penn State meteorologist by training. It's true that all knowledge is relative; science is never "settled" and one never quite reaches solid bedrock. There's always a new observation, a new discovery, a radical theory, more testing to do. We look at the universe through a pinhole as God gradually reveals himself to us.

Regardless of how you pray or how you vote, we can all agree that fewer toxic chemicals in our air and water is a good thing. But today, [more Americans die prematurely from air pollution than traffic accidents](#). More than [5 million premature deaths](#) result from dirty air every year, worldwide. Air pollution [disproportionately impacts minority and low-income communities](#) across the USA. And statistically, [America's poor are much more likely to live near toxic waste sites](#).

These numbers betray the ugly truth that the poor pay the steepest price for America's toxic reliance on fossil fuels. This is not the world Jesus teaches us to create. "He will reply, truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me," Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 24:45.

The Trump administration's misguided efforts to roll back protections for public health and the environment puts every one of us at risk, especially those with the fewest resources. Increasingly, America the Beautiful is under siege, as the interests of polluting industries take priority over the safety and welfare of our children.

Science is not a substitute for faith; the two are not mutually exclusive. Science has no answer for the miracle of consciousness, the power of love and the promise of eternal life to come. We are here to worship our Creator and enjoy the fruits of his Creation. We are caretakers of a precious gift. We don't own anything—everything around us is on loan. "My home is in Heaven. I'm just traveling through this world," Billy Graham preached.

Science doesn't have all the answers, but we would be well advised to listen to [the 97% of climate scientists](#) who tell us Earth is warming, and the rapid burning of fossil fuels is responsible. Because the symptoms of a warming planet are becoming harder to deny and dismiss.

I just co-authored [Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment](#) with Mitch Hescox, a former coal industry employee and a Methodist Minister. He is now leading the Evangelical Environmental Network, made up of conservatives focused on conserving the very thing that sustains us: a healthy, vibrant planet.

I'm proud of the many Christians who will march on April 29th in [the People's Climate March](#). Around the world people of faith will speak with one voice about the dangers of climate change, and the opportunities for good, renewable, clean-energy energy jobs. Environmental justice and economic justice go hand in hand. [Clean energy is rapidly outpacing fossil fuels in creating jobs](#)—the solar industry already employs twice as many people as coal.

We are called to be stewards, tending what's left of Eden. "Man has been appointed as a steward for the management of God's property, and ultimately, he will give account for his stewardship" says Luke 16:2.

How are we doing?

More than 150 million people around the world [live within three feet of sea level](#), so warming, rising seas are quickly becoming more than an inconvenience. Climate change is already making storms, droughts and heat waves more intense, impacting where crops grow and who has access to water. Climate change is emerging as the global human rights struggle of the 21st century.

A rapidly-changing climate affects the health and welfare of our kids, and their kids. Respect for life must extend to future generations of unborn. [Climate change](#) is a global pro-life issue.

There's no time for gloom and doom. We already have solutions that will power sustainable abundance. Dirty fossil fuels will fade as we dial up clean, renewable energy sources. [The revolution is here](#): solar costs have fallen more than 80 percent since 2008, onshore wind is down 40 percent, and grid-scale batteries cost 70 percent less. We can have everything we want and need, with less stress on Earth's Operating System - less lasting damage to God's Creation.

What would Jesus do? We can't know the mind of God, but based on Christ's own words, actions and ministry he might have two simple questions. "Did you protect my Father's home? Did you defend his children?"

What will we tell him?

Republican meteorologist [Paul Douglas](#) is a serial entrepreneur, co-founder of [AerisWeather](#) and [Praedictix](#); currently on the board of EEN, [The Evangelical Environmental Network](#)

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2017/apr/22/christian-earth-day-lessons-worship-by-protectiong-creation>

April 25, 2017

A Guatemalan indigenous land rights activist wins the Goldman Environmental Prize

Rodrigo Tot, born in central Guatemala during the mining boom of the 1960s, spent much of his 59 years in a tenacious battle against the mining industry in the Lake Izabal region.

