January 3, 2018

Pope to hear from indigenous about ministry, land rights in Chile, Peru

By Barbara J. Fraser
National Catholic Reporter

TEMUCO, Chile — Sergio Catalaf's son was just 3 days old when police arrested the Mapuche Indian leader, accusing him of terrorism. He and 10 other Mapuche leaders spent 14 months in preventive detention before being acquitted in October of setting fire to a farmhouse in which an elderly couple died.

Sitting in his simple wooden house, cradling the child on his lap as a light rain fell outside, Catalaf said he and others have been targeted unjustly because they are defending their people's right to their ancestral territory.

He would like Pope Francis to speak out about that when the pontiff visits Temuco Jan. 17.

Pope Francis' weeklong trip to Chile and Peru in January will take him to two regions that are among those countries' poorest, where environmental issues and demands for indigenous land rights have led to sometimes-violent conflict.

In the Araucania region of southern Chile, Mapuche communities have been stripped of their land repeatedly — first by Spanish colonists, then by settlers who moved to the region to farm, and more recently by timber plantations.

The pope will celebrate Mass here and share lunch with a small group of "simple people, ordinary people from the region," according to Bishop Hector Vargas Bastidas of Temuco.

Vargas said he expects the pope to bring a message "of hope, that hearts may be opened to peace, justice and dialogue."

Pope Francis is slated to meet with Amazonian indigenous people in Peru's southeastern Madre de Dios region Jan. 19. His visit comes at a time when Wampis and Achuar people in Peru's northern Amazon region, as well as groups in other parts of the country, are seeking greater autonomy and territorial rights.
Those rights are at the heart of conflicts in southern Chile, where protests have been marked by violence in recent years. Besides the burning of the home in the case in which Catalaf was acquitted, protesters have burned evangelical and Catholic churches, although indigenous leaders also have received support from the church.

The construction of hydroelectric dams on the Biobio River displaced indigenous communities and remains contentious, and recent decades have seen the expansion of pine and eucalyptus plantations across vast areas of southern Chile.

The plantations have depleted local water supplies and occupied areas claimed by Mapuche communities. Although they provide some local jobs, a study in 2016 found that plantations have done little to reduce poverty in the Araucania region, which remains one of the poorest in Chile.

Plantations have displaced indigenous people, who traditionally farmed, fished or raised livestock. They also have left little of the native forest that is the center of Mapuche spirituality, said Isolde Reuque Paillalef, a Mapuche woman and coordinator of indigenous ministry for the Diocese of Temuco.

The Chilean government has been purchasing or allocating state land to be turned over to Mapuche communities that have documents proving rights predating the arrival of settlers. But some communities have received land that is too far from their communities to be of practical use, or that lacks water and electricity, she said. In other cases, the cost of moving to the new land and building houses is prohibitive.

Nevertheless, Mapuche communities maintain their identity and their traditional religion, particularly the "nguillatun," a communal ritual that strengthens and renews bonds among the community members, Reuque said.

"This is a people of faith, which, despite everything, has not lost its values, its love for the earth and its own identity," she said.

Some bishops and priests are reluctant to support the movement to strengthen indigenous identity and traditional rituals, Reuque said, but others have embraced it.

Just outside the city of Temuco, Fr. Juan Antonio Gonzalez lives in a simple, wooden house in an area the diocese has designated as a Mapuche parish. Like his neighbors, he tends a flock of chickens in a pen beside his home.

He has no plans to build a church building for people whose traditional place of worship has been the forest. Instead he visits the communities scattered throughout his parish, including more than a dozen that have Christian communities founded more than four decades ago, when Maryknoll missionaries from the United States worked here.
"That network of Christian communities is what most strengthens the Mapuche culture," Gonzalez said. "Our work is to accompany the Mapuche people, supporting the good initiatives that spring from them" and strengthening their cultural identity.

"The Mapuche people's demands are just," he said, adding that although the Chilean government and the Mapuche people must resolve them, the Catholic Church can help by encouraging dialogue.

Pope Francis will hear similar concerns about territorial rights, environmental damage and the need for indigenous ministry when he travels to Puerto Maldonado, in the southeastern Peruvian Amazon, Jan. 19.

Home to some of the world's most biodiverse parks, that area has been devastated by a gold rush that has left large expanses of barren land pockmarked with pit mines. The wildcat mining has led to forced labor, trafficking of women and girls for prostitution, and one of the highest murder rates in the country.

Indigenous people from vicariates throughout the Amazon will travel to Puerto Maldonado for a meeting with the pope. Most will be leaders of Christian communities in their parishes or villages. Some will be from areas where communities have suffered oil spills or invasion by wildcat gold miners, while others have seen their forests razed and replaced with oil palm plantations.

Amazonian indigenous communities are among the poorest in the country, and often lack basic services such as safe water, sanitation and electricity.

The lack of basic services, along with poor schools and scarce job opportunities, drives many indigenous people to cities. They often live in the most impoverished urban neighborhoods.

Many conceal their indigenous roots to avoid discrimination, Rosa Pacaya, who leads a Christian community in La Inmaculada parish in the northeastern city of Iquitos, told CNS.

Pacaya lives in Masusa, a riverside neighborhood of houses built on stilts, which floods each year during the rainy season. The houses lack running water and sewage systems, and trash collects in the streets and under the buildings when the water recedes.

Most men in Masusa work informally, loading and unloading riverboats in the nearby port, while women care for their children and do odd jobs. Pacaya cooks and cleans in other people's houses or scavenges scraps of wood behind a sawmill to sell for firewood.

The stress of daily life takes a toll on families and leaves people little energy for mobilizing to demand better living conditions, she said.

A priest visits the chapel in her neighborhood once a month to celebrate Mass. On the other Sundays, she leads the Liturgy of the Word and catechism classes. By working with children, she hopes to draw the rest of the family into the Catholic community.
Ministry among indigenous people in both rural and urban areas requires a church with an indigenous face, said Divine Word Fr. Fernando Diaz Fernandez, who works in the parish in Quepe, a town about eight miles from Temuco.

"It would be a church that is tribal, rather than monarchic," he said. "A family church that is not patriarchal. It would be a church that learns to read the word of God in creation, to care for (creation) and respect it. A church that witnesses to the truth, seeking out our neighbors and those who suffer, and serving them."


January 5, 2018

Pope to teachers: Help kids live with care for all of creation

By Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City — A lifestyle that is environmentally ethical cannot be "schizophrenic" — for example, by showing more care for animals and forests, than for the plight of people, Pope Francis said.

A green lifestyle must be consistent and complete, driven by a love for God the creator and all of his creation, the pope said in a speech Jan. 5 to the Italian Association of Catholic Teachers, which held its national congress in Rome in early January.

The elementary school teachers must help children from a young age understand and practice an environmentally ethical lifestyle that must not be "schizophrenic," that is, a kind of disconnected concern for, as an example, "taking care of animals in extinction, but ignoring problems facing the elderly. No. Or defending the Amazon rainforest, but neglecting the rights of workers to have a fair wage," he said.

This approach demands teaching the importance of personal responsibility, not bombarding the children with slogans or catchy commands that someone else will have to carry out, he said. Teach children to have an enthusiastic appetite for "experiencing an environmental ethics that stem from the choices and behaviors in daily life," he said.

The pope also encouraged teachers and schools to rebuild a new alliance with families that mutually supports and strengthens each other.

The educational alliance or "pact" that once existed among the state, schools and parents unfortunately "is broken" and must be repaired, he said.
Since constructive collaboration no longer comes "naturally," plan and design a way for it to happen, even with the help of experts in education, said the pope, who used to teach at a Jesuit high school in Buenos Aires.

"But even before that, foster a new 'conspiracy' — and I am fully aware of this wording — between teachers and parents," becoming jointly responsible accomplices to promote the well-being of children, he said.

Teachers and parents cannot see each other as opposing forces and or point fingers at each other, he said, but rather, they must put themselves "in the other's shoes, understanding the real difficulties both sides face today in education, and thus creating greater solidarity, a supportive collusion."

Pope Francis also urged the Catholic teachers to continue to be inspired by their Christian values, whether they teach in public or private Catholic schools, and to encourage their students to be open to others in a "culture of encounter."

The challenge is to work together to teach kids to be open to and interested in what is around them, he said.

They need to be "capable of caring and tenderness — I am thinking of bullying here — free from widespread fallacies" that claim the only way to be worth anything is "to be competitive, aggressive and tough toward others, especially toward those who are different, foreign or seen as being an obstacle in some way to one's personal success," he said.

"Unfortunately, this is the 'air' our children often breathe," he said. The remedy is to give them a "change of air" that is healthier and more humane, he said, which is why it is important teachers build a new alliance with parents.

Help kids see others as brothers and sisters to be respected and as worthwhile in getting to know "with their past, their virtues and defects, assets and limits," he said.


**January 8, 2018**

Organizers want 'Black Nazarene' festival in Philippines to go green

By Inés San Martín

Crux

Three years ago, Pope Francis shattered the all-time record for turnout for a papal Mass by drawing an estimated six million people in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. The previous record had also been set in the heavily Catholic Asian nation, when St. Pope John Paul II is
believed to have celebrated a concluding Mass at World Youth Day for somewhere between four and five million.

Yet neither of those events are even close to being the Philippines’ biggest religious gathering. That pride of place belongs to the annual Black Nazarene procession, and the Asian Catholic news agency UCAN reports that this year, the week-long celebration is expected to draw close to 20 million people to Manila.

The apex will come on Tuesday, when a feast known as the Translacion, celebrating the passage of a sacred image from one location to another, is marked.

Every year on Jan. 9, millions gather in Manila for a procession of the Poong itim na Nazareno, a life-sized statue of a suffering Jesus fallen under the weight of the Cross. It’s held along a three-mile route from Rizal Park, where Francis delivered his “Thrilla in Manila” in 2015, to the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene, in the district of Quiapo, where the image is kept throughout the year.

This time around, organizers are echoing the environmental-friendly message Francis delivered in the Philippines and throughout his pontificate, urging people to keep the celebration “trashless.” The appeal has been made by several environmental groups and Father Douglas Badong, vicar of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo district.

“Let us consider our environment in our expression of faith,” the priest said.

According to UCAN, Monsignor Hernando Coronel, rector of the basilica, also called on Catholics “to translate the devotion into actions that would serve the community.”

“Let us become ecological stewards like how we protect the image of the Black Nazarene during the procession,” he said.

Last year, over 300 tons of garbage were collected throughout the week along the route of the procession, some 70 tons after the 20-hour pilgrimage from the park to the church. These statistics led to last week’s call from several pro-environment groups, urging Black Nazarene devotees to renounce littering and maintain a “zero-waste” policy during the procession.

The suggestions - made by the EcoWaste Coalition, Buklod Tao, and the Green Brigade Committee of the Quiapo Church - include asking for pilgrims to refrain from smoking or vaping as an “act of penance,” to return used beverages and food containers to givers or vendors for proper disposal, and to store their food in reusable cloth bags instead of plastic ones.

In recent years, among the most littered items were food packaging, plastic cups, food leftovers, bamboo skewers, PET bottles, plastic bags, newspapers and cigarette filters.

Speaking from experience, the group also asked for people not to relieve themselves in PET bottles, nor in the walls of Rizal Park or the streets, saying that it’s “unsightly and unsanitary.”
The environmental groups asked the devotees to “express their faith in a manner that is respectful of the environment.”

“The Catholic devotion to the Black Nazarene is truly breathtaking and splendid. Sadly the annual Traslacion is sullied by the unrestrained littering at the Pahalik and vigil site in Luneta and along the processional route,” said Daniel Alejandre, of the EcoWaste Coalition in a statement.

The EcoWaste Coalition, self-defined as a public interest network of community, church, school, environmental and health groups pursuing sustainable solutions to waste, climate change and chemical issues, issued its own statement, fearing a repeat “of the heaps of garbage” left by the faithful on Dec. 31 - another big day for the Black Nazarene devotees, since it marks the beginning of the novena in his honor.

“As a show of reverence to the Black Nazarene, we request the faithful to manifest their solemn devotion in a way that will not overwhelm Rizal Park and the processional route with litter,” he said.

“Cleaning up the mess left behind by the devotees can be a grueling task for government workers and for volunteers from various parishes, schools and groups,” he added.

According to the EcoWaste Coalition, the protection and preservation of the city’s environment and God’s creation should also be “at the core” of the devotion to the Black Nazarene.

During off-the-cuff remarks at the University of St. Thomas in Manila three years ago, Francis urged youth to protect the environment, “not only because this country, more than many others, is likely to be seriously affected by climate change.”

The pope had a set of prepared remarks, which he decided to set aside - as he often did during this trip - opting instead to speak in Spanish through an interpreter. This decision was partially motivated by the fact that the Argentine pontiff was visibly moved by the questions posed to him, particularly that of a 12-year old girl named Glyzelle Palomar, who asked the pope, “Why do children suffer?”

However, Francis requested for his original speech to be published. In it, he focused even more on the environment, something that was expected: Preparations for the papal visit were partially set in motion after a 2013 super-typhoon in the central Philippines left 6,000 dead and 4.1 million homeless.

“You are called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens, but also as followers of Christ!” the pope wrote in the speech, available on the Vatican’s website. “Respect for the environment means more than simply using cleaner products or recycling what we use. These are important aspects, but not enough.”

He went on to say that by destroying forests, ravaging the soil and polluting the seas, humanity betrays the noble calling of being “stewards of God’s creation.”
Francis insisted on this during his homily in the Mass in Rizal Park that drew a crowd estimated at six million people.

“[God] created the world as a beautiful garden and asked us to care for it,” he said. “But through sin, man has disfigured that natural beauty; through sin, man has also destroyed the unity and beauty of our human family, creating social structures which perpetuate poverty, ignorance and corruption.”

The actual feast of the Black Nazarene is marked on Good Friday. However, this week’s procession is even more popular. It reenacts a seemingly minor historical event from 1787, known as the solemn Translacion, meaning transfer, of the image from its original home, where Rizal Park is now located, to its present home at the basilica in Quiapo.

Most Filipino Catholics consider the Nazarene statue to be miraculous, able to heal terminal cancers and other sicknesses, to grant petitions, and to help those in need.


January 11, 2018

How Much Does Climate Change Cost? Try $1.5 Trillion (and Counting)

By Mark Trahant
YES! Magazine

The Trump administration, and its allies in Congress, are fighting a losing war. They continue to press forward for the development of oil, gas, and coal when the rest of the world understands the implication of that folly. Global warming is the most pressing issue for our time. Period.

The thing is governments really have two choices when it comes to managing the impact on its people from global warming: spend money on trying to reduce the problem or spend money on cleaning up the catastrophes.

The Trump administration is on the hook for the catastrophe. A report released Monday by The National Centers for Environmental Information pegged the total cost this year at $1.5 trillion, including estimates for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. (And that doesn’t even begin to count the human toll, lost lives, lost jobs, lost opportunity.)

I witnessed firsthand the impact of Hurricane Maria on the island of Dominica last month. We keep hearing stories about the power grid being down (similar to Puerto Rico) and you think, Why? It’s been months. Why aren’t the lights on? Then you see nearly every electrical pole on the island sideways. The entire grid needs to be rebuilt (or better, rethought) and that’s decades of infrastructure. So the figure of $1.5 trillion is far short of what will be needed. Nearly every
electrical line, every other house, the damage was so widespread it’s impossible to overstate. And that’s just one island. Multiple the effect across the region. The planet.

Even the United States.

The Centers for Environmental Information says there were 16 weather and climate disasters with losses exceeding $1 billion each across the country last year. These events included one drought, two flooding events, one severe freeze, eight severe storms, three cyclones, and one extraordinary wildfire. These “events,” as the center defines them, resulted in 362 deaths.

Turns out 2017 was a record-breaking year. “In total, the U.S. was impacted by 16 separate billion-dollar disaster events tying 2011 for the record number of billion-dollar disasters for an entire calendar year,” the report said. “In fact, 2017 arguably has more events than 2011 given that our analysis traditionally counts all U.S. billion-dollar wildfires, as regional-scale, seasonal events, not as multiple isolated events. More notable than the high frequency of these events is the cumulative cost, which exceeds $300 billion in 2017—a new U.S. annual record.”

A similar report was published by the Government Accountability Office, including a recommendation that Executive Office of the President “identify significant climate risks and craft appropriate federal responses.”

But instead of trying to reduce the impact—and the costs of weather-related catastrophe—the Trump administration continues on course for new development of oil and gas. The Interior Department announced new rules that, if enacted, will open up nearly all of the United States coastal waters to more oil and gas development beginning next year.

“By proposing to open up nearly the entire OCS for potential oil and gas exploration, the United States can advance the goal of moving from aspiring for energy independence to attaining energy dominance,” said Vincent DeVito, counselor for Energy Policy at Interior, in the news release. “This decision could bring unprecedented access to America’s extensive offshore oil and gas resources and allow us to better compete with other oil-rich nations.”

Or as Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke put it: “The important thing is we strike the right balance to protect our coasts and people while still powering America and achieving American Energy Dominance.”

Dominance is such a funny word. How can any nation be dominant in the face of hurricanes that are ever more powerful and destructive? How does energy dominance work when tens of thousands of Americans will have to move because their homes are no longer there because of fire or storms? What happens if that number grows into the hundreds of thousands? Millions? How can we afford to spend trillions of dollars rebuilding what we have now?

A group of elders on the Bering Sea immediately condemned the Interior Department’s offshore drilling plan. “We told them that in person last October and again in writing, that there were 76 tribes in these regions opposed to this,” said the statement from the elders. “The draft plan implies that Bering Sea communities were ‘generally supportive of some’ oil and gas activity.
This is not accurate and there is no evidence of this from Bering Sea communities. For decades, our people have opposed oil and gas activity and we continue to oppose it today. The northern Bering Sea is a very fragile ecosystem. The marine mammals that we rely on use it as their highway and they follow specific migration routes. That is how we know when and where to find them. The noise and vibration associated with drilling will interfere with their sonar and disrupt their migrations. Then we the coastal people will lose our primary food source.”

There is a connection between developing oil and gas and paying the high costs to clean up after a storm. One side of the ledger goes to a few; the oil and gas “industry.” The folks who bought and paid for this administration.

The other side of the ledger is the rest of us. The taxpayers who will foot the bill for this continued folly.

And on the Bering Sea? The folks who live there are one storm away from a tragedy. As the elders put it: “Our people and our way of life are being exposed to danger and we do not understand why.”


January 12, 2018

'This is a sin.' Public appeals to Pruitt's religion

By Niina Heikkinen
E&E News

To keep the Clean Power Plan alive, some people are appealing to Scott Pruitt's faith in God.

The EPA administrator, who is a Southern Baptist, has fought against the Obama administration's signature climate rule since his days as Oklahoma's attorney general. Now the agency he leads is in the first phases of undoing the rule, by seeking comment on the proposal from the public. A number of commenters made it clear that EPA's decision to reconsider the rule did not mesh with their own religious views. They challenged Pruitt to reconsider his opposition to the Clean Power Plan in light of his moral obligation to protect the planet.

One woman told Pruitt to review the Bible's teachings on the environment.

"[I]f you are among those Americans that have turned your back on science because it challenges your beliefs, I urge you to consult your religious texts," wrote Jessica Ferrato.
Ferrato noted that citations in the Bible about care for the environment could be found from "Genesis to Revelations" and were supported by a range of Christian denominations, as well as non-Christian teachings.

"[W]hether you are guided by science or religion, by mathematics or by the lure of cold hard cash, our morality, our life experiences, and our success as a species and as a society is fundamentally connected to the care with which we manage the bounties of our natural world," Ferrato said.

Greg Rockwell, meanwhile, expressed his disappointment with the administrator more succinctly.

"This is a sin. Please repent, and follow God," he wrote.

While appealing to the administrator's personal beliefs may seem like an unusual tack to prevent regulatory rollbacks, Pruitt is known to have strong ties to his faith. In Oklahoma, he was an active member of his church in Broken Arrow, where he served as a deacon and taught Sunday school. Since coming to Washington, he has attended Bible studies with other Cabinet members (Climatewire, July 14, 2017).

Pruitt often sprinkles his public speeches with religious references, using words like "prayerfully" and occasionally alluding to Scripture. Last November, he attended the dedication of Washington, D.C.'s Museum of the Bible.

Commenters attempted to tap into that connection to Christianity to reach the administrator, who has gone forward with the repeal over the objections of environmental groups and public health experts.

Many comments filed with EPA began with the same phrase: "As a person of faith, I am very concerned about the impact of global warming on God's Creation."

Commenters pointed out that the Bible called for mankind to be "good stewards" of the Earth. That, they said, included protecting against the harmful impacts of climate change.

The Rev. Dr. Gail Cafferata, an Episcopal priest, said repealing the Clean Power Plan was undermining "vital health protections."

"God has blessed us with this planet with its precious air, water, flora and fauna, and made us stewards of this wondrous creation. From this ethical perspective, any risky exploitation of the earth for human purposes like greed or power or national supremacy is immoral because it offends the Creator of heaven and earth," she wrote.

This isn't the first time opponents of Pruitt's plans have attempted to reach him by appealing to his faith. In October, a group of religious leaders made a trip to EPA headquarters calling for the agency to take action on climate change and reconsider its deregulatory agenda. The
administrator did not attend that meeting, but the group was able to meet with agency staff (*Climatewire*, Oct. 25, 2017).

To date, there are more than 185,000 comments posted on the *Federal Register*, and EPA had set a comment deadline of 11:59 p.m. Tuesday. Yesterday afternoon, EPA extended that to April 26 to allow comments after additional public "listening sessions" on eliminating the rule.

EPA's first listening session of the year will be on Feb. 21 in Kansas City, Mo., followed by another on Feb. 28 in San Francisco. The final listening session will be on March 27 in Gillette, Wyo., according to EPA. The agency held its first listening session in November in Charleston, W.Va.

"In response to significant interest surrounding the proposed repeal of the Clean Power Plan and the success of the West Virginia hearing, we will now hold listening sessions across the country to ensure all stakeholders have an opportunity to provide input," Pruitt said in a statement.

An EPA court filing on Wednesday also asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to continue to keep the case challenging the Clean Power Plan on hold until the agency completed its rulemaking process.

So far, most of the posted comments on the CPP's repeal have voiced opposition to the proposal.

Some commenters lauded Pruitt's actions, too.

One man, David M. Albert, said he thought some provisions of the Clean Power Plan were illegal and the rule should be repealed. He targeted the endangerment finding, a scientific determination that underpins EPA's greenhouse gas rules.

"The CPP is proposed due to the Endangerment Finding which itself was enacted without required study. Since the enactment of the Endangerment Finding all of the supporting arguments for it have been shown to be invalid by peer reviewed science," he wrote.

[https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060070817/](https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060070817/)

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**January 16, 2018**

Christianity Is Not Getting Greener

By Niina Heikkinen, ClimateWire

Scientific American

U.S. Christians' concerns about the environment and climate change haven't shifted much in the past two decades, despite a push by some religious leaders to increase attention on the issue, a new study finds.
In fact, Christians' views may be reversing course since the 1990s, according to David Konisky, an associate professor at Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs and the study's author.

"Not only has there not been an amplification of concern among Christians about the environment, there's seemingly been a decline, at least over the time period I've been studying," he said.

Konisky's work is part of a decadeslong debate both in academia and among religious leaders about the degree that Christianity is a positive or negative influence on people's attitudes on climate change. His study comes as some researchers have suggested there has been a "greening of Christianity" in recent years, as high-profile religious leaders like Pope Francis have made climate change a higher priority within the faith. Konisky wanted to find out whether this "organizational-level" emphasis on caring for the planet was having an impact on the attitudes of individual Christians.

Konisky said he wasn't necessarily surprised by the findings.

"It seemed perfectly possible that Christians may be less concerned about the environment than, say, non-religious individuals, but there may have been a growth over time in the level of concern," Konisky said.

To figure out whether there had been a change in attitudes over time, Konisky needed data that consistently tracked attitudes about the environment over a number of years, along with religious affiliation. He found just such a resource in Gallup polling data, which included specific questions on concerns about the environment, pollution and climate change. He analyzed survey responses from 1990, 1991, 1999 and 2005 to 2015.

He found American Christians' concern about the environment had remained the same or declined, and that the degree of concern did not shift based on how often the individuals said they attended church.

His findings were published recently in the journal *Environmental Politics*. The paper comes as environmental groups are seeking to rally support for environmental regulations at U.S. EPA and other federal agencies that the Trump administration is in the process of unwinding.

The role of religion on shaping beliefs about politically charged issues like climate change has gotten attention under the Trump administration, particularly as President Trump has packed his Cabinet with evangelical Christians.

Konisky noted previous research had shown that political affiliation and ideology were the most important influencers on Americans' attitudes on the environment.

"But once you sort of move past that and think about other characteristics, what you consistently see popping up in empirical research is that religion matters," he said.
Konisky cautioned that there were several limitations to the study. The surveys did not ask detailed questions about which denominations respondents were affiliated with. The research also doesn't provide an answer for why concern may be decreasing.

"What's the explanation for the decline? I can't really say with any certainty because the data don't allow that kind of analysis. There is a lot of future work to be done to figure out what explains these correlations," Konisky said.

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https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/christianity-is-not-getting-greener1/

January 17, 2018

Amid attacks on churches, Francis tells Chilean indigenous to shun violence

By Joshua J. McElwee

National Catholic Reporter

TEMUCO, Chile — Pope Francis told Chile's indigenous people Jan. 17 to shun bloodshed in their decades-long struggle with the country's government over control of their native lands, warning that violence "eventually turns even the most just cause into a lie."

Speaking in the capital of Chile's verdant southern Araucanía region — where protest against the government's sale of former indigenous territory to logging companies has included shootings, kidnappings, and bombings — the pope said: "You cannot assert yourself by destroying others."

"Violence begets violence, destruction increases fragmentation and separation," Francis said in a homily during a Mass with 150,000 Mapuche, Rapanui, Aymara, Quechua, Atacameño, and other indigenous people gathered at Maqueue airfield.

Violence, the pope said, is "like the lava of a volcano that wipes out and burns everything in its path, leaving in its wake only barrenness and desolation." He encouraged the native peoples to instead "seek the path of active nonviolence."

Francis' exhortation against political violence came on the second of his three-day visit to Chile. A tense atmosphere not before seen on the pope's 21 other voyages abroad has marked the trip.

At least six churches across Araucanía have been firebombed in the past 48 hours, apparently by militant indigenous groups who think the pope's visit lends legitimacy to the Chilean government's control of their native lands. Three helicopters owned by the logging
company Forestal Arauco were also attacked overnight Jan. 16, their cockpits left bombed-out and unusable.

Francis is also facing vocal criticism over his 2015 appointment of Bishop Juan Barros Madrid of Osorno, Chile, who is accused of covering-up for notorious abuser Fr. Fernando Karadima in the 1980s and ’90s.

Several protesters stood outside the airfield in Temuco Jan. 17 to criticize the pope over Barros. Referencing the pope's defense of Barros in 2015, when the he said the allegations against the bishop were being orchestrated by "lefties," the protestors held a sign that read: "Not lefties, nor fools, Osorno suffers. Bishop Barros covered up."

Francis arrived in Temuco after an hour-long, 400-mile flight south from Santiago, the Chilean capital, where he is staying each night in the country.

The Mass in Temuco began with a short ritual performed by a small group of indigenous people, who approached the wood-accented altar platform at the airfield wearing colorful headdresses and holding tree-branches. As several of the indigenous banged on drums, the rest of the group moved the branches while singing softly.

Francis started his homily by referencing how the airfield hosting the Mass had been used at the beginning of Augusto Pinochet's 1973-90 military dictatorship as a detention and torture center of political dissidents.

The pope said the site had been the location of "grave violations of human rights" and said he wanted to offer the Mass for all those who had died and those who experienced "so much suffering, so much pain."

Francis also focused his reflection on the need for different cultures within a society to seek unity together while distinguishing between unity and uniformity.

The pope said that unity should not come about as "the result of forced integration" but must be woven together like a hand-stitched garment. "Unity can never be a stifling uniformity imposed by the powerful, or a segregation that does not value the goodness of others," he said.

Logging is Chile's second-largest industry, after copper mining, and is responsible for 10 percent of the country's exports. Nearly 20 percent of land in Araucanía is now used for forest plantations, which activists say has adversely affected the local ecosystem.

There are about 600,000 Mapuche in Chile, which has a total population of some 17.9 million. The indigenous people have lived in the region since long before the Spanish arrived in the area in the 16th century.

The Chilean government and the Mapuche have been at odds for nearly three decades over what lands in the region should be controlled by the indigenous group, and the disagreement has as
times turned violent, often with the setting of destructive fires that cost logging companies tens of millions in damages.

After the Mass Jan. 17, Francis is to have a private lunch with 11 representatives of the Araucanía region, including eight Mapuche, a victim of rural violence, a Haitian immigrant, and a Swiss-German settler,* at an educational center run by the Congregation of the Holy Cross. The pope will then return to Santiago, where he is to hold a meeting with young people and visit the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in the evening.

The pope's visit to Chile will continue Jan. 18 with a trip to Iquique, a port city about 1,000 miles north of Santiago, where he will celebrate an open-air Mass before heading on later in the day to Lima, Peru.

The pope will be in Peru through Jan. 21, returning to Rome Jan. 22.


January 19, 2018

Interfaith Power & Light welcomes Susan Hendershot Guy as new president

Episcopal News Service

Interfaith Power & Light (IPL) announced that Rev. Susan Hendershot Guy will serve as its new president, ending a year-long search for the successor to founding president the Rev. Sally Bingham, who is retiring after leading the organization for 18 years.

“I am excited to continue to grow this vital organization and its critical mission to mobilize a religious response to global warming and to act as good stewards of our planet for future generations,” said Hendershot Guy, a minister ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) tradition, who has led this work in Iowa for seven years. “I deeply respect the work of Rev. Bingham and hope to build on the solid foundation she created. The need for people of faith to lead the movement to protect Creation has never been greater.”

President Emeritus Bingham will remain involved on IPL’s board of directors. “It is with delight and my strong support that I leave IPL not only with a strong board of directors, but also in the capable hands of the Rev. Hendershot Guy who will carry IPL well into the 21st Century,” said Bingham.

IPL has an unparalleled track record of educating millions of “people in the pews” about the call to care for Creation and mobilizing them to action, achieving clean energy policy wins from the local to international level. Mobilizing people of faith to be advocates for climate protection is more important than ever, as the Trump administration continues its reckless attempts to roll
back urgently needed climate policies. Maintaining the EPA’s Clean Power Plan, and keeping congregations all over the U.S. moving forward with emissions reductions to show that “We are Still In” the Paris Accord are important priorities for IPL. Hendershot Guy will be speaking in support of the Clean Power Plan at the upcoming hearing in San Francisco.

“Rev. Hendershot Guy will bring a valuable new perspective to our San Francisco-based team from her experience leading one of our successful Midwest affiliates,” said Doug Linney, chairman of the board of directors, which conducted the nationwide search for the new president. “I am more confident than ever in our stability, strength, and the urgency of our mission. I believe we are in a great position for growth and innovation,” Linney continued.

Hendershot Guy will step into her new position this month. She will lead IPL from its national headquarters in San Francisco.


January 19, 2018

From the Amazon, Francis decries policies that 'strangle' indigenous

By Joshua J. McElwee
National Catholic Reporter

Puerto Maldonado, Peru — Pope Francis stood among the indigenous peoples of the Amazon Rainforest Jan. 19 to criticize the ramp-up of the global extraction industry in the world's most biodiverse region and decry local policies that he said "strangle" its some 350 native tribes.

The pope met with about 4,000 indigenous in this small city near Peru's southeastern border with Bolivia, known as the gateway to the Amazon, and expressed support for proposals that would place large portions of the forest under native control.

"We have to break with the historical paradigm that views Amazonia as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants," Francis said in an address marked by criticisms of both exploitative global industries and national Peruvian policies.

"Great business interests want to lay hands on [the Amazon's] petroleum, gas, lumber, [and] gold," he said. "The native Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened on their own lands as they are at present."

The pope then lambasted local policies that he said operate "under the guise of preserving the forest, [but] hoard great expanses of woodland and negotiate with them, leading to situations of oppression for the native peoples."
"These problems strangle her peoples and provoke the migration of the young due to the lack of local alternatives," he said, speaking as Peruvian President Pedro Kuczynski sat in the audience.

Francis, who has made environmental protection a key focus of his papacy, came to the Amazon on his first full day in Peru, which he is visiting through Jan. 22 on the second leg of a weeklong journey abroad that started in neighboring Chile.

His speech to the indigenous, some of whom took part in the event bare-chested and sporting feathered headdresses, comes as the expansion of permitted construction of dams and roads has tied with illegal mining activities to turn large portions of the lush, verdant rainforest into contamination zones.

Puerto Maldonado's apostolic vicariate estimates that nearly 17 percent of the Amazon has been destroyed. In press materials, the vicariate said that a "spectacular increase" in the granting of mining permits in particular has shown an "arrogant disregard" for environmental conservation efforts and the protection of native peoples.

Francis also heard testimony from three members of different Amazon tribes. Héctor Sueyo and Yésica Patiachi of the Harakbut people spoke passionately about the pressure their peoples are under.

"We ask that you defend us!" Patiachi told Francis, to wide applause from the crowd.

Sueyo said they had a warning for the world: "The indigenous peoples of the Amazon want to tell all of humanity that we are worried because due to the consequences of climate change the land is spoiling, the animals are shrinking, the trees are disappearing, the fish are dying, [and] the fresh water is running out."

Earlier this week, leaders of three of the largest indigenous communities asked Francis to support their request for Peru to grant some 50 million acres in collective land rights to the indigenous.

The pope appeared to back that effort in his speech Jan. 19, noting "promising initiatives ... which advocate that the native peoples and communities themselves be the guardians of the woodlands" and would "benefit your families, improve your living conditions and promote health and education in your communities."

As he has at many times in his nearly five-year papacy, Francis also pointed out the effect carbon emissions have on both the local and global scale, saying that release of hydrocarbons after oil extraction and coal mining in the Amazon "gravely threaten the lives of your families and contaminate your natural environment."

"Your lives cry out against a style of life that is oblivious to its own real cost," the pope told the indigenous. "You are a living memory of the mission that God has entrusted to us all: the protection of our common home."
For his part, the pope promised that the Catholic Church "will never stop pleading for the outcast and those who suffer."

Francis focused on the environment in his 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home," in which he accepted the wide scientific consensus on climate change and called on global governments to act.

Several world leaders have said the encyclical played a role in the success of the 2015 Paris agreement, which has been signed by 195 countries and obligates them to reduce carbon emissions and practice more sustainable development.

Sixty percent of Peru is located in the Amazon Rainforest, which also encompasses parts of Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia. About 34 million people live in the Amazon, including some individuals and tribes in voluntary isolation.

The Puerto Maldonado vicariate said that more than 250 dam projects and 20 road construction projects have been approved in recent years, and more than 8,000 mining permits have been granted, with another 6,800 under review.

Francis was greeted at the event Jan. 19 by two dances from young indigenous peoples, whose arms and legs swayed to a slow incantation.

The pope began his address by naming 22 of the different Amazonian tribes he wanted to greet and then saying he had come to see the "deep wounds that Amazonia and its peoples bear." He asked the native tribes especially to protect those who have chosen voluntary isolation, calling them "the most vulnerable of the vulnerable."

"They went into seclusion in the most inaccessible reaches of the forest in order to live in freedom," he said. "Their presence reminds us that we cannot use goods meant for all as consumerist greed dictates. Limits have to be set that can help preserve us from all plans for a massive destruction of the habitat that makes us who we are."

Francis landed in Peru from Chile Jan. 18 to an enthusiastic welcome on the streets of the capital of Lima.