Al Dia News

A Guatemalan Indian who was born in central Guatemala during the mining boom of the 1960s and has spent much of his 59 years in a tenacious battle against the mining industry in the Lake Izabal region, has been awarded the [Goldman Environmental Prize \(link is external\)](#) for his conviction that the fight to save the Earth is the most important.

Indigenous leader Rodrigo Tot told EFE in an interview that "I feel happy as a leader of my community because I know that through our struggle we will achieve our goal," adding that despite the **threats against his family, seemingly a permanent part of his life**, he will never be intimidated.

He lost his parents when still a child, so at age 12 he went to live with relatives in Agua Caliente. That small village was his home, the place he grew up to be the leader he is, and in 2002 the Q'eqchi, descendants of the Maya, elected him to be their leader.

From that moment he guided his community to a court decision that set a historic precedent: it ordered the government to issue property titles to the Q'eqchi people and kept the environmentally destructive nickel industry from expanding into their community.

A man of few words but sharp and to the point in his speech, Tot, who **never received a formal education** and who learned to speak Spanish listening to others, recalled how government officials and executives of Hudbay Minerals, the company that operates the Fenix nickel mine, never spoke with the indigenous community.

They came and got down to business. The Q'eqchi only found out about it when the miners came and went to work. The Indians saw the lands they lived off of threatened and were afraid.

But with the help of the Indigenous Law Resource Center and O'eqchi Ombud, a small human-rights organization, they achieved the seemingly impossible.

The Guatemalan Constitutional Court confirmed the people's right to collective ownership - between 1985-2002 they had paid 32,350 quetzals (some \$4,000) for more than 1,300 hectares (3,200 acres) - and ordered the government to replace the "missing" pages in the property registry (they had been torn out) and to issue the corresponding property titles.

Despite the court's decision, the government never enforced that ruling.

And the price paid by Tot was steep. Without lifting his eyes from the ground, he recalled how on Oct. 1, 2012, the eldest of his five sons was slain, leaving behind four little orphans.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ruled preventive measures against the mining operation in his favor, but they were also ignored. The only thing that kept him going was his close-knit family and certain positive results: "We got a lot of support. You start with you family and from there you start seeing an expansion of positive results."

An ardent believer in the Bible and a preacher for more than 37 years, Tot has **no fear of what might happen to him** and is perfectly aware that, **from one moment to the next, "they'll make me disappear."** Even so, he said the struggle must be continued by the next generation.

His attorney, Carlos Antonio POP, was most emphatic in his resentment. The "Russians," he said, are dead set on getting the uranium in the area, and so much money could be involved that all the rest - the court sentence, the murder of Tot's son and everything else could end up in limbo. **The race for uranium is not even being investigated.**

Meanwhile local water resources are dwindling and the Indians' crops seem almost irrevocably damaged.

But Tot is still a fighter, and the [Goldman Environmental Prize \(link is external\)](#), he said, is an acknowledgment not only of his but also of the community's engagement in "the biggest fight in the world, for the Earth."

The campaign for justice has not come without great personal risk. Previous Goldman prize winners such as Berta Cáceres have been killed in Latin America, which rights groups say is the most dangerous region to be an environmentalist.

<http://aldianews.com/articles/culture/environment/guatemalan-indigenous-land-rights-activist-wins-goldman-environmental>

April 27, 2017

Science and faith a natural fit for climate change marchers

By Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans
Global Sisters Report

When you think about women religious, the word "science" may not be the first to spring to mind. After all, faith and science are often portrayed as opposites, allegiance to one suggesting a betrayal of the other.

But for many if not most Catholic sisters, the calculations, experiments and observations that have shaped climate study and other scientific disciplines are facts that bolster their conviction that all life on Earth is interdependent, and that the time to intervene on behalf of a struggling planet is now.

That explains why, in part, women religious, volunteers and other community associates are traveling to Washington, D.C., for the [People's Climate March](#) on April 29 or already took part in the [March for Science](#) there a week earlier. Many are participating in local marches, too.

"Science helps us understand the world around us," says Sr. Barbara Battista, a member of the [Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana](#). "Faith in general can help us understand that there is so much we'll never understand about this journey in life. Science helps us get little glimpses of ... the immensity and therefore the potential for life. We are all connected. ... What happens to one happens to all of us."

Long before Pope Francis embraced the science behind climate change in his 2015 encyclical "[Laudato Si'](#): On care for Our Common Home," Catholic sisters were blazing trails in the hard sciences. Four nuns in the late 19th century worked with astronomers to help map the stars. In 1965, the late [Sr. Mary Kenneth Keller](#), a [Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Dubuque, Iowa](#), is recognized as the first American woman to earn a doctorate in computer science. Sr. Mary Celine Fasenmyer, a [Sister of Mercy](#), was a mathematician famed for her work on hypergeometric functions.

Before a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis mandated a change of calling in 1971, Sr. Margaret Knoeber, a member of the [Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Wichita, Kansas](#), had earned a doctorate in organic chemistry at Notre Dame University, and founded the chemistry department at Sacred Heart College (now Newman University).

"I believe in science and the study of science, the teaching of science, because science is a significant aspect of our lives," says Knoeber, who went on to have a long and fruitful career with the university and as a leader in her own order. "I'm not aware that Catholics I know have any difficulty with science."

Battista, who participated in one of the satellite versions of the March for Science on April 22, says that she has been inspired by an unlikely role model: a man imprisoned by the Catholic

Church for his outspoken, persistent defense of the Copernican hypothesis that the Earth circles the sun.

"Galileo has been my hero within the Catholic Church for as long as I can remember. He stood his ground against some pretty short-sighted teachings of the church that ultimately were corrected," says Battista, who helped organize the Wabash, Indiana, version of the science march. "The Catholic Church has yet to recognize the full humanity of women. To me, that's a breakdown of biological science — to me there should be no distinction."

Sr. Joan Baustian, a member of the [Adrian Dominican Sisters](#) based in Adrian, Michigan, is part of a group of eight community members planning to attend the 2017 People's Climate March in Washington.

As a child, she says, she grew up on a farm. But for 27 years she lived in Detroit, where part of her work was helping residents create and tend a community garden. Spurred by her concern over proposed severe cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency's budget and other Trump administration proposals, Baustian says that she hopes that the groups gathering in Washington and around the country on April 29 will influence decisions being made by lawmakers.

"The climate was made by God, and we're destroying it," she says. "If you believe what's in the Bible, we were made stewards of this wonderful Earth, of all these resources, and we're poisoning it."

Baustian's order, which has made a commitment to "live simply and sustainably for the sake of the whole Earth community," has a long history of environmental activism that includes alternative investing, interfaith alliances and physical changes to their campus and community life.

These measures include the establishment of a [permaculture](#) site on their campus. Using social and ecological principles, permaculture is designed to imitate the relationships found in the natural world.

The focus of the permaculture philosophy is "working with nature instead of against it," says Dominican volunteer program member Holly Sammons. Currently working with the Adrian Dominicans Peace Justice and Care of Creation Office, the 2014 college graduate is part of the group traveling to Washington for the Climate March.

"This is a way for me to add my voice to people calling for positive change to environmental policies and to learn from more experienced activists," says Sammons. She's also impelled to march, she says, by her concern for "climate refugees" — those forced out of their regions by droughts, rising sea levels or temperatures. "It's only going to get worse if we continue down the path we have been going," she says.

Sammons, who is Catholic, says she has been inspired both by the pope's encyclical and by the deliberate ways in which the Dominican Sisters are trying to mitigate their own environmental footprint.

Permaculture specialist Elaine Johnson, a staff member in the Adrian Dominican community, says she wasn't raised in any particular faith community. Describing herself as "having a reverence for life, and being pro-life in all life forms," Johnson says that she hopes to tap into the power of the network of activists descending on Washington April 29. "It is a protest march, but I like to think of it as an action march. You can protest and resist ... and come back and do local action."

Kathy Quick, a Sister of Mercy associate, is planning to travel to the D.C. march from her home in Clifton Park, New York, in the company of a sister and two other associates. "I'm trying to be optimistic, that [the march] will bring to the forefront that this is a real issue; it's not going to go away. People are very concerned. We're demanding action," says Quick, a U.S. Air Force veteran, whose professional interest in climate change derives from her past career as a weather forecaster.