Tens of thousands of people lined miles of Lima's streets to try and catch a glimpse of the pope as he made his way from the airport to the apostolic nunciature, where he is spending his nights.

After arriving at the nunciature, Francis took to his pope-mobile a second time to try and greet more of the people on the streets, who were pushing against barricades and gathered rows deep, holding signs and offering small gifts or religious objects.

The reception in Peru made a sharp contrast to Chile, where the pope encountered protests each day in the country over his 2015 appointment of Bishop Juan Barros Madrid, who is accused of covering up sexual abuse by a fellow priest in the 1980s and '90s.
Francis will to return to Lima in the afternoon of Jan. 19 for a meeting with Kuczynski and will give a speech to him and the country's other political leaders. The pope travels Jan. 20 to Trujillo, in northwest Peru, for an outdoor Mass and a meeting with priests and religious.


January 19, 2018

Pope set to visit site of deforestation, indigenous struggle in Peru

By John Cannon
Mongabay

- Pope Francis plans to visit Puerto Maldonado in the Peruvian region of Madre de Dios Friday morning on his trip to South America.
- He will speak with indigenous communities in a coliseum.
- Madre de Dios had the second-highest rate of deforestation in the Peruvian Amazon in 2017, with 208 square kilometers (80 square miles) of forest cover loss as a result of farming, logging and mining.

Pope Francis will visit one of the Peruvian Amazon’s most threatened regions today, where the leader of the Catholic Church is expected to address escalating deforestation and uncertainty about indigenous peoples’ rights.

“The Holy Father has a special concern for the Amazon and therefore put as the first point of his journey an encounter with indigenous groups to dialogue, to give a sign of hope,” Salvador Piñeiro, president of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference, said in an article published by Mongabay LatAm. “These topics concern the Pope and he feels them very closely.”

After a visit to Chile earlier this week, the pope is scheduled to fly Friday morning from Lima to Puerto Maldonado, the capital of the Madre de Dios region. It’s a place where logging, agriculture and mining — much of it illegal — have led to the loss of thousands of hectares of rainforest in recent decades. In some cases, these activities have touched off conflicts with local communities.

Buoyed by Pope Francis’s commitment to tackling environmental issues as codified in Laudato Si’, the encyclical he published in 2015 subtitled “On Care for Our Common Home,” campaigners are eager to welcome him to their corner of southeastern Peru. After meeting with local authorities, he will speak to indigenous people in a coliseum.

“It is very symbolic that the pope is going to Madre de Dios, the capital of the country’s biodiversity, home to many indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, and yet [one that] has seen
a growing trend of environmental problems, corruption and poisoning of the ecosystem,” said Pedro Solano, who heads the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law, known as SPDA.

The region of Madre de Dios is in the midst of a “deforestation crisis,” according to the scientists at the NGO MAAP, short for Mapping of the Andean Amazon. Based on their calculations using early-warning alerts from the University of Maryland and Peru’s environment ministry, they’ve tracked an “increasing trend of annual forest loss since 2001, peaking in 2017.”

The 208 square kilometers (80 square miles) of forest loss in 2017 is twice what the region saw in 2008. That means that Madre de Dios has been saddled with the second-highest rate of deforestation in Peru’s slice of the Amazon. To get a better idea of what’s causing this hemorrhage, the MAAP team drilled down into the data covering specific areas.

Gold miners are felling trees in areas around the upper stretches of the Malinowski River, which abuts the wildlife-rich Tambopata National Reserve, as well as the town of La Pampa. Elsewhere, near Santa Rita, Guacamayo and Iberia, small-scale farmers appear to have cut several thousand hectares of forest to plant cacao, corn and papaya.

The satellite imagery has shown the “rapid proliferation of logging roads” around Tahuamanu, according to MAAP. And in 2017, spots of deforestation began to show up in two ecotourism concessions teeming with wildlife near Las Piedras, which locals say are the result of cacao farming and cattle ranching.

“This hotspot is located within a forestry concession, but its impact is troubling due to the extension and density of the new road network,” MAAP reported. The team found evidence of 130 kilometers (81 miles) of new logging roads into forested areas in 2017.

Issues such as logging and mining affect indigenous ways of life, leaders say. The razing of the forest they depend on and the pollution of their waters from mining are among the issues that a coalition led by the group Fenamad, the Native Federation for the Madre de Dios River and its Tributaries, hopes to bring to the forefront with the pope’s visit.

“For us, indigenous peoples, the pope’s arrival is important because it is a leader who is highlighting environmental issues and human rights,” Julio Cusurichi, president of Fenamad, said in another article by Mongabay LatAm.

Also in the group’s proposal are the legal security of their claims to the land and a desire to have a say on large projects such as oil and gas infrastructure, dams for hydropower, and roads that cut through the forests. They also want to see the continued protection of peoples living in voluntary isolation and a recognition of the conservation contributions that indigenous communities make.

Many local and national leaders also see this as an opportunity to elevate the status of indigenous rights and rampant forest destruction on the national agenda.
“Unfortunately, lawmakers have failed to see this reality and are letting an opportunity pass for the organization of the country against this phenomenon and to demonstrate to Peruvians and the pope concrete actions that address this our common house as he calls the world,” said Iris Olivera, program coordinator at the organization Law, Environment and Natural Resources. “We just hope that the pope can raise an agenda, a commitment that we can then follow up on.”

Others envision a mandate arising out of Pope Francis’s choice of where to visit in Peru.

“If the pope comes to Peru and his first trip is to Madre de Dios, he commits us as a country to be able to take effective measures for protecting the environment and combating illegal activities occurring in the region,” said Alicia Abanto, the deputy ombudsman of the Environment, Public Services and Indigenous Peoples.

CITATIONS


January 19, 2018

Pope in Amazon urges seamless defense of life, earth and cultures

By Inés San Martín
Crux

PUERTO MALDONADO, Peru - In the middle of Peru’s Amazon jungle, Pope Francis on Friday delivered what could be considered a “seamless garment” speech - stressing ecology and issuing a strong appeal for protection of the Amazon region, which he said is not an “inexhaustible source of resources,” while also insisting that human life has equal, if not greater, value.

Francis said he wanted to affirm “a whole-hearted option for the defense of life, the defense of the earth and the defense of cultures.”

The term “seamless garment,” associated with the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, refers to an approach to the sanctity of life stressing opposition to abortion and attempts to
redefine the family in tandem with other social justice issues, such as defense of the poor and the environment.

“The defense of the earth has no other purpose than the defense of life,” Francis said during his first speech in Peru after arriving Thursday night.

“We know of the suffering caused for some of you by emissions of hydrocarbons, which gravely threaten the lives of your families and contaminate your natural environment,” he said.

Yet, the pope warned, there is also an equally worrying “distortion” of certain policies, which aim to conserve nature without considering the men and women who live in the area. There are movements, the pope told a stadium with some 4,000 people from the Amazonian region, trying to preserve the forest that also “hoard great expanses of woodland and negotiate with them, leading to situations of oppression for the native peoples.”

Saving the trees and wildlife, in other words, is not good enough, if the people who live in the region are not equally protected.

On the day of the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., Francis also delivered a strong pro-life message.

Speaking about the family and how it’s contributed to keeping cultures alive, he said that today there are “ideological forms of colonialism, disguised as progress, that slowly but surely dissipate cultural identities and establish a uniform, single… and weak way of thinking.”

“Ideological colonization” is a papal shorthand for attempts by Western governments and NGOs to compel impoverished nations to accept measures such as contraception, abortion and gay marriage as a condition of development assistance.

Referring out loud to what was originally a footnote in his prepared text, Francis also spoke of the need to “raise our voices” against pressure in favor of the sterilization of women, which, he said, at times happens without their knowledge.

That’s a highly sensitive issue in Peru, since former President Alberto Fujimori launched a family planning program in 1996 that involved the sterilization of thousands of women. Justified at the time by a desire to reduce poverty, the program stirred controversy when many women, mostly members of the country’s Amazonian indigenous groups, reported that they had been sterilized without their consent.

In general, the pope presented a comprehensive case for the defense of life, both natural and human, in the Amazon.

“Praise to you, Lord, for your marvelous handiwork in your Amazonian peoples and for all the biodiversity that these lands embrace!” Francis said Friday.
The pope was paraphrasing a prayer by St. Francis of Assisi, “Canticle to brother son and sister moon,” which gave the title to the pope’s first-ever encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’*. The Argentine pontiff has long called for greater protection of the environment, insisting that climate change is at least partially man-made.

“This song of praise is cut short when we learn about, and see, the deep wounds that the Amazon and its peoples bear,” Francis said.

Prior to the pope’s remarks, he heard from indigenous persons urging a defense of the peoples and cultures of the Amazon.

María Luzmila Bermeo told Francis that forests have been attacked, fish killed, trees cut down, animals hunted, and rivers polluted by mining, gold and oil extraction.

“Now we do not have many natural resources,” she said, adding that it seems “we don’t care. We don’t respect nature. Rather, we pollute all nature.”

Pollution, she said, has heavily impacted the Amazon, which today suffers the effects of climate change.

“What can we do? The authorities can help conserve the forests, to keep our environment clean and breathe pure air, like when I was little,” she said.

Arguably, the pope said, the Amazon’s peoples have never been so threatened in their own land, which is under pressure on many fronts, including what he called a “neo-extractivism, and the pressure being exerted by great business interests that want to lay hands on its petroleum, gas, lumber, gold and forms of agro-industrial monocultivation.”

In recent years, the Peruvian Amazon has been plagued by illegal mining that damages the delicate ecosystem. Yet this practice, the pope said, also leads to another “devastating assault on life”: human trafficking, slave labor and sexual abuse.

“Violence against adolescents and against women cries out to heaven,” the pope said.

“Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. This issue involves everyone!” he continued, quoting his own document, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Francis also referred to the “most vulnerable of the vulnerable,” meaning what are called “Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation,” who went into seclusion in inaccessible reaches of the forest to “live in freedom.”

“Their presence reminds us that we cannot use goods meant for all as consumerist greed dictates,” he said. “Limits have to be set that can help preserve us from all plans for a massive destruction of the habitat that makes us who we are.”
Puerto Maldonado is a steamy rainforest city often used as the gateway to deeper, more remote parts of the Amazon jungle and a jumping-off point for eco-tourists who want to explore the natural riches of Tambopata national park.

There are over 50 ethnic groups living in the Peruvian Amazon, and representatives from several of them traveled to participate in the gathering with Francis. Also present were bishops from eight of the nine countries that make up the Pan-Amazonian region. Last year, the pontiff called for a 2019 synod of bishops to focus specifically in this region, and some on the ground perceived this meeting as a prelude of the one to come.

One of the organizers of the event told *Crux* on Thursday that many had to “travel by boat, then go into the mud, then on another boat” to get to Puerto Maldonado, in the Madre de Dios region.

Respecting and recognizing the native peoples, acknowledging their cultures, languages, traditions, rights and spirituality is key, and can only be done with the indigenous being the “principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting your land are proposed.”

The Amazonian people, the pope said, are not an obstacle, but a cry against a style of life that ignores its own real cost. Instead, indigenous peoples are a “living memory” of the mission God has entrusted to humanity: “the protection of our common home.”

On another topic, the pope said that education, which helps create a culture of encounter, must be a priority of the state, yet respectful of their ancestral wisdom and bilingual.

Francis closed his remarks praising the missionaries who devoted their entire lives to the people of the Amazon and the protection of the region.

“Do not yield to those attempts to uproot the Catholic faith from your peoples,” Francis said. “The Church is not alien to your problems and your lives, she does not want to be aloof from your way of life and organization. We need the native peoples to shape the culture of the local churches in Amazonia.”

Pope Francis has a busy day ahead. After meeting with the indigenous peoples, he was scheduled to encounter the local population at an education center, and then head to the Hogar Principito, home to some 35 orphan children.

He will then have lunch with representatives of the Amazonian peoples, and then head back to Lima, where he’ll address the local civil authorities and have a private meeting with President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

January 19, 2018

Pope brings environmental crusade to Peru’s Amazon, citing ‘defense of the earth’

By Lucien Chauvin
Washington Post

Pope Francis landed in the Amazon on Friday, bringing his environmental crusade to a rough-and-tumble corner of Peru’s jungle that is besieged by deforestation and illegal mining.

The visit to Peru, the second leg of a trip that ends Sunday and also took him to neighboring Chile, gave the Argentina-born pontiff a chance to highlight the links between the environment and indigenous people. He met with Mapuche people in Chile early this week and gathered here Friday with thousands of indigenous people decked out in traditional dress.

Arriving just after 10 a.m. in the jungle heat, the pope was greeted with chants of “Francis, Francis, you are now Amazonian.”

He arrived at his first official event aboard his popemobile and circumvented a phalanx of men wearing loincloths. Addressing a crowd of indigenous people from Peru and neighboring countries, he stressed the environmental ills facing the Amazon, including agribusiness, logging, mining, and oil and gas drilling. He also cited “certain policies aimed at the ‘conservation’ of nature” that he said did not take into account people who inhabit the rain forest.

“We have to break with the historical paradigm that views the Amazon as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries, without concern for its inhabitants,” he said during a 20-minute speech. “Defense of the Earth has no other purpose than the defense of life.”

He said that the Amazon is not only about biological riches but is a “cultural reserve” under threat by new forms of colonialism. “Limits have to be set that can help preserve us from all plans for a massive destruction of the habitat that makes us who we are,” he said.

The visit and the meeting with indigenous people are meant to build on his groundbreaking treatise on the environment — the 2015 Laudato Si encyclical, passages of which were read in five languages by indigenous leaders — and to plan for a synod of Amazon Basin bishops that has been called for October 2019.

The pope’s message and the encyclical, basically guidance to clergy and the faithful on key environmental issues, were applauded by the crowd. But inhabitants also expressed fear that not enough is being done as environmental destruction in this massive sea of green continues to gain speed.

“The Amazon is our home, but it is also the lungs of the world. We have to work much harder to stop deforestation,” said the Rev. Juan Elias, a priest in Bolivia’s jungle state of Pando, across the Peruvian border.
Elias echoed the pope’s concern, saying that forests are being clear-cut to make way for large-scale agribusiness, including sugar cane. He said the new fear is the expansion of soy, which already covers huge tracts in Bolivia’s eastern plains. “There are plans for soy. Can you imagine what that will do? It would be devastating,” he said.

The pope did not make specific references to some of the controversial issues being pushed by indigenous peoples, such as territorial demarcation, property titles and consent, specifically the right to veto extractive or infrastructure projects, including roads and dams for energy projects that they say degrade the environment.

“The church has to get our governments to see that their policies are destroying the environment and us with it,” said Angeltom Arara of Brazil’s Arara do Pará people. “We want more support from the church, and we want our governments to follow what the church says.”

Wearing an ample feather headdress and covered with red and black body paint, Arara was part of a delegation representing 32 indigenous peoples from Brazil who traveled to Peru to present their case to the pope. “We can no longer just talk. There needs to be real action, because we are being killed while we wait,” he said.

Brazil’s Indigenous Missionary Council reported that more than 100 indigenous people were killed in the country in 2016. Brazilian authorities continue to investigate the killing in September of 10 members of an indigenous group that lives in voluntary isolation near the border with Peru.

The pope dedicated part of his address to people living in isolation, who he said were the “most vulnerable of the vulnerable” and should not be considered a “kind of museum of a bygone way of life.”

The largest concentration of people living in voluntary isolation are found along the long, inaccessible border between Peru and Brazil.

The World Wildlife Fund’s director for climate and energy, Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, who previously served nearly five years as Peru’s environment minister, said he hoped the testimonies from indigenous people would help ground the encyclical in everyday issues.

“There need to be priests who are capable not only of talking about the environment but anchoring it in real issues. This has not been done, which is why the message [of the encyclical] has not had the impact it should have,” he said.

Pulgar-Vidal said Puerto Maldonado and the surrounding southeastern Amazon rain forest, home to some of the most biologically diverse spots in the world, offer tragic examples that could be used to drive home the pope’s vision.

Peru lost nearly 407,000 acres of tropical forest in 2016, 5.2 percent more than the previous year, according to the state’s protected areas service. It lost nearly 4.9 million acres between 2001 and 2016 — more than the combined area of Connecticut and Rhode Island — from deforestation.
caused by farming, illegal mining and road construction. The state of Madre de Dios — Mother of God in English — of which Puerto Maldonado is the capital, lost 42,125 acres in 2016, and initial estimates put the number at roughly the same for last year.

The big problem in Madre de Dios is illegal gold mining, which not only eliminates forests but contaminates the air, soil and water with toxic chemicals, including mercury used to extract river gold. Some of the large camps where gold is extracted are just down the road from where the pope landed here.

They are sprawling and barren wastelands where few plants can return after miners move on. And mining is big business. Madre de Dios does not have any large-scale formal gold mines, but the state produced 12 million grams of gold in the first 11 months of last year, according to the Energy and Mines Ministry. That represents just shy of 9 percent of the country’s gold production. Peru is the world’s sixth-largest gold producer. The government last year destroyed 284 illegal mining camps, the bulk of them in Madre de Dios, and launched dozens of criminal investigations, including for human trafficking.

Although he did not go after illegal mining directly, the pope did not avoid it.

“There exists another devastating assault on life linked to this environmental contamination favored by illegal mining,” Pope Francis said. “I am speaking of human trafficking: slave labor and sexual abuse.”

David Barbosa, an Ashaninka indigenous leader from Peru, said he hoped the pope would leave his country with an understanding of what is happening in the Amazon.

“I think what we are hearing is good, but the church needs to do more. It has to take a stand,” he said.

“The issues in Madre de Dios are the issues the pope addresses in the encyclical,” said Pulgar-Vidal of the World Wildlife Fund. “The focus on the Amazon is the opportunity to get the traction that is needed.”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/pope-brings-environmental-crusade-to-perus-amazon-though-indigenous-skeptical/2018/01/19/4de03f6a-fcb0-11e7-a46b-a3614530bd87_story.html

January 19, 2018

Latest chapter in Adorers pipeline case unfolds with appeals argument

By Jamie Manson
Global Sisters Report
The fight by the Adorers of the Blood of Christ against a natural gas pipeline went to an appeals court Friday, Jan. 19, as their attorneys argued that the case should be heard by a lower court that had dismissed it.

The sisters were appealing the U.S. District Court’s decision, in August 2017, to dismiss their claim that the building of a pipeline through their land violated their religious freedom. They argue that the Eastern District of Pennsylvania inappropriately dismissed their religious freedom challenge for a lack of jurisdiction.

The hearing was the latest chapter in a two-year battle against the building of a natural gas pipeline through Lancaster County. The courtroom for the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals was standing-room-only, with more than a dozen Adorers and their fellow activists filling most of the available spaces.

"The Adorers have a deep and longstanding commitment to safeguard the sanctity of the Earth," the congregation said in a press statement a few days before the hearing. "As such, the forced installation of a fossil fuel project on their own land represents a gross violation of their deeply held religious convictions."

The sisters are basing their case on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), the same statute that the Little Sisters of the Poor have cited in their case against the contraceptive mandate in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

In 2005, the sisters adopted a "Land Ethic," proclaiming that, as a matter of religious belief, they will not use their land in any manner that does harm to the Earth. The Adorers have used Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," to further bolster their argument.

In its legal briefs, Transco, the construction company that is building the pipeline, questioned the sincerity of the sisters' defense, calling their convictions a "subjective religious experience."

At the hearing, the three-judge panel pressed the Adorers' lead counsel, Dwight Yoder, as to why the sisters did not raise a formal complaint with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) or Transco before construction began.

Yoder pointed out that the notifications that the sisters received from the federal commission did not offer an opportunity to object on the grounds of a violation of religious freedom.

Lawyers for the commission and Transco told the judges that they would have taken the Adorers' claims seriously if the sisters had raised them months ago when other Lancaster landowners were filing their objections through FERC's formal administrative process.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the judges requested a written argument from the Adorers' lawyers. If the court rules in their favor, the sisters will be allowed to present their case in the district court. A decision by the appellate judges is expected within a few months.
In an interview with reporters after the hearing, Yoder explained that a religious freedom claim requires a judicial process, as opposed to the administrative process that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission offered to landowners before Transco broke ground.

"We think the District Court has jurisdiction and would be the proper forum to hear their RFRA claim," Yoder said.

Yoder said that, according to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the sisters could not file a claim until there was a substantial burden on their religious beliefs.

"That didn't happen until Transco condemned their property and took it against their will in July 2017," Yoder said. The congregation that month filed a complaint against the federal commission.

"When you look at RFRA, it has no requirement that you go to the agency before your religious beliefs are violated," Yoder said. "It says you have a right to a cause of action after your religious beliefs have been substantially burdened."

Yoder said that Transco's construction permit did not give enough cause for the sisters to take action. "There was no ability for them to assert those claims until the pipeline actually went through."

The Atlantic Sunrise pipeline would be a $3 billion, 183-mile extension of the Transco pipeline system that currently runs 10,200 miles from Texas to New York.

In early July, the sisters built an open-air chapel on their land as a protest against the construction. A short video presented to reporters at a press conference after the hearing showed that the periphery of the chapel was damaged by the construction.

In their press statement, the Adorers claim that Transco altered its construction schedule to install the pipeline on their land first, "in a bald attempt to insulate themselves against a future legal victory for the Sisters."

If they ultimately win their case, the Adorers may demand that Transco remove the pipeline, since the construction company proceeded at their own risk.

"If you proceed knowing that there's a legal challenge pending and you lose, you have to remove it," Yoder said.


January 22, 2018

Pope’s message to Amazonia inspires hope, but will it bring action?
By Justin Catanoso

Mongabay

- **On 19 January, Pope Francis spoke to a crowd of thousands, including many indigenous people, in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, the capital of Madre de Dios state in the Amazon, a region that has seen significant deforestation (62,500 hectares between 2012 and 2016), and significant violence due to illegal mining.**

- **Latin American analysts, while excited about the pope’s visit, and appreciative of his spotlighting of illegal mining in Madre de Dios and other environmental problems across Amazonia, expressed doubt that the papal visit will have much impact in the long run.**

- **The pope singled out large corporations in his address: “[G]reat business interests... want to lay hands on [the Amazon’s] petroleum, gas, lumber, gold and other forms of agro-industrial monocultivation,” he said. “We have to break with the historical paradigm that views Amazonia as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants.”**

- **The pope invited a top-down and bottom-up response by Catholics to the Amazon crisis, calling on indigenous people “to shape the culture of local churches in Amazonia,” and announcing next year’s first-ever Synod for Amazonia – a gathering of global bishops who will put papal doctrine such as Laudato Si, his landmark 2015 papal encyclical, into action.**

There is nothing quite so effective as an **historic visit** by a charismatic pope for bringing grave moral issues into the bright light of spiritual hope.

Pope Francis did just that on 19 January when he arrived in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, the capital of **Madre de Dios state** in the Amazon which is rich in biodiversity, but also in gold; nearly 62,500 hectares (154,440 acres) of forest were lost there to illegal gold mining between 2012 and 2016, **an area bigger than ten Manhattan islands.**

Nature isn’t the only victim of illegal gold mining. The deforestation, violence and land conflicts, and toxic mercury pollution it brings to local rivers, are also seriously impacting indigenous communities who for centuries have laid claim to their ancestral rainforests and waterways.

“The native Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened on their own lands as they are at present,” Pope Francis said in a stirring address to a huge crowd that filled a sports arena and included many indigenous people dressed in their finest decorative robes and feathered-headdresses.

The pope didn’t only blame illegal small-scale miners for the Peruvian deforestation crisis. “Amazonia is being disputed on all fronts,” the pope said. “There is the pressure being exerted by great business interests that want to lay hands on its petroleum, gas, lumber, gold and other forms of agro-industrial monocultivation... We have to break with the historical paradigm that views Amazonia as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants.”
Judging by the ear-shattering waves of applause the pope received, everyone within earshot of Francis agreed with his assessment of the crisis and with his call to action.

“We Peruvians are obliged to take care of our cultural and natural heritage,” agreed Mariela Cánepa, policy director for the World Wildlife Fund-Peru, who hailed the pope for being forthright about the issue. “Now that this is out there in the open, we need to come together and work toward that goal [of curbing amazon deforestation]. Short term, we must make sure that this stays as a priority in the public agenda, besides plain or rhetorical statements. We need to commit to a more inclusive and sustainable vision for the Amazon and the country. Long term, everyone – authorities, civil society and citizens – need to be accountable.”

Now what?

The public moment of the pope’s visit has now passed. After speaking out passionately in Peru – pumping new life into the *Laudato Si*, his landmark 2015 papal encyclical that blasted capitalism and blamed humanity for climate change, while demanding global stewardship of “our common home” – the pope has returned to Rome.

Across the Amazon, it’s back to life as before the visit: back to chain saws. To mercury poisoning. To human and wildlife trafficking. To a relentless assault on a U.S-size region rich in natural resources, but on which the planet’s wellbeing depends for carbon sequestration, weather regulation, regional and global climate stability, and an array of plant, animal, bird and insect life found nowhere else.

The question analysts are asking is will hope take root in the wake of Francis’ visit?

Puerto Maldonado is the largest city in the state of Madre de Dios; its economy depends largely on illegal gold mining. Will the governor of Madre de Dios, Luis Otsuka, former head of the statewide miners’ association, become an environmentalist? Will the government in Lima take much needed steps to protect the indigenous tribes whom Pope Francis so exalted?

“The defense of the earth has no other purpose than the defense of life,” the pope asserted. “We know of the suffering caused for some of you by emissions of hydrocarbons, which gravely threaten the lives of your families and contaminate your natural environment.”

A consensus of those interviewed by Mongabay, as well as those quoted in other media, is pessimistic. Most offer little hope that government or business leaders will change much as a result. Many, for example, have long dismissed *Laudato Si* as naïve or beyond the pope’s expertise. Surprisingly, many of the working poor are opposed to the Pope’s environmental message, fearing that it will deprive them of jobs and an economically secure future.

Pedro Solano, executive director of the Lima-based Peruvian Society of Environmental Law, saw the pope Friday and spotted Governor Otsuka in the crowd.

He told Mongabay he did not expect Otsuka to suddenly press for a reduction in illegal gold mining. But he added, “It is good to remind people that he was in the audience and that his role is
to act accordingly to the [environmental and indigenous] emergency… and in the public interest of the most valuable rights that are in jeopardy: human and environmental rights.”

**Calling on church leaders**

If the pope’s words are to lead to practical action, it may fall to the Catholic Church of South America to make it so, many agreed. But that, too, is complicated. The church is still staggering through its sexual abuse scandals, especially in Chile. While Francis, an Argentinian, remains popular, his South American cardinals and bishops are less so.

“I’m Catholic, I believe in God, but I’ve learned not to trust priests,” Edwin Vasquez, leader of an Amazon indigenous organization, told *The New York Times*.

Enrique Ortiz, a project manager with the Andes Amazon Fund and a Peruvian conservationist, is more optimistic. The pope’s specific call for the church to be more engaged in environmental protection and indigenous rights “is the real game changer,” he says.

“The pope is making sure that at the level of small, medium and large-scale churches, *Laudato Si* is coming. It’s real. It’s a big deal,” Ortiz told Mongabay. “Two years ago, we wondered if it would have any impact. But Francis is now telling the church, ‘This is a priority.’ It’s going to take a while, but it’s coming. Change always comes slowly to the Catholic Church.”

Frances Seymour, a senior fellow with World Resources Institute, agreed: “Papal attention can inspire, encourage and empower local religious leaders and faith communities to redouble their efforts to stave off forest destruction and violations of human rights.”

Manuel Pulgar-Vidal is the World Wildlife Fund’s director of climate and energy. As Peru’s former minister of the environment, he helped produce the working draft of the 2015 Paris Agreement at the 20th United Nations Climate Summit in Lima in 2014. He has long waited for *Laudato Si* to bring about change.

“There need to be priests who are capable of not only talking about the environment, but anchoring it in real issues,” he told *The Washington Post*. “This has not been done, which is why the message [of the encyclical] has not had the impact it should have.”

In Puerto Maldonado, Pope Francis made clear that he remains committed to expanding the mission of the Church to include earth stewardship. But he understands well that this change can’t only come from above. On his South America trip, he called on indigenous people “to shape the culture of local churches in Amazonia.”

Then he punched up his commitment: in Peru, the pontiff announced that he will convene the first-ever Synod for Amazonia next year – a gathering of global bishops who will aim to put papal doctrine such as *Laudato Si* into action on the ground – including in the rainforests across Amazonia.
January 24, 2018

Do We Care Enough About Mother Earth?

By Ryan Torok
Jewish Journal

As the executive director of the Shalom Institute, a Jewish day camp and conference center in Malibu, Rabbi Bill Kaplan has been both a preacher and practitioner of environmentalism.

In 2016, his organization received $75,000 from the Homeland Security Grant Program, funds it used to install two solar power banks. What’s more, the institute’s dining hall is made of recycled plastic, its urinals are water-free and the campus uses LED lighting.

“We’re making choices — and those choices are green choices,” Kaplan said. “We always do improvements with a mind on sustainability.”

That very contemporary concern has deep Jewish roots, as reflected in the holiday of Tu B’Shevat, the birthday of the trees, which falls on Jan. 31.

While in ancient times the date served to keep track of fruit trees’ age, it has evolved into an opportunity for Jewish environmentalists to reaffirm their dedication to sustainability, respecting the earth and conserving natural resources. That commitment, however, isn’t as widespread in the Jewish community as many think it should be.

Devorah Brous, founding executive director of Netiya, a Los Angeles-based food justice organization, is focused on improving the choices individuals and the community make around food. Brous was hired by Netiya in 2011, aiming to help Los Angeles synagogues to transform their underused land into food-producing gardens.

Her efforts have yielded mixed results, said Brous, who discovered that many of L.A.’s Jewish leaders are less concerned about sustainable agriculture and healthy eating than she is. As a result, the organization is putting a greater emphasis on working with the city. Los Angeles City Councilman David Ryu recently helped Netiya secure a parcel of land that it plans to convert into an urban farm. Brous also expressed excitement about local legislation that would provide tax incentives for landowners to dedicate their property to food production.

She sees a major opportunity for the organized Jewish community to embrace congregational gardens. Farming is an effective way of immersing young adult Jews in Judaism, she said, citing...
several communities — including Berkeley and Boulder, Colo., among a vibrant national movement of 17 Jewish farms — where farming has connected young adult Jews to Judaism and to other Jews.

Brous said the work she is doing addresses many Jewish leaders’ goals of engaging young Jews and combatting intermarriage.

“These Jewish farmers around the country are showing that the answer is to get them close to the land, get them outside, teach them skills, teach them how to grow food, teach them how to make their own matzah instead of buying it,” she said. “Because the people who are doing these programs are falling in love, getting married and having Jewish babies.”

While successfully catalyzing food production with 31 faith-based congregations throughout L.A. County, she did say that at least two Los Angeles synagogues expressed interest in turning unused land into gardens but eventually decided against doing so.

“I think this is not enough of a priority for many synagogues,” she said. “My wish is that regenerative stewardship becomes a top priority. This is faith in action.”

The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles has provided Netiya financial assistance for a gardening-education program for young children. Last fall, Federation gave Brous a $40,000 grant to run the Seedlings Sprout! and Torah of Gardening programs out of her home in the San Fernando Valley.

Jewish day schools — including the Alice and Nahum Lainer School, de Toledo High School and Milken Community Schools — and congregation IKAR are working with Netiya, and last spring, Netiya installed an irrigation system and a number of fruit trees on Shalhevet High School’s roof. The school’s students and faculty also tend a rooftop flower and vegetable garden, and the school’s environmental club promotes recycling.

Brous, whose sister is IKAR Rabbi Sharon Brous, also helps out at IKAR with the synagogue’s Green Action team, which IKAR’s website describes as a group of “advocates, activists, and gardeners” with a goal to “create a more sustainable way of life.”

“We’re teaching the youngest of the young at IKAR’s Early Childhood Center program,” Devorah Brous said.

Despite efforts like Netiya’s, much of the Jewish community is just beginning to understand the potential behind Jewish environmentalism, said Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director of the Philadelphia-based Shalom Center, which integrates political action with spiritual wisdom. Waskow has been a Jewish environmental leader for decades. Taking care of the planet is an imperative of Biblical Judaism, he said.

“It seems to me the value of Torah and environmentalism are very closely intertwined, especially if you look at … the Biblical tradition, which really was the spiritual expression of shepherds and farmers who were very close to the land,” Waskow said.
He said many congregations are focused on social justice issues but do not consider the environment in that category. “We now talk about ‘eco-social justice,’ ” he said, “we won’t use ‘social justice’ by itself.”

Of the major denominations, the Renewal movement has made the most progress integrating environmentalism into daily practice, he said. The Orthodox movement, he said, has the furthest to go.

“The Orthodox community, most of it, is still focused on traditional Orthodox concerns — keeping Shabbat, keeping kosher — and has only begun to address the ways in which Torah might point us toward action about the earth,” he said.

Pico Shul Rabbi Yonah Bookstein, an Orthodox rabbi, acknowledged that the Orthodox community lags behind, but he also said the Reform community does not appreciate how fundamental Jewish environmentalism is.

“Way before there was ever an environmental movement, [German Orthodox] Rav [Samson Raphael] Hirsch wrote, in the 1850s, how anybody who could think the Earth was ours to use and abuse was like an idol worshiper — and in Judaism you can’t get much worse than being an idol worshiper,” Bookstein said.

Bookstein has been passionate about the environment for decades. As an undergraduate at the University of Oregon in 1988, he brought Waskow to the campus on Earth Day to speak to Jewish students about Judaism and environmentalism.

Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky of B’nai David-Judea, a progressive Orthodox congregation in Los Angeles, said his congregation is not focusing on the environment.

“Unfortunately, [we] have nothing environmentally friendly to report,” Kanefsky said in an email.

On Tu B’Shevat, synagogues across Los Angeles will be holding Tu B’Shevat seders and other events. But Brous said Tu B’Shevat should be about more than events. The holiday reminds people how appreciating nature can improve their lives. She said there is a mystical element to the holiday.

“In our culture, you’re sort of expected to be always on, always be productive. But if you were a tree, not all trees are evergreen; some lose their leaves and go dormant in the winters,” she said, pointing out that, in the Torah, people are compared to trees. “Tu B’Shevat is this unbelievable, mystical reminder that even when they are powered down, they are still very much alive.”

[https://jewishjournal.com/cover_story/230019/tu-bshevat-question-care-enough-mother-earth/]
January 30, 2018

Loyola's free e-textbook brings environmental ethics to classes worldwide

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

In October 2017, students at a Jesuit secondary school in Spain's Aragon region were studying hurricanes. At the same time, their peers in Puerto Rico were living through the aftermath of one.

Separated by an ocean and widely different circumstances, the students at Colegio del Salvador in Zaragoza, Spain, wrote letters of support to the students of Colegio San Ignacio de Loyola in San Juan, Puerto Rico, who remained in the midst of recovery from the devastating destruction brought by Hurricane Maria a month earlier.

What connected the two schools wasn't simply empathy but an environmental textbook, that each class had used, with the Caribbean's hurricane fallout presenting a case study come to life.

"It's not just a textbook that's going from us to users, but we're able to get this lateral connection going, which is exciting," said Michael Schuck, an associate theology professor at Loyola University Chicago and co-editor of the book who helped put the schools in touch.

In January 2016, the Jesuit university launched Healing Earth as a free, online textbook available to anyone with an internet connection. Co-edited by Schuck and Nancy Tuchman, a biology professor and dean of Loyola's Institute of Environmental Sustainability, the e-textbook is geared toward upper-level secondary school students, beginning college students and adult learners.

Beyond its pricing and paperless publishing, what differentiates Healing Earth from other environmental science texts is its integration of ethics, theology and spirituality into the curriculum — subject matters not often associated with science classes — in an effort to deepen the learning experience from simply understanding what is happening and why with respect to the environment, to what it means and what can be done about it.