In partnership with the [Global Catholic Climate Movement](#), the Sisters of Mercy have been public advocates for an assertive approach to redressing the effects of climate change as part of their approach to the care of the Earth.

The Friday before the climate march, Sr. Maryann Agnes Mueller, Justice and Peace Coordinator for the [Felician Sisters of North America](#), planned to be part of a lobbying group organized by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, though as a Connecticut resident, she says that her senators are both already involved in legislation to cope with the effects of climate change. The next day she planned to march with the [Franciscan Action Network](#).

As a Franciscan, she believes that everything is interconnected, and says, "How we treat the environment is a barrier to peace in the world." Recalling a New York march in 2014 before the [U.N. Climate Summit](#), Mueller says that she felt more hopeful then. "It's just different this time. There is an urgency. We need to be out in the streets and show up because of the new political climate [and] to make people aware that this is affecting the poor, refugees, everything. We're going backwards."

While several women religious are attending marches because of concern about the global effects of climate change and the impact of national policy decisions, Sr. Kathleen Storms, a [School Sister of Notre Dame](#)*, brings the conversation back to local concerns. As a staff member at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat, the ministry that the [Congregation of the Humility of Mary](#) operates in the countryside of east central Iowa, Storms runs the 200-acre farm. At the retreat center, they raise vegetables in a garden and a greenhouse, use a bank of solar panels, and have put almost half of their acreage in a conservation reserve program to take the land out of production, she says.

In the Quad Cities area, where a local march will take place on April 29, one of the chief concerns is water quality and availability, she says. "Much of our water is polluted by runoff from the fields, and the rivers end up in the Mississippi, so water has ended up being one of our main issues," she says. Both the Congregation of the Humility of Mary and her own congregation are passionate about climate care, she says.

Storms, who hopes for a good turnout on Saturday (she and a local Benedictine sister are going to be handing out chocolate spheres covered with a foil image of the Earth), says that science is an ally, backing up their faith with facts.

"I don't see what science is telling us as any different from what our faith is telling us. We need to care for the Earth."

[Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans is a religion columnist for Lancaster Newspapers, Inc., as well as a freelance writer.]

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/science-and-faith-natural-fit-climate-change-marchers-46321>

April 28, 2017

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change recognizes Canadian churches as earth-care partners

Press Release

Ottawa – The Honourable Catherine McKenna will be present at the *Green Churches Forum* to show her support for Canadian churches of all denominations as spiritual and moral leaders in their efforts to reduce their ecological footprint. In conjunction with the celebrations taking place throughout the National Capital for Canada's 150th anniversary, the Forum will be held on May 11th at St. Paul University in Ottawa. Anyone interested in taking better care of our planet is welcome to attend. After offering some words of welcome, Minister McKenna will be on hand to meet and exchange with participants.

Although churchgoers are not the first to spring to mind in caring for the environment, they are actually deeply involved in community gardens, recycling, efficient water and energy conservation, reuse (rather than disposal) of tools, clothing, toys and other items as well as in numerous other varied and often original "green initiatives". Christians are doubly energized in this quest through their faith that God has entrusted the care (not the domination) of his creation to humanity and we have the responsibility to respect and look after it.

Keynote speaker and the Anglican Church of Canada's first National Indigenous Bishop, Right Rev. Mark MacDonald, will share his unique insights on caring for creation. The introductory presentation by this spiritual and ecological leader will be followed by workshops on topics related to environmental education and action. During the break for a "green" lunch, it will be possible to visit the kiosks of various ecological organizations. More workshops will occur in the afternoon and an ecumenical celebration will close the day.

This fourth Forum organized by the Green Churches Network follows those held in Montreal (2010), Drummondville (2012) and Quebec City (2015). Started in 2006 in Montreal, the Network currently numbers more than 60 churches of various denominations across the country.

For more information visit <http://forum.greenchurches.ca>

or contact us at [1-844-490-6464](tel:1-844-490-6464) (toll free).

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