The approach parallels the integral ecology that Pope Francis highlighted in his 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," which coincidentally published roughly seven months before Healing Earth.

"When the encyclical came out, we were convinced that the pope had read Healing Earth," Schuck said.

The team behind Healing Earth briefly met Francis in September at the Vatican, where they were among the inaugural recipients of the Expanded Faith Awards, presented by the University Francisco de Vitoria, in Madrid, and the Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI Vatican Foundation.

"It was just very affirming for our project," Tuchman said.
The idea of a "living textbook" blending science, ethics and spirituality originated six years ago in the mind of Jesuit Fr. Michael Garanzini, formerly Loyola president (2001-2015) and director of the Jesuit Higher Education Secretariat in Rome. The concept came, in part, from a 2011 special report on ecology from the Society of Jesus, titled Healing A Broken World. Among the report's recommendations: developing teaching resources and curricula in environmental studies as well as increased collaboration on environmental concerns — an increasing focus for the Jesuits, in particular the impact of ecological degradation on the poor — among its vast network of schools worldwide.

Healing Earth, which has been used in classrooms in at least 17 countries, 20 secondary schools and more than 30 universities, attempts to do just that.

The e-textbook runs six chapters — introduction, biodiversity, natural resources, energy, water, global climate change — with each written by an interdisciplinary team of scholars and teachers. While faculty from Loyola University Chicago represented roughly a third of the contributors, about an equal number of writers hailed from outside the U.S., including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Spain and Zambia.

"We tried to make it a global perspective so it's not just about the United States and what's happening here," Tuchman said.

Each chapter starts with the science to provide a basis of understanding of the issue before expanding into the ethics, spirituality, and finally, a discussion of actions under way as well as ideas for students to get involved themselves.

At Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School, environmental sciences teacher Stanmore Hinds has watched his junior students latch onto the ethical and spiritual dimensions.

"They really get into it, and sometimes I have to try to pry them away from discussions along that," he told NCR.

Hinds, who teaches three classes on AP environmental science and has used Healing Earth as a supplemental text the past two school years, attributes their interest in part to teenagers' attunement to what's right and wrong. But he also sees some students, many from economically disadvantaged families, relating personally to case studies about landfills or power plants built near lower-income housing areas.

"They get a chance to see those kinds of things and they start to pick up. They say, 'Wait a minute, that's like where I live,' " Hinds said.

Incorporating into classroom discussions the spiritual and ethical discussions beyond the science helps students become more critical and analytical thinkers about their world, he added, recognizing the interrelatedness not only of the subjects they study but what happens in the communities all around them.
Connections to *Laudato Si'* have also piqued Hinds' students, as they're surprised by what the pope has said about environmental stewardship, and curious why more people haven't heeded his directives. In reply, their teacher told them, "OK, that's what you're going to do."

At Loyola Academy, another co-ed Jesuit high school in Chicago, references to the pope's encyclical and Jesuit documents in *Healing Earth* has led environmental science teacher Jennifer Snyder to make regular use of its climate change chapter.

"The way the climate change one is written is so different than in the traditional textbook because they talk about *Laudato Si*'," she said. Having Catholic social teaching included in a textbook, she added, makes it easier for science teachers to find ways to weave the Ignatian pedagogy and the school's mission into their lesson plans.

While both Snyder and Hinds have found *Healing Earth* enhancing classroom discussion, they said they can't use it as their primary textbook largely because it doesn't cover all of the material associated with the college-credit AP test for environmental science administered by The College Board.

The book's editing team continues to make updates, including a forthcoming chapter on food, a synthesis chapter tying together all the issues addressed from a macro level, and more global case studies. They also plan to polish up the Spanish translation — a priority with a sizable number of the text's users located in Spanish-speaking countries — and eventually add a French version, with an eye toward reaching schools in some African countries.

Other goals include a deeper collaboration with the Cristo Rey network of schools and with the Jesuit Refugee Services, the latter to bring *Healing Earth* into its schools set up in refugee camps. The small staff is also seeking additional donors, so far predominantly funded by Loyola University Chicago.

Ultimately, Tuchman said they strive to reach 100 known users of *Healing Earth*. As it stands, the free and online components, while making the book widely accessible, doesn't allow for a true count of how many teachers are using it in classrooms.

"We might already have those 100 and we have no way of knowing," Tuchman said.

From the workshops they've given on *Healing Earth* around the globe, she and Schuck have seen the textbook take root in classrooms, and see potential for it to become a larger platform for Catholic schools to address environmental issues across the planet.

"I hope *Healing Earth* can grow, and people can become aware that it's a place to come to talk about the challenges we're facing," Schuck said.

February 2, 2018

Minister urges Christians to act on climate

By Daisy Simmons
Yale Climate Connections

'Love of God and neighbor means that we have to honor creation and care for it,' she says.

Sharon Delgado is a retired United Methodist minister and activist who challenges Christians to reflect on how their faith relates to climate change.

In her new book, Love in a Time of Climate Change, Delgado uses scripture and religious teachings to explain why Christian ideals require action on global warming.

Delgado: “It’s not simply an issue of loving the earth and taking care of the earth, it’s also an issue of standing up and speaking out for justice for people who are on the front lines of climate change.”

She says that includes poor and vulnerable people who often bear the brunt of extreme weather, droughts, and pollution, as well as children and future generations.

Delgado: “Love of God and neighbor means that we have to honor creation and care for it, and we have to establish justice.”

For Delgado, that means going beyond individual actions like recycling. She encourages Christians to become politically active and to speak out in support of climate-friendly laws and policies.

Delgado: “We’re facing a living hell on earth if we don’t turn things around – and that is going to require systemic change.”


February 7, 2018

As Cape Town’s Water Crisis Nears ‘Day Zero,’ Faith Groups Spring into Action

By Brian Pellot, Religion News Service
Word & Way

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (RNS) — The trickling sound echoed through Zonnebloem Estate's chapel as the Anglican bishop of Table Bay, the Rt. Rev. Garth Q. Counsell, slowly poured one pitcher of water into another.
This sound of running water, once considered soothing, now triggers anxiety in drought-stricken Cape Town, where residents are hoarding bottled water and showering over buckets in anticipation of “Day Zero.”

Currently estimated for mid-May, Day Zero would mark the unprecedented moment when engineers close most of the city’s faucets. Nearly 4 million residents would be left to fetch daily water rations of just 25 liters (6.6 gallons) from fewer than 200 central collection points until rains resume or alternative sources come online.

Government officials have provided scant details for Day Zero logistics. Rather than communicate a clear plan of action, some are invoking fear with comparisons to World War II and 9/11.

Major political parties and faith groups in South Africa have long recognized the toll climate change is taking on citizens and the environment. As tensions rise and politicians point blame in every direction, faith groups are working across spiritual divides to offer their flocks hope and a way forward.

Counsell’s deliberate water display and opening sermon kicked off the Anglican Diocese of Cape Town’s Water (In)Justice Conference on Saturday (Feb. 3). More than 120 lay and clergy members joined the event, aimed at infusing the upcoming Lenten season with messages and prayers around water’s sacredness, scarcity, sanitation, biodiversity and sustainability.

We have stopped major crises in the history of our country, and even this one will come to pass,” Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba told the room, later referencing the HIV/AIDS epidemic and apartheid. Makgoba takes issue with the apocalyptic connotations of the name “Day Zero” and suggested parishioners consider “Day One” — his preferred term for the same scenario — as an opportunity for action.

“From a biblical perspective, the concept of void and nihilism does not sit well, because we take the creation story seriously,” he explained. “Zero has the connotation that this is the end. It doesn’t give us hope. But we are responsible. We can do something. We can avert it.”

The Rev. Rachel Mash, environmental coordinator for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and Green Anglicans, organized the conference, which featured practical water-saving tools and ideas. Goody bags included dense green plastic blocks participants were advised to drop in their toilet tanks at home to save water.

“Our job as the church is to reduce water ourselves, inspire others to reduce water, share ideas on how to do that, get the message out into the community, and avert Day Zero,” Mash said.

The Anglican Diocese is performing environmental audits on individual parishes and fixing leaks. If or when the countdown to Day Zero drops below 30 days, Mash said the denomination plans to install crisis committee representatives at each parish to help coordinate water home delivery for vulnerable people of all faiths and none.
“If we do need to be queueing for water, it would be helpful if faith leaders are there to help marshal and to make sure the elderly, vulnerable, pregnant mums, etc., aren’t standing in the hot sun for hours,” she said.

Mash invited fellow Anglican and “water prophet” Kevin Winter of the Future Water Institute at the University of Cape Town to address the conference.

“We’ve always imagined climate change as being a slow-moving bus, but we need to recognize that there are speed bumps along the way, and we’re going through one right now,” he said.

Winter’s ultimate message: “Keep calm and save water while we have it.”

The Rev. Ronald Dias attended the conference from St. Dominic Church Parish in the township of Hanover Park, where he says water quality is already a problem.

“We have a borehole (water well) at the church, but the police stopped us from using that,” he said. "The water is running very low, and the pressure is very low. What will happen to our soup kitchen on Wednesday mornings? That requires water.”

New water restrictions came into effect Feb. 1, regulating the use of borehole water wells and limiting Cape Town residents to 50 liters (13.2 gallons) of water per day. By comparison, the U.S. Geological Survey estimates that Americans use 80 to 100 gallons of water each per day.

These numbers, and the growing panic in Cape Town’s wealthy and middle-class neighborhoods, belie a grim reality, Mash is quick to point out.

“Because Cape Town is such an unjust society, the leafy suburbs have always had enough water for swimming pools and totally ignored the fact that on the other side of the city people don’t have enough water to even throw into their toilet, and they’re sharing one toilet between 20 families,” she said.

On Sunday, the Muslim Judicial Council South Africa joined Habibia Soofie Masjid and Masjidul-Quds to lead more than 1,000 Muslims in an early morning prayer for rain.

Men at the front, women at the back, gathered on green patches of grass at the Rylands sports complex, where signs warned that the nonpotable grey water keeping the field alive is “not suitable for human consumption.”

Presiding sheikhs offered an emotional refrain that highlighted sin and redemption.

“Each and every person must ask, ‘Where did I go wrong?’ We have done so much wrong. The consequences have brought us to where we are today,” said Sheikh Moegamad Moerat of Zeenatul Islam mosque. "Once we live in halal, Allah will send us beneficial rain.”

“The root cause is the way we live, the sins we commit," added Sheikh Riad Fataar, second deputy president of the judicial council. "You have a hand in it, and you can correct it.”
Several imams encouraged worshippers to pay zakat, obligatory alms, citing a hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad that Allah withholds rain for those who withhold their charity.

Pressed about the water crisis’ practical implications for Muslims — supply restrictions on ablution water used for ritual washing before prayer, and questions about whether alcohol-based hand sanitizer, now replacing soap and water in many public restrooms, is halal — Masjidul-Quds President Hafiz Mahmood Khatib said sometimes necessity makes the impermissible permissible.

“The importance of washing ourselves and obtaining a state of purity is important, but more important is finding spiritual purity. Islam enjoins us that when water is scarce you can make your ablution with pure sand,” he said.

For now, many mosques throughout Cape Town have installed aerators on taps or are providing worshippers with spray bottles or single cups of water to perform ablutions.

Cape Town’s predominantly Orthodox Jewish community has also held several gatherings and half-day fasts to pray for rain. Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein’s office circulated a rain prayer to synagogues and now plans to launch a nationwide daily psalm.

“We are praying not only for G-d to bring the rain, but also for G-d to give wisdom and insight to all levels of government – national, provincial and city – to guide them in the right direction to find solutions for the water crisis,” Goldstein told RNS by email.

Beyond individual faith groups’ efforts, several ecumenical and interfaith initiatives have emerged to address the water crisis and “soak the city in prayer.” In May, Cape Town Mayor Patricia De Lille hosted interfaith leaders at the foot of Table Mountain to pray for rain.

On Monday, interfaith leaders gathered at St. George’s Cathedral to offer leadership in advancing water justice and averting Day Zero.

“When the interfaith voice opposed apartheid as a movement, it worked,” Archbishop Makgoba said. "This is a struggle and a crisis. We need to be good stewards. It’s a beautiful opportunity for South Africans to come together. And therein lies our hope.”


February 10, 2018

Biodiversity Congress to be held in Dehradun

Deccan Chronicle
Ms Vandana Shiva said the focal theme of the Congress aimed to showcase Indian philosophy of living in harmony with all living beings.

Thiruvananthapuram: The Centre for Innovation in Science and Social Action (CISSA), Thiruvananthapuram will organise an International Biodiversity Congress at the Forest Research Institute, in Dehradun from October 4 to 6. Navdanya, Dehradun, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE, Dehradun), Forest Research Institute (FRI), Wildlife Institute of India (WII, Dehradun), Uttarakhand Biodiversity Board and Uttarakhand Council for Science and Technology, will be the co-organisers of the Congress with the focal theme “Biodiversity for Ecological Civilisation: Vasudha-aiva Kutumbakam”.

Ms Vandana Shiva, managing trustee, Navdanya, told reporters here on Friday that the focal theme was aimed at showcasing the Indian philosophy living in harmony with every living being in the planet. “The Congress will be an appeal towards undertaking a transformation from industrial civilisation to biodiversity civilisation, a human civilisation strongly rooted in biodiversity consciousness.

Global authorities and thinkers who promote this philosophy of biodiversity civilisation will take part in the programme,” Ms Shiva said. Academicians, researchers, students, citizen scientists, farmers are among those who will participate., Farmer Representatives, Social Activists, and Community Representatives will be among the participants.

Congress will include a wide array of programmes including International Seminar, Exhibition, Women Biodiversity Congress (WBC), Youth Biodiversity Congress (YBC), Civil Society Meet, Workshops, National Photography Exhibition, and Documentary Film Festival More than 1000 participants from all over the world will participate in the event. Academicians, researchers, students, citizen scientists, Farmers, Farmer Representatives, Social Activists, and Community Representatives will be among the participants.


February 13, 2018

Lord Williams: Environmental Crisis Toxic Expression of Humanity's Failures

By Catherine Pepinster
The Tablet

Lord Williams of Oystermouth gave an address on Pope Francis’ green encyclical, Laudato Si at St Mary's University
The environmental crisis is a toxic expression of humanity’s failures which Pope Francis has challenged us to tackle, according to the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord (Rowan) Williams.

And according to the former archbishop, one of the gravest problems of this crisis is the way in which society is failing children, hampering their ability to grow in learning and understand beauty.

Lord Williams of Oystermouth was speaking on Monday night at St Mary’s University, Twickenham, where he gave an address on Pope Francis’ green encyclical, Laudato Si’.

He praised the encyclical for highlighting that the Christian understanding of “who is my neighbour?” should embrace the whole of creation and that humanity’s treatment of the environment is self-destructive.

“For the Christian, the doctrine of creation is a declaration that all that is comes from God”, said Lord Williams. “But as Pope Francis says, it is not enough to avoid environmental disaster, to love our neighbour and ourselves…we have to ask how do we live in such a way to receive from God”.

Lord Williams, now the Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, reserved his staunchest criticism for contemporary approaches to education.

“Children need to know what beauty is and we need to think how this can be nurtured and developed in education. We have increasingly lost sight of education as a humanising task,” he said.

After the lecture during questions he was even more forthright about education, expressing dismay over the Government’s higher education white paper. It recommends that universities should be placed on a more commercial footing, and uncouples the link between teaching and research.

“We are in danger of trivialising higher education,” he said. “The higher education white paper was narrow- minded and a disgrace. Universities should be conversational communities”.

Lord Williams also used to his lecture to draw out a strong link between the theology of Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, highlighting the importance both attach to reason, in the sense of the importance of conversation and of learning together – something he urged was vital for universities to nurture.

After the lecture, St Mary’s chair of governors, Bishop Richard Moth, presented Lord Williams with the Benedict Medal, awarded by the university for outstanding contributions to faith and education.

http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/8554/lord-williams-environmental-crisis-toxic-expression-of-humanity-s-failures-
February 14, 2018

Indonesian youths plant trees to protect environment

By Katharina R. Lestari
UCA News

_Interfaith group seek to prevent landslides, retain water at natural sources_

The Suburban Interfaith Youth Community of Kupang plant 500 saplings of mahogany in Naitoto, where a spring is located, on Feb. 3. (Photo supplied by Maks Tameno)

More than 50 people calling themselves the Suburban Interfaith Youth Community of Kupang in Indonesia's predominantly Christian East Nusa Tenggara province have planted 2,000 saplings so far this year to help protect the environment.

The young people representing Buddhism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam and Protestantism as well as young policemen and military personnel planted 1,000 mahogany and rain tree saplings Feb. 10-11 near a newly constructed bridge in the provincial capital Kupang.

Community members as well as the local forestry department provided the saplings.

"Construction of the bridge left the land around it empty. We want to prevent any possible landslides," Maks Tameno, the community's coordinator, told ucanews.com on Feb. 14.

Earlier, on Feb. 3, the community planted 500 mahogany saplings in nearby town of Naitoto, where a natural spring is located. "The spring serves as water source of local people. We want to prevent it from drying up," he said.

In late January, the community planted 500 mahogany and rain tree saplings along a river in Belo on the outskirts of Kupang. "At least 120 families live close to the riverbanks. Heavy rains can cause landslides there," Tameno said.

In the near future, he said the community will cultivate unused land in the province and drill a well in Belo.


February 19, 2018

Before Tet festival, sisters train Vietnamese to avoid unsafe food
During the Tet or Lunar New Year, Vietnam's biggest festival, food contamination is a serious threat.

Vietnamese people say ăn Tết, literally "eat the Lunar New Year." During the festivities, which were at a peak Feb. 16-18 but traditionally last a full month, food is a central focus and revelers consume large amounts of a bewildering variety of food.

Amid the frenzy of activity, substandard food products and contaminated or rotten meat can be secretly slipped into restaurants, open markets and even malls.

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate have chosen the time leading up to the holiday to educate people, especially those who are ill or with limited resources, to avoid the risks of food poisoning.

"We are deeply concerned about poor people's health during the Tet. They easily suffer food poisoning because they can only afford to buy cheap food of poor quality," said Sr. Anna Nguyen Thi Hien, a doctor who runs a clinic in Hue City.

In 2017, the General Statistics Office recorded 3,374 food poisoning cases nationally, 22 of them fatal.

On Feb. 3, police in Ho Chi Minh City reportedly seized more than 10 metric tons of rotten pig meat that was collected from places outside the city. Police also caught workers at three small factories processing hundreds of kilograms of pig ears and viscera that had already started to rot or had no documents regarding its origin.

The traders said the intention was to process the meat in chemicals and then supply it to restaurants in the city.

During a Feb. 8 press conference, authorities from the coastal province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau said they fined six factories for using pesticides in processing dried fish to preserve it from insects.

Police from Thua Thien-Hue Province, in the North Central coast region, said last month they found 20 incidents of food safety violations and product imitations.

Responding to these risks, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate sisters organized a Feb. 5 training course in food safety for 50 people with HIV/AIDS, volunteers and sisters at their Kim Long Charity Clinic in Hue City.

Hien, head of the clinic, said the course "aims to raise a growing awareness of food safety among participants and provide them with practical knowledge about nutrition and food safety so that they could maintain their good health and [that of] others."
During the course, Dr. Tran Thi Kim Pho, deputy of the Food Safety and Hygiene Department in Thua Thien-Hue Province, taught participants how to use information on food origins, producers and processors to identify whether food is unclean.

Participants learned how food could be adulterated with chemical agents, viruses, poisons, pesticides and chemicals from the soil.

They were also shown ways to preserve fresh food, and to process meat, fish, fruits and vegetables with proper hygiene. They learned how to prepare nutritious food for the sick, people with malnutrition, obese patients and pregnant women.

They were taught how consuming unclean food products can lead to cancer, other diseases and poisoning.

Pho warned that many people who sell food on the street process food without proper hygiene and store food near garbage cans. Some local factories are known to use chemical agents to process packaged food products.

She said that, in one December 2016 case, 128 people were hospitalized after eating bread from a street vendor, and 23 others were sent to hospitals for poisoning in a case in 2017. Both incidents happened in Hue City.

The doctor urged participants to seek medical treatment for intestinal parasites every six months, and to wash their hands before meals and food preparation.

A participant living with HIV said, "I learned much helpful information from the course. I hope I can buy and prepare good food products to serve my family during the Tet."

She said she and 22 others suffered poisoning after buying sticky rice cakes on a street in Hue last April. "I had severe diarrhea and other symptoms, and received treatment at the hospital for one week," she said.

Joseph Nguyen Van Hoang, a volunteer who visits and serves patients at their homes, said the course would help him show HIV/AIDS patients how to prepare nutritious food for themselves.

"If patients who are in poor health get food poisoning, it takes much time for them to recover," Hoang said.

Hien said she plans to hold another course for 100 people with HIV/AIDS from the neighboring province of Quang Tri after the Tet festival.

The nuns also held Tet celebrations for 400 people with HIV/AIDS at the clinic. The attendees watched cultural performances, played traditional games, enjoyed a great feast, and received blankets, cooking oil, milk, sugar, rice and sweets.

[Joachim Pham is a correspondent for Global Sisters Report based in Vietnam.]
The Church of England’s Lent challenge: give up plastic

By Tara Isabella Burton

Vox

All over the Christian world, the faithful are making sacrifices for the penitential season of Lent, which began last week. Some are giving up chocolate; others are turning away from Twitter. But the Church of England has one slightly unconventional vice it wants its parishioners to give up: plastics.

The Church of England, which has about 25 million members worldwide, exhorted the faithful to participate in the Lent Plastic Challenge forgoing single-use plastic containers, such as plastic cups, and unnecessary plastic packaging, as part of a wider program of stewardship for the environment. The effort is part of the church’s wider environmental program, Shrinking the Footprint.

Ruth Knight, the environmental policy officer for the church, told the BBC: ”The Lent challenge is about raising our awareness of how much we rely on single-use plastics and challenging ourselves to see where we can reduce that use. ... It ties in closely with our calling as Christians to care for God’s creation.”

Lent, the approximately six-week lead-up to Easter, is a time of fasting, penance, and prayer meant to coincide with Christ’s temptation in the wilderness, arrest, and crucifixion. Catholics and some Protestants today typically give up a perceived “vice” (like alcohol or sweets) for the duration of the period.

To critics, the church’s actions may seem emblematic of a wider “secularization” of Lent: in which an originally spiritually focused religious observance becomes more about anodyne notions of “wellness” and “doing good.” It’s fair, too, to critique the movement as a bid for relevancy by a fading institution: A 2016 poll found that the number of Britons attending a weekly Church of England service fell for the first time to fewer than 1 million (or less than 2 percent of the UK’s population).

Those criticisms would be valid. But at the same time, the Church of England’s actions reflect a wider willingness among many mainline Protestant and Catholic Christian groups to focus on combating structural or global issues — from income inequality to environmental stewardship — alongside individual misdeeds.

For instance, Pope Francis has frequently made environmental issues a linchpin of his ministry. His 2015 encyclical, Laudato Si, argued that caring for the environment was a fundamentally
Christian obligation. To sin against the environment, in this paradigm, is to place individual convenience and instant gratification above cooperation and caring for the world God has made.

“This is our sin, exploiting the Earth,” Francis said in 2014, “this is one of the greatest challenges of our time: to convert ourselves to a type of development that knows how to respect creation.”

Francis’s notion of sin as something collective and structural, not just individual, has informed much of his theology, from his environmentalism to his fervently anti-capitalist stance, a dynamic also at play in the way the Church of England is talking about its own initiatives.

It’s worth noting that these initiatives, which tend to be popular with Catholics and mainline Protestants, are not necessarily shared by all Christians. American evangelicals, in particular, have long been wary of environmental causes, seeing them as a threat to what they envision as man’s God-given dominion over the earth.

But for the Church of England, environmental stewardship has become a necessary part of the Christian mission.

By focusing on the shared call to care for what they see as God’s creation, the church isn’t just asking parishioners to recycle. It’s asking them to step up to their divinely mandated role as responsible “stewards” of creation. What could be more orthodox than that?


February 21, 2018

Red Cloud’s Revolution: Oglalla Sioux Freeing Themselves From Fossil Fuel

By Saul Elbein
Common Dreams

“People don’t like being on the grid here,” Red Cloud says, “because they’ve been coexisting with the earth – the sun, the wind – for most of their history.”

- Henry Red Cloud, like so many Oglalla Sioux young men, left the reservation to work in construction. When he returned home in 2002, he needed a job, and also wanted to make a difference. He attended a solar energy workshop and saw the future.
- Today, Red Cloud runs Lakota Solar and the Red Cloud Renewable Energy Center, which have become catalysts for an innovative new economic network – one that employs locals and connects tribes, while building greater energy independence among First Nations.
The company is building and installing alternative energy systems, and training others to do the same, throughout remote areas of U.S. reservations, thus allowing the Sioux and others to leap past outdated fossil fuel technology altogether.

Henry Red Cloud’s company has another more radical purpose: it helps provide energy to remote Water Protector camps, like the one at Standing Rock protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Solar power and other alternative energy sources are vital at such remote sites, as they power up cellphones, connecting resistors to the media and outside world.

It’s high summer in South Dakota, and a cruel sun beats down with an endless floodtide of photons that burns skin through t-shirts and tinted car windows. That’s the way Henry Red Cloud likes it. To Red Cloud – descendant of a great Lakota insurgent chief, founder of Lakota Solar, and self-proclaimed “solar warrior” – that July sun is key to the independence of his fellow Lakota and native peoples across America; it also embodies a hot business opportunity.

It’s July 5, the tail end of Red Cloud’s Energy Independence Day weekend, first announced in the wake of the Trump Inauguration, and meant to spread off-grid skills throughout Indian country – possibly with radical purpose.

I walked out of the sun and indoors to find Red Cloud leading a solar workshop, holding forth to a group of eager indigenous participants about photovoltaic cells and the danger of phantom loads – the way in which many appliances continue drawing current even when switched off. “Vampire” loads are a constant suck on household energy, consuming electricity and thereby emitting carbon to no purpose – while also draining an off-grid setup with limited juice.

A set up, like, say, the remote, off-grid camps at the Standing Rock Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protests in 2016.

Red Cloud offers up a hypothetical: “Let’s say you have a Water Protector camp, your solar array is charging, you notice the inverter is on, but nothing is plugged in.” The stocky 60-something instructor, with long ponytail and far-seeing eyes, frowns and shakes his head, indicating trouble. “Well, that empty power strip can draw more than your actual daily use,” draining down the batteries faster than they can charge.

A bearded man in his late 20s raises his hand. “That bad for the array?”

“Well,” Red Cloud responds, “it’s not a problem if you know about it. Just plug in a couple cellphones,” and charge them up so protestors can reach out to the media from the remote site. That way, he says, at least now the array is doing some work.

Man with a plan

After the workshop, Red Cloud shows me his innovations. A solar trailer, small enough to be pulled by a compact car, is mounted with panels and an inverter. We step into a show-house built out of compressed earthen blocks – the hydraulic press that makes them runs on diesel, the only machine Red Cloud owns that depends on fossil fuel.
“And then there’s this,” he says, pointing to a plywood box with Plexiglas atop it, a 35V photovoltaic panel that sparkles in the sun. It’s a homemade solar furnace: in the brutal Dakota winter, it can generate a 190 degree Fahrenheit mass of air, along with enough energy to blow that warmth through a house, largely eliminating heating costs. He takes me to see the solar pumps that move running water through his two-story school building. Red Cloud’s training center and home is a model for something new and, not to put too harsh a word on it, revolutionary.

His compound represents an all-in-one alternative energy lab and off-grid resistance camp set in the middle of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. That’s a highly unlikely place for energy innovation: Pine Ridge is America’s second poorest county, a sprawling and desolate collection of about 40,000 spread across the South Dakota Badlands. Most locals are so impoverished, and so estranged from the cash economy, that some 60 percent of them can’t afford to hook up to the electric grid.

Which, to many Lakota leaders and especially Red Cloud, represents a huge opportunity—a chance for the tribe to leapfrog over the 20th Century energy economy of coal and natural gas burning power plants and regional transmission lines into a New Economy. The goal is to build an energy independent First Nation and modern lifestyle, beyond the reach of oil shortages, price hikes, and the environmental harm perpetuated by the U.S. fossil fuel-driven economy.

For more than a decade, Red Cloud has been running Lakota Solar, an off-grid skills school and solar machine factory—one of Pine Ridge’s few locally owned business, and the heart of a business network that extends to a dozen other reservations.

Over a thousand alumni have learned to build solar arrays, solar furnaces and solar-driven water pumps in his schools. To Red Cloud, these are practical skills that expand people’s economic and political options. But they’re also something mystical—a key to a new personal and communal future. The two of us settle under a shade tree, and Red Cloud declares: “Number 45,” (that being his way of referring to U.S. President Donald Trump) “is changing a whole lot in our country. So we need to start banding together, natives and non-natives, and if we’re going to build this country let’s build it efficient.”

He wipes his forehead. “We’re all waiting for something. What? I don’t know. But it’s time to get started,” he says.

**An independent tradition**

In the early 2000s, Henry Red Cloud came home to the Pine Ridge Reservation and realized he had a problem. He’d spent years on the road, working seasonal construction, building with structural steel, interlocking the bones of skyscrapers “high above 5th Avenue” in New York City, and elsewhere, seeing much of America. But that wasn’t the world he wanted to live in.

“I had all these hopes of going home, having a job, getting to spend quality time with my people,” he recalls.
The word “home” for Red Cloud, and his moniker too, resonate with historic cadences. He is named for his five-times great-grandfather, the war-chief Red Cloud of the Oglalla Sioux. Though not a member of one of the traditional Oglalla ruling families, the original Red Cloud led a highly successful insurgency from 1866-1868 to prevent U.S. expansion into the productive buffalo grounds that the Lakota were then seizing from the Crow Indians.

During that conflict – now remembered as the Powder River War or Red Cloud’s War – the Oglalla and their Cheyenne and Arapahoe allies, defeated a number of U.S. expeditionary forces, wiping out an 81-man cavalry unit in the worst American military defeat at the hands of Plains Indians up to the defeat of Custer’s 7th Calvary at Little Big Horn, Montana in 1876.

The end of Red Cloud’s War resulted in the federal government signing the Treaty of 1868, ceding a vast territory to the Lakota that made up much of what is now the U.S. Midwest. Red Cloud then agreed to settle the Oglalla at Pine Ridge, and his fight ended there. When in 1876 the Hunkpapas under Sitting Bull rose against the U.S. in anger at the treaty’s violation, the elder Red Cloud stayed out, seeing no benefit in further battles against the Americans.

The Oglallas have been at Pine Ridge since, renowned among the other Lakota and Dakota peoples for the extent to which they have proudly maintained their culture. It is still common to meet elderly Oglalla who speak only their tribal language well, and English with difficulty.

Here comes the sun

According to Henry Red Cloud, what the Oglallas lack today, and badly need, is a thriving economy. When he came home in 2002, he found a reservation that relied on something roughly comparable to a colonial economy – indigenous settlements were largely dependent on franchise stores and chains that brought little money into the community, but which sucked out dollars to the benefit of faraway corporate headquarters. About the only jobs on the reservation were with the tribe – as police, in schools and government.

With the initial intention of just making some cash, Red Cloud signed up for a solar installation course. It was a revelation.

“I thought, as natives we’ve been embracing the sun for eons,” he says, offering the Sundance as an example, the most sacred rite of the Plains Indians, in which devotees dance ecstatically for four days, exposed to the elements, without sleep, food or water.

“We have always believed in living off the land,” he says. After graduating from that first solar course, he decided there was no reason that this native self-sufficiency shouldn’t be reestablished.

He took more solar courses, learned more about alternative energy and green technology. He started working as a solar installer, always expecting to run into other Native Americans who had enjoyed the same epiphany he had. “But there weren’t any,” he recalls.
“I encouraged my brothers to come [and learn from me], but people can’t just get up and [come to my workshops]. Everyone is doing something, like making handicrafts or gathering wild food, to help their families survive. They can’t leave their families for 19 days. So I thought, what if I bring this knowledge here, to Indian Country?”

By 2004, he had learned solar installation; by 2005 he was making his own solar machines; by 2006 he had founded Red Cloud Renewable Energy and was employing locals to make solar panels to sell to the other tribes. Meanwhile, his alternative energy training school began turning out graduates.

**Finding an alternative to the devil’s choice**

For Red Cloud, solar and renewable energy are to the New Economy what the sun is to an intact ecosystem – the basis of everything, offering perpetual sustenance. A place as “underdeveloped” and remote as Pine Ridge, he says, has always presented its First Nation inhabitants with a devil’s choice: either continue in poverty, or sacrifice your culture to the world coming in from outside – usually the malls-and-suburban model of 20th Century America.

“But out here we’re rural,” Red Cloud says, pointing to the far horizon. “We’re the West of the West. At night you have a sky full of stars. You can see thunderstorms coming from 100 miles away. We have no Interstate, no banks, no nothing. And that’s how I like it – being able to go to the hills and see as far as the naked eyeball can see. I wouldn’t want to see mainstream America flood this place.”

“So, Lakota Solar and the Red Cloud Renewable Energy Center have become catalysts for an innovative economic network – one that employs locals and connects tribes, while building greater independence.

Ten years on, Red Cloud employs a dozen people at around $12 an hour, well above the U.S. minimum wage of $7.25 per hour. The products they make, they sell to other tribes, who add their own innovations to the mix. The nearby Rosebud Sioux have “gone to the next level,” says Red Cloud, installing residential-scale wind and rooftop solar. But they also buy their solar furnaces and photovoltaic arrays from Red Cloud. Lakota Solar is now the main supplier for three other native-owned small businesses – a solar-powered paper recycling company and two solar installation firms.

The alternative energy systems Red Cloud builds, and boosts, are what’s known as “grid-tie.” For now, they tie into the conventional electricity grid, providing a household, depending on its solar setup, with anywhere from 40 to 80 percent of their power. The systems are designed to be small scale and supplemental, offering a bit more power (or a bit more saved cash) to families that otherwise might go without, or fall short.

A mid-range residential setup from Lakota Solar goes for $3,500 and lasts about 30 years; that’s drastically below the $25 to $35 thousand dollar average cost for solar arrays found in the rest of residential America. His systems don’t pay the entire electric bill, Red Cloud says, “but it’s still money saved that goes back into the community. It’s enough to help build our own economy here.”
While not the be all, or end all, these inexpensive solar installations offer more than just extra electricity to High Plains reservations. For Red Cloud and other Native American leaders, these solar solutions possess a deep philosophical appeal, extending beyond economic or environmental motives, and extending into the communal, and even to the nearly spiritual.

“People don’t like being on the grid here,” Red Cloud says, “because they’ve been coexisting with the earth – the sun, the wind – for most of their history.” Clearly, the man who came back to the reservation in 2002 has found his way home, and he’s now bringing his people home too.

See photos from this article here:


February 21, 2018

The world will be saved by beauty

By Martha A. Kirk
Global Sisters Report

I had been thinking, "Too much poverty, too much pain, too much pollution, I don't want to look, I don't want to know. How can we go forward with all this?"

I was helping to lead a study and service trip to Peru with our University of the Incarnate Word students and faculty, as part of a Women's Global Connection team.

Peruvian Incarnate Word Sr. Katty Huanuco introduced us to the women of the Shipiba community who live in the hills of Cantagalio, Lima.

The Shipomi-Koniba communities are indigenous Amazonian people who have moved to Lima seeking work and education for their children. Not only were they poor and struggling, but a little over a year ago their small hillside homes were destroyed by fire. The Peruvian government has refused to recognize the people's rights to be there, but about 30 of these courageous women have been working together to demand their rights.

Sister Katty has been encouraging them in developing leadership skills and in creating a sewing co-op. It seems the greater their hardships, the more beauty they have been creating with the fabrics.

"The world will be saved by beauty," says the main character of The Idiot by Fyodor Dostoevsky. In his 1999 Letter to Artists, Pope John Paul II took up Dostoevsky's prophetic idea, suggesting that when humanity is challenged, beauty and wonder can draw them forward.
Two years ago, when we were on a service trip in Chimbote, a Peruvian coastal city challenged by dire poverty and pollution, I began asking Peruvian artist Richard Jon Castañeda Estrada if we could serve in Chimbote by collaborating with him on art projects. People hunger for beauty as well as food. Nourishment for the spirit gives strength and creativity to pursue justice. Castañeda Estrada, one of the best artists in Chimbote, had created a mural for the city's Centro Cultural Centenario.

One of our Incarnate Word missionaries ministering in Chimbote, Selena Mitchell, made contact with Santa Rosa School in one of the most disadvantaged areas. The children's homes do not have running water and the school has no back fence, so the area where the horses and animals live is all one with the children's playground.

Elena Valenzuela, an art teacher and one of my doctoral students, focused her research on Peruvian murals and social justice. She and Castañeda Estrada led our group in the creation of a mural in the Santa Rosa kindergarten classroom. I didn't fully appreciate it until my grandniece Harper Metting delightedly explained it from her perspective as a kindergarten student: "Children can learn their letters, they can learn their numbers, they can learn their colors and their shapes — then they can fly like a bird!"

At the school, Stephanie Phillips Mitchell, a University of the Incarnate Word nutrition teacher, also tested the quality of water in the area with Juan Piña, an Incarnate Word missionary in Peru. Every week, families get water outside from what is left of the school water supply. The families often wash their clothes in the irrigation ditch across the street. The water does not meet safe standards and we hope to help the people get safe water.

They inspired me to go home and focus on water — lack of water, polluted water, and water as the source of life. As the United States has been moving away from the crucial Paris climate agreement, our sisters have made a strong statement in support of it and are calling others to do so also. I wanted us to be part of the Global Water Dances movement in support of the environment, so I contacted a former student, Catherine Cisneros, and her creative Urban-15 dance and music group.

We gathered at the Blue Hole for an event we called "Standing with the Paris Climate Agreement, Celebrating and Dancing with Creation," to raise issues about water. The Blue Hole is the source of the San Antonio River and is located in the Headwaters Sanctuary, our congregation's Earth care ministry that preserves 53 acres of beautiful land in the middle of the urban area of San Antonio.

See the video of our danced prayer in the dry riverbed where crystal clear water used to gush forth from a spring.

In this way, we joined people around the world in dancing to raise issues about water. Finally, people were invited to sign our sisters' Statement for Sustainability and Solidarity with the Paris Climate Agreement.
In the face of the challenges that I feel overwhelming us, let us dare to create beauty. Beauty can re-create us in hope.


See photos with this article here:

http://globalsistersreport.org/column/environment/world-will-be-saved-beauty-52076

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**February 21, 2018**

'Administrative chaos' risks sacred site

By Wendy Caccetta
National Indigenous Times

An ancient valley in a region of Australia found to hold secrets of Aboriginal occupation dating back to the Ice Age is at risk of being destroyed by a rail line planned by billionaire Andrew Forrest’s Fortescue Metals Group, according to traditional owners.

The Native Title body for the Eastern Guruma people of Western Australia’s East Pilbara, the Wintawari Aboriginal Corporation, has asked federal Environment and Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg to urgently act to protect the valley.

His department told NIT Mr Frydenberg had appointed a “reporter” or investigator to look into the matter.

The Wintawari Aboriginal Corporation claims the case has been botched by the WA Labor Government and has not ruled out asking for a legal review by the courts if proper procedures aren’t followed by the government and its advisory body, the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee.

The valley lies at the base of Spear Hill, or Ngajanha Marntaa, a traditional meeting place for Aboriginal people who travelled to the site near the Hamersley Gorge and Karijini National Park to harvest wood for ceremonies.

The valley shares the same traditional name as the hill it abuts.

**Thousands of years of history**

Wintawari director Tony Bevan said the valley contains at least 50 important sites, including rock shelters and ceremonial storage places that had so far been dated back 10,300 years.
Archaeological work was continuing to determine if the secrets of the valley were even older, he said.

“We’ve done some preliminary dating and the information we have is 10,300 years old in one of the rock shelters,” Mr Bevan said.

“But that date is only halfway down the pit. We’re waiting for another type of testing to come back, which will hopefully indicate it is older.”

Mr Bevan said Wintawari wanted FMG to re-route about three kilometres of a planned rail line — part of the miner’s $1.5 billion Eliwana Mine plans — so that it did not go through the valley.

Rock shelters in other areas in the Pilbara have been found to contain rare artefacts showing continuous Aboriginal occupation dating back 40,000 years.

Two years ago archaeologists discovered grinding stones and 48 other artefacts in a rock shelter deep in the heart of mining giant Rio Tinto’s iron ore operations near Tom Price, also in the Pilbara.

The battle over Spear Hill Valley comes after the Aboriginal group says a WA government decision in November clears the way for the FMG rail line to proceed through the valley at the same time as approval was given for Wintawari to determine the importance of the site.

The WA Government, however, says the November decision relates to the Solomon mine and its infrastructure and the Eliwana Rail Project is still with the state’s Environmental Protection Agency.

‘Administrative chaos’

Wintawari chairman Glen Camille said the WA Government had “bungled”.

He said traditional owners were pragmatic about balancing economic development and Aboriginal heritage protection, but in this case they had been denied fairness.

“Eastern Guruma are beneficiaries of mining, but FMG’s current expansion to facilitate Eliwana must have consideration for our cultural heritage places,” Mr Camille said.

“The facts are clear. On the same day, that the ACMC and the Department for Planning, Lands and Heritage provided us with the required permits to allow work to determine and document the significance of the area, to help inform the minister’s decision on the FMG application, the ACMC and the department also discussed and then recommended to the minister that FMG should be granted consent to destroy these sites.

“At best, this reflects administrative chaos within the ACMC and the department.”
Mr Camille also questioned why FMG was given the go-ahead before the report on the site’s significance was ready on March 1.

Mr Bevan said they had asked Mr Frydenberg to make an emergency declaration to protect the area and also appoint an investigator to look into its long-term protection.

He said the matter was becoming increasingly urgent.

“FMG are wanting to go ahead and do some geotechnical testing, so dig test pits along the railway alignment,” Mr Bevan said.

“That means they will go into that Spear Hill area and dig a 2m x 1m trench.”

In a statement on February 20, a spokesman for Mr Frydenberg’s Department of Environment and Energy said a reporter, or investigator, had been appointed.

Further applications from Wintawari were being considered.

“The department will work with the reporter to ensure an expeditious and thorough process,” it said.

“The exact timing of the process depends on the volume and complexity of information contained in the application and responses from affected parties, the nature of consultation with affected parties, the extent of requirement for scientific and archaeological investigations.”

**Act in need of reform, says Wyatt**

WA Aboriginal Affairs Minister Ben Wyatt did not directly respond to questions from *NIT* about whether the handling of the Spear Hill Valley matter had been botched nor whether he was confident the rail line would not destroy a significant site.

Instead his office issued a statement in which he said he would like to see WA’s *Aboriginal Heritage Act* reformed.

“What this issue shows is that we are currently working with an outdated *Aboriginal Heritage Act*, which all sides seem to find unsatisfying and that is why I am committed to reform,” he said in the statement.

His office said the Eliwana railway was being assessed by WA’s Environmental Protection Agency and Mr Wyatt would be constrained from making a decision on it “even if there was a section 18 linked to it”.

The Department for Planning Land and Heritage said in a statement that FMG had made an application to the ACMC under section 18 of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* to use land for its Solomon Mine and infrastructure.
“Having considered the information, including submissions made by stakeholders in response to the department’s procedural fairness process, the ACMC resolved to advise the minister to approve the purpose, subject to providing the WGAC reasonable access to the land to conduct excavation of Aboriginal sites approved by the Registrar.

“A permit under section 16 of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* was issued to the WGAC by the Registrar on the advice of the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee on 22 September 2017.

“The permit was to enable the WGAC to collect Aboriginal cultural material from the surface of 10 sites for the purpose of archaeological investigation. The permit consented to test pitting for the purposes of collecting materials and for the WGAC to manage the cultural material collected.

“The permit was valid for a period of 50 days, with a report on the outcome of the permitted works to be provided by the WGAC to the Registrar by 30 November 2017. At the request of the WGAC, the department has agreed to extend the period for reporting until 1 March 2018.”

**New FMG CEO backs process**

Fortescue Chief Executive Officer Elizabeth Gaines said FMG had worked closely with the Eastern Guruma people and Aboriginal heritage professionals to identify important Aboriginal cultural heritage sites.

“On the basis of information gathered during this process, an agreed boundary was placed around Spear Hill and Fortescue designed its railway to stay outside of the boundary,” Ms Gaines said.

“Fortescue secured consent from the state to use the land outside of Spear Hill and we will continue to work constructively with Eastern Guruma.

“This project is important for Fortescue and the state and will provide significant employment during construction and operation, with a capital cost of US$1-1.5 billion.

“Fortescue has always sought to work cooperatively with Aboriginal people to ensure heritage is appropriately managed.”

Ms Gaines said FMG was open and ready to contribute to any review made by the Federal Government.

The ACMC was also contacted for comment.


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**February 22, 2018**
Midlands Voices: Let’s build consensus for action to promote climate stability

By Daniel R. DiLeo and Richard W. Miller
Omaha World Herald

DiLeo is assistant professor and director of the Justice and Peace Studies Program at Creighton University. He is also a consultant to Catholic Climate Covenant. Miller is associate professor of systematic theology and associate professor of sustainability studies at Creighton.

This week Creighton University hosted a lecture by V. Ramanathan, Ph.D, a world-renowned climate scientist who advised Pope Francis on his ecological encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. As Catholics, we affirm the Church’s consistent teaching that climate change is an urgent moral issue. As Americans we ask that people of faith and goodwill demand science-based climate change policies from our elected officials, and implore our leaders to preserve the climate upon which civilization depends.

In 1859, Irish physicist John Tyndall showed that greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide in the Earth’s atmosphere trap heat in a process called the “greenhouse effect.” Since then, human activities — especially fossil fuel combustion — have radically increased the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

At the same time, our planet’s surface temperature has increased nearly two degrees Fahrenheit in the past 150 years. This is no coincidence. As the National Aeronautics and Space Administration reports, “97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities.”

Human-forced global warming is having profound effects across the planet. For example, the Greenland and Antarctic sheets have lost miles of ice in the past decade, and glaciers around the world are melting rapidly. As a result, global sea level rose eight inches over the past century, and a growing number of distinguished researchers warn that we could already be committed to 10 to 16 feet of sea level rise.

Climate change affects people around the world — especially the poor who contribute least to the problem. Sea level rise displaces coastal communities. Drought causes food and water stresses that lead to resource conflicts, political instability and violence. Increased severe weather events produce malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress that, according to the World Health Organization, already cause 150,000 annual deaths globally and may lead to an additional 250,000 fatalities between 2030 and 2050.

There is a growing danger that we will soon pass tipping points that lead to irreversible global warming and effects beyond human control. This is due to the long lifespan of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (thousands of years), and because of so-called “feedback loops.” For example, permafrost melt releases frozen greenhouse gases that further intensify the greenhouse effect.
Faced with these realities, the Catholic Church, beginning with Saint John Paul II in 1990, has recognized climate change as a moral issue implicating core commitments of the Christian tradition to protect human life and dignity, promote the common good, exercise special concern for the poor and vulnerable, and care for God’s gift of creation. In defense of these commitments, the Church has repeatedly supported action to address climate change.

Since climate change is a global problem that voluntary actions and regional policies have failed to address, the Catholic Church has repeatedly advocated for national and international climate change policies.

Domestically, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops supports the Clean Power Plan. Internationally, the USCCB calls for American contributions to the Green Climate Fund. Additionally, the Vatican under both Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis advocates for a global climate change accord — most recently the Paris Agreement.

Many American politicians and corporate leaders — including from Nebraska — have resisted these and other policies for climate stability. Instead, they have largely chosen to ignore the overwhelming scientific consensus about human-forced climate change and support energy plans providing short-term financial benefits for some persons at the long-term expense of climate stability for all humanity — indeed, all creation.

As U.S. Catholics, we ask that people of faith and goodwill demand science-based climate change policies from our elected officials. We also implore our leaders to enact policies preserving the climate upon which human life and dignity, the common good and all creation depend.

http://www.omaha.com/opinion/plus/midlands-voices-let-s-build-consensus-for-action-to-promote/article_e64cb761-9277-51da-b037-bff039a6a7fb.html

February 23, 2018

How dangerously dirty water is threatening one of the world's ancient religions

United Nations Environment Programme

On an unseasonably warm winter afternoon in Baghdad, Sheikh Anmar Ayid hitches up his robe and crouches by the Tigris river. Rocking back and forth on his haunches, he flicks the water from side to side – all the while chanting rhythmically in Aramaic. After finishing his ablutions, a two-minute procedure, the young sheikh turns to a small mud-brick temple and begins to pray.

In past years, Ayid might then have quenched his thirst directly from the river. As a Mandaean priest, an adherent of a pre-Abrahamic faith that’s native to the Fertile Crescent, he and his co-religionists believe the Tigris – and the Euphrates – are sacred and flow from heaven. Clerics are consequently only supposed to drink from and eat food washed in their waters.
That, however, is scarcely even possible these days. Dirtied and drained almost from the moment they rise, Iraq’s great waterways are in bleak states by the time they reach the country’s heavily urbanized centre. To drink straight from them is to invite near instant sickness. And so as the rivers plumb desperate new lows, seemingly worsening by the year, the Mandaeans are struggling to practice their several thousand-year-old rituals.

“We depend on the water for everything, for worship, for daily life, for food,” Ayid said. “But because the water is going from bad to very bad, we are negatively affected.”

Across the world, water pollution is leaving a devastating trail in its wake. Eighty per cent of all wastewater goes untreated, and much of finds its way back into rivers and lakes – where it contributes to ecosystem and public health crises. Up to a third of all rivers are blighted with pathogenic waste, according to UN Environment data, and a seventh suffer from organic waste problems, mostly from agricultural fertilizer run off. In largely desert countries, like Iraq, worsening sandstorms and diminishing grass cover have caked the rivers with dust and saddled water treatment facilities with a new range of woes.

Never before, though, it seems, has poor water quality imperiled an entire religion. Already threatened by jihadists and criminal gangs, who damn them as heretics and target them for their historic role in the gold trade, the Mandaeans’ numbers have fallen from 100,000 to less than 10,000 in Iraq since 2003. For those who remain, pollution’s assault on one of the central tenets of their faith has added fin...

In Amarah, 350 km south of Baghdad on the Tigris, the pollution is so debilitating that not even boiling water is enough to prevent local priests from falling ill. At their heavily-guarded riverside temple in the Iraqi capital, Ayid and his colleagues have taken to leaving buckets of water to sit for a day, before skimming off the layer of fetid scum that’s usually accumulated on the top. From Baghdad to the Mandaeans’ traditional heartlands in the country’s far south, there’s so much glass and trash in the shallows that few worshippers dare set foot in the rivers without wearing sandals. “Our religion believes human nature requires hygiene, and so for us many things are built around water,” Ayid said. “But where is the hygiene here?”

What makes this all the more frustrating for many Mandaeans is that the culprits are hiding in plain sight. With insufficient wastewater treatment facilities and lax environmental regulations, ever-growing volumes of industrial and domestic refuse are seeping into the rivers. In Baghdad alone, dozens of places, including the Dora oil refinery and the massive Medical City hospital complex, discharge waste directly into the Tigris, according to local conservationists. All this at the same time as upstream dam construction and reduced rainfall cut the rivers’ flow has brought the lifeblood of the Mandaeans faith to the brink of disaster.

“When water levels drop, the health of that lake or river is likely to be affected, both in terms of quantity and quality,” says Lis Mullin Bernhardt, a Programme Officer in UN Environment’s Freshwater Unit. “And the lower the flow, the less likely that water body is to be able to deal naturally with water pollution and contamination.”
Globally, there is an increasing awareness that something drastic has to be done. UN Environment operates a monitoring system, GEMS/Water, which keeps tabs on river and lake water quality, and also helps states establish their own water quality surveillance networks. “For me, it’s like going to the doctor,” Bernhardt says. “You need that monitoring, those stats and numbers, to understand what’s happening and know a bit more about what you can do about it.” By encouraging the planting of water grasses and the preservation of wetlands, for example, UN Environment is pushing for green solutions to water quality problems.

But for the Mandaeans, the fear is that no manner of solutions might arrive fast enough to save their rituals – and perhaps their very existence. Scattered now across Europe, North America and Australia, they question whether a community as small as theirs can endure in diaspora. That a people whose faith teaches care for the environment might die in part because of it is a tragic irony not lost on Sheikh Ayid.

“Above all, we respect the water, of course. But we respect the Earth and the animals too. It is forbidden, for example, to play with a living tree, to slaughter an animal unless it is needed, or to throw things into the river,” he said. “Our daily life depends on nature, but nature is not being kind to us.”


February 26, 2018

A climate scientist talks—respectfully—to climate-change skeptics

By Amy Frykholm
The Christian Century

*Katharine Hayhoe is a professor and director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University. She has led climate impact assessments for many cities and regions. Recognizing her ability to communicate the importance of climate change to skeptical audiences, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication called her a “national treasure.” She also appears in the video series Global Weirding. She and her husband, Andrew Farley, a pastor, wrote A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions.*

How did you begin trying to communicate to the skeptics about climate change?

It began inadvertently. I met my husband at the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship at the University of Illinois, when we were both in graduate school. We had been married six months or so before it dawned on us that we weren’t on the same page when it came to climate change.
I come from Canada, where I took for granted that everyone agrees that climate is changing, humans are responsible for it, and we need to do something about it. He came from the American South, where many believe climate change is something liberal, atheist tree huggers have invented so that the government can rob people of their personal liberty and ruin the economy. I had never met anyone as intelligent and educated as my husband who didn’t think climate change was real. And he had never met anybody who believed the same things he did who thought it was.

Back then, 17 years ago, the issue was not as politicized as it is today. And we had another advantage: we not only loved each other, but we respected each other. I knew that he was a really smart person. He knew that not only did I share his faith, I was a practical person. I wasn’t somebody who wanted to ruin the economy to save the whales.

One conversation didn’t resolve our differences overnight. But over the course of months, through exploring the evidence and the implications together, he came to agree that climate change is real and human-caused and that the impacts are serious enough to warrant taking action.

**How was that conversation like the others you’ve had since with people who deny climate change?**

It was my first experience of starting from a place of mutual respect and shared values. And that, I realized, is the key to success: not just then but even more so today, when climate change has become one of the most politically polarized issues in the United States.

Today, the most accurate predictor of what people think about climate science—or even what the number on the thermometer means—is where they fall on the political spectrum. In a study done in 2017 in New Hampshire, during an unusually warm winter in the state, researchers asked, “Has this winter been unusually warm?” People’s perception of an event they had personally experienced differed based on their political affiliation. It doesn’t get more politically polarized than that!

**How did you start speaking in churches?**

By the time we moved to Texas about ten years ago, I realized that many people thought what I did as a climate scientist was one step removed from astrology—so I wasn’t sure what to expect. Within a couple of months of moving here, though, I was asked to speak to a women’s group about climate change. I did my best and fielded a lot of questions—some I could answer, some I couldn’t. The experience reminded me of the conversations I had had with my husband.

Soon, another invitation came to speak at a book club from a woman who had been in the first group. I adapted my presentation so it addressed many more of the questions people had asked in the first one—and got even more questions. Then another invitation came, to a church group. I adapted the presentation again and collected even more questions. And that’s what I’m still doing today, more than ten years later.
Whenever I’m invited to speak to conservative audiences—farmers, water managers, experts in the oil and gas industry, Christian colleges and churches—I try not only to anticipate but respect the questions they will have. My goal is to communicate that, yes, those are good questions that deserve good answers, so let’s talk!

**What have these the conversations taught you?**

One of the most important things I’ve learned is that most people don’t really have a problem with the science or even the theology of climate change.

I know that there are lots of scientific sounding objections: “it’s just a natural cycle,” or “scientists don’t know enough yet,” or “those models are always wrong.” I hear these every day. And I also hear the religious objections: “if God is in control, then nothing bad can happen,” or “God gave us dominion over the earth, so we can do whatever we want,” or, “the earth is going to end anyway, so why does it matter?”

But if we talk about these concerns for more than a few minutes, the conversation quickly moves past the science and even the theology. People’s real objections are based on the fact that they believe the solutions to climate change conflict with their ideology and even identity. They’ve been told that climate change solutions will ruin the economy; that the issue is being pushed by godless liberal atheists, and Christians can’t go along with them; that the concern is a tool of the Democrats to expand big government and control people’s lives. And who wants any of that? I don’t.

Here’s the thing: those worries are not accurate. There are all kinds of solutions that energize local economies, build jobs, free people to develop their own energy sources, and—most importantly—fulfill our call to exercise responsible dominion over the planet and love others as Christ loved us. So my message is: we do not have to change who we are to care about this issue. Who we are is already the perfect person to care about this. We just need to connect the dots between the things that we already care about, how they are affected by a changing climate, and what we can do about it that is consistent with who we are.

**What kind of connections do you make?**

I’ve become increasingly convinced that nearly everyone already has the values they need to care about climate change. It’s just a matter of figuring out what values those are, then making the connection.

Many of those I speak with are Christians, so we can connect on our shared faith. In Genesis 1, humans are given dominion or stewardship or responsibility over every living thing on the planet. Whichever word we prefer, it’s impossible to interpret this as meaning pillage and plunder, given all we read of God’s joy and pleasure in creation throughout the rest of the Old Testament. It’s not just about nature, though; the Bible has a lot to say about caring for others, especially those less fortunate than us, those who are already poor and suffering. Climate change exacerbates the problems of hunger and poverty and lack of access to clean water, so for me, I care about climate change because it’s a humanitarian issue.
The Bible is by no means the only point of connection. We can connect over economics, how clean energy creates many more jobs than traditional fossil fuels, many of them local, and how it empowers us to develop our own energy rather than importing it. For those concerned about American exceptionalism and “making America great again,” it’s important to recognize that China is already well ahead of the United States when it comes to the new clean energy economy of the future. We all know what their air quality looks like; but what most people don’t realize is that they are changing, fast. They already have more wind and solar energy than any country in the world, and they are a global leader in manufacturing this technology. Continuing to shore up the coal industry when there are more jobs in solar energy than coal is like investing in horse farms and buggy manufacturing as the automobile is starting to be mass produced. It just isn’t competitive.

“I hear a lot of scientific sounding objections, but they aren’t the real issue.”

For those of us concerned about our health, we can connect the dots between the air pollution from fossil fuels and some 200,000 people in the United States who die every year as a direct result of this pollution. If we’re concerned about water, as many are in Texas, we know that the warmer it gets, the more water evaporates out of soils and reservoirs, exacerbating drought. Whoever we are, whatever we believe, whatever matters to us, these days there is more likely than not a connection to climate change: how it affects us and what we can do to make sure that we are reducing its impacts and prepared for those we can’t avoid.

**Where do you take the conversation from there?**

To solutions. All too often, we think solutions are punitive and unpleasant; that if we agree climate is changing and humans are responsible, then the only fix is to let the government control our thermostats, or control how many minutes we are allowed to shower, or even take away our trucks. But that’s not the case at all.

There are so many practical, beneficial solutions that we can all support and even implement in our day-to-day lives. New LED lightbulbs save us money—and don’t have to be changed nearly as often. Eating lower down the food chain reduces our carbon footprint—and benefits our health as well. Insulating our houses keeps energy costs down.

In addition to personal choices, we can do more. We can add our voice to organizations that reflect our personal values, from Young Evangelicals for Climate Action and Interfaith Power and Light to the free-market Energy Enterprise Institute or even the libertarian Niskanen Center. We can make our elected representatives aware of important programs like the U.S. Mayor’s Climate Protection Center and the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus in the U.S. Congress.

And perhaps most important, we can talk about solutions, like the fact that Fort Hood, the biggest army base in the United States, signed a new contract for solar and wind energy because it will save taxpayers over $150 million; or that there are at least six cities in the United States that are already using 100 percent renewable energy (including Georgetown, Texas); or that the cheapest prices for solar energy are in developing countries where people need it the most.
What specific actions do you recommend to church communities?

Church communities have so much potential: classes, sermons, book recommendations, guest speakers, even online communities like Climate Caretakers for people who want to “care for the climate through regular prayer and action that glorifies God and loves our neighbors.” It’s important to be a good steward of our finances; so a church might consider doing an energy audit to save money, which would also reduce the church’s carbon footprint and might free up funds to support for missions or invest in green energy options the church. As part of their witness, one congregation offered its roof to the community as a “solar panel garden,” because it’s often cheaper to put a lot of solar panels on one large structure like a church than dividing them up among homes. Churches are great places to help each other and build community by starting a composting program or a lightbulb initiative to replace senior citizens’ incandescent bulbs with the more efficient LED type, or by asking a local car dealership to park electric cars in the parking lot so that everybody can see what they look like or reaching out to elected officials to share their concerns.

How do you respond to eschatological concerns, like the notion that the world is going to end soon anyway?

My favorite Bible verse comes from 2 Timothy 1:7, which says that “God has not given us a spirit of fear.” This is a litmus test for us Christians. If something is inducing fear in us, it is not from God. What God has given us is a spirit of love, power, and a sound mind.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul was writing letters to people who expected that Christ would return tomorrow or next week. He makes it very clear that although we don’t know the day and the hour, we are not to sit on our hands waiting for him to return, and we are certainly not to tremble in fear. We are to do good works, which includes loving and caring for others. And today, that includes addressing global issues like climate change that disproportionately impact the most vulnerable of us.

What are your goals for these conversations?

My goal is for people to feel empowered. So often, we feel as if climate change is this enormous global problem and nothing I can do about it will ever make a difference—so why bother? The truth is that the boulder is already rolling downhill, we just need more hands.

The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication surveyed thousands of people and categorized them into six different groups based on their relationship to action on climate change. They called the results the “Six Americas of Global Warming.” The categories are alarmed, concerned, cautious, disengaged, doubtful, and dismissive. And despite the fact that the loudest voices we usually hear from are the alarmed, on one end of the spectrum, and the dismissive, on the other, the majority of people in the United States are somewhere in the middle.

So my personal goal is to move people who are cautious, disengaged, or doubtful to concerned, recognizing that this does matter to me and there is something that I can do to help.
**What is the most important action that you encourage people to take?**

The number one thing that we can do is talk about climate change.

In addition to helping us understand where people are coming from, the Six Americas survey also asked how many times a year we hear someone else talk about climate change. It turns out that about 75 percent of people said less than one or two times a year.

Why should we expect someone to care about something that they never hear anyone talk about? Why would we expect someone to think that the problem can be fixed if we never hear anyone talk about solutions?

“Nearly everyone already has the values needed to care about climate change.”

We may be scared to talk about climate change because we worry it will pick a fight, or we will have to argue about science, or it is just doom and gloom, such a downer. But as we’ve discussed above—and as I talk about in my Global Weirding videos—there are lots of positive ways we can connect this issue with things people already care about, to talk about why it matters to us and what we can do about it.

**Tell us about your PBS series on Global Weirding.**

Our Global Weirding series is now in its second season. Every other week, we release a short video that tackles a frequently asked question that has something to do with climate change. The prompt for the series came from a local PBS station, which thought it would be cool for a station in West Texas to do a series on the science, politics, and religion of climate change. The videos are purposely designed to be short and sharable and to give people interesting facts and perspectives they can use in conversation with others.

Questions we’ve talked about so far include: How do we know climate change is real? What do all of these crazy hurricanes have to do with global warming? What does the Bible say about climate change? Won’t plants and animals adapt? Aren’t you climate scientists just in this for the money? Are those airplane tracks we see in the sky a secret attempt by the military to cool the planet?

**I haven’t heard that one.**

Yes, that’s a big conspiracy theory in the darker halls of the Internet. Never mind that the logistics of secretly producing massive amounts of chemicals, shipping them to airports, and getting them on board commercial flights without the pilot’s knowledge or anyone else finding out is stunningly prohibitive; there are still thousands of people convinced that the normal condensation trails, or contrails, we see in the sky for minutes and even hours after planes have passed are actually a chemical experiment by the military to do . . . what? The answers never make sense—but hopefully our Global Weirding videos do!

**Do you have time to do any science?**
I have to make time, because doing science is what I love most. I work with big climate models, looking at how well they are able to reproduce the local climate patterns that bring heat waves and drought and storms. Then I translate that into information that people can use to make plans. For example, the city of Austin is using information that we generated in developing its long-term water plan, to make sure the city is prepared for a changing climate. Washington, D.C., is using our projections to plan for the future of infrastructure and public health. When it all comes down to it, we all want the same things: enough food to eat, clean air to breathe, clean water to use, and a safe place to live. Climate change threatens that, and that’s why it’s so important to prepare for its impacts.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “How to talk to climate skeptics.”

https://www.christiancentury.org/article/interview/climate-scientist-talks-respectfully-climate-change-skeptics

February 27, 2018

Some Christians are cutting carbon for Lent

By Diana Madson
Yale Climate Connections

Instead of giving up luxuries, they're reducing pollution.

The weeks just before Easter are known as Lent. It’s a time when many Christians fast or give up luxuries. Now, some churches and faith groups are encouraging Christians to reduce activities that contribute to global warming.

Leah Wiste is director of outreach and advocacy at an organization called Michigan Interfaith Power and Light.

Wiste: “Lent is a state of preparing for rebirth … And so we focus on transformation.”

In that spirit, her group helps Christians use this time to develop more environmentally friendly habits.

Wiste: “We propose a Lenten Carbon Fast. We’ve created a calendar that suggests one activity each day that folks can do in order to reduce their ecological footprint.”

It includes actions such as switching to energy-efficient L.E.D. light bulbs, eating food that is not trucked long distances, turning the temperature down on water heaters, and hanging clothes out to dry instead of using the dryer.
February 27, 2018

Pope's climate expert tells Nebraska audience: It's an issue in the laps of faith leaders

By Bill Kelly
NET News – Nebraska’s PBS and NPR Stations

Did you know Pope Francis has a scientist consulting him on issues related to climate change? Neither did we.

Dr. Veerabhadran "Ram" Ramanathan, an atmospheric and climate scientist, recently spoke to students at Creighton University. In an interview with Bill Kelly of NET News he talked about his post with the Vatican, why the pope made climate an ethical and spiritual issue, and why Nebraska needs to pay attention.

V. Ramanathan: I'm a distinguished professor at the University of California, San Diego. I started working on this topic of climate change, at least for the last 40 years. I joined the Vatican as part of the Pontifical Academy of Science. They have 80 world renowned experts invited to the academy. I was invited, invited to join the Pontifical Academy of Science in 2004 by then-Pope John Paul II.

You are elected to the Academy not because of your religious beliefs, not because of your cultural or national origin, it's purely based on scientific merit. You're just chosen for your science and I found that to be remarkable. I don't think there is any panel equal to that in any religion that I know of having a scientific body exerting its free will.

Bill Kelly, NET News: As a member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, you're in the service of Pope Francis. I'm betting most people still ask what is the service that you offer the pope.

Ramanathan: The Academy meets once every two years but then individual members organize meetings on special topics, there are at least two such meetings each year. Based on that, we then brief the pope what is the most recent scientific thought on any particular topic. We had meetings on creationism, we had meetings on fundamental areas of physics, and of course, climate change. Sometimes he comes to our meetings himself.

Kelly: Did Pope Francis need convincing that there's appropriate advocacy to be done in the area of climate change?
Ramanathan: I don't know the answer to that question. I personally don't think so. But I can just tell you about one event. I planned to organize a meeting under Pope Benedict on melting glaciers. By the time we got to organize the meeting in 2014 (Pope Benedict) stepped down and Pope Francis stepped in.

At the end of it, I was asked to brief the pope. Unfortunately that day he had only two minutes. So, I mentioned to him just on one thing, which is “what's going to be the plight of the poor?” Climate change was caused by pollutants from the wealthiest billion around the world. But the poorest three billion who have not even discovered fossil fuels. They were still using primitive energy. I told him these three billion are going to suffer the worst consequences. He seems to have immediately got that (message). A year later he spoke about climate change extensively. In fact, there was a famous statement he made. “If you hurt nature, nature will hurt you back.”

When he released encyclical, I consider that the most influential document on us as human beings protecting nature. Scientifically it's very accurate. I challenge any climate scientist to look at Laudato Si, his encyclical, and find anything there which he or she doesn't agree with. It's stuck to the rigors of the science. Perhaps that may be because of the influence of the Pontifical Academy of Science.

There's one statement says, "Cry of the earth should be heard with the cry of the poor." That's how he synthesized all of climate change into one sentence.

Kelly: So where does the science and the spirituality intersect with this issue?

Ramanathan: This being my mantra, the thing I'm pushing last five years, more so after my interaction with Pope Francis, is that in the context of climate change we have reached an important fork on the road. Which is, if you ignore the science and go one way, my own science tells me I foresee destruction. Suffering on mass scales. Now we are talking about three quarters of the planet getting impacted if you let these pollutant emissions go unchecked for the next 30 years.

So where does spirituality fit in? Because of our inaction to stop this climate change, it has become a huge moral, ethical issue. Three billion (people) who have nothing to do with this (the cause of climate change) are going to suffer the worse consequences. The change, which is already happening, is going to get worse. They're irreversible on our time scales. Once you have the sea level rise 10, 15 feet, it's not going to go back for another several thousand years. So generations of our children, grandchildren, and their children, they're going to suffer the worse impacts of our actions. It's the huge equity issue, which puts it right in the laps of faith leaders.

Kelly: You're in the center of the United States and you have a faith community here often with roots in Christianity. They also can be traditionally politically conservative. This is where some of those ardent skeptics of climate change can be found these days, too. What would your message be to one of those congregations in Nebraska?

Ramanathan: First I want to challenge on one topic you mention that the Christian community is conservative. I found in my interaction last five years the Christian community is
tremendously unified in protecting creation. They call it creation, I call it nature. That's where I find that we can come together science, policy and religion.

The fundamental challenge I face in talking with churches and with evangelical groups which I have done, is to separate the politics from the science of climate change

**Kelly:** If part of the tenant is science comes in opposition to biblical teaching, that's a huge hurdle for you to overcome. That their faith is in conflict with your science.

**Ramanathan:** I've learned from the Catholics that being good stewards of the planet is part of the teachings. I've interacted with the president of the American Evangelical Association who oversees 30,000 churches. He reassures me, being good stewards of the planet is part of the *evangelical theology* too. So, I have so far not seen that resistance.

**Kelly:** There is a certain band of Christian belief that says this is just *God's will* and this is the course that God's intending. Your response.

**Ramanathan:** That's very difficult for me to understand because when the testaments were written, the whole issue of we damaging the planet beyond recognition was not there.

If God created us and God created our ecosystem, how can one part of that system destroy the other part? If you think of both as creation, then the issue of this as God's will, it's very difficult to justify.

**Kelly:** Nebraska is a state built on generations of farm families and a strong agricultural economy. Weather and climate, long range climate are part of people's lives and a big chunk of this state. What is the responsibility of American agriculture in addressing this issue?

**Ramanathan:** The issue that concerns me is how are (rural farmers) going to be impacted by this climate change? What we are predicting, the extreme weather, is going to get a lot worse because we are creating new climate. As the American Meteorological Society said, we are expecting huge heat waves exceeding 130 degrees Fahrenheit. Then we're predicting huge droughts. Not the drought that comes one or two or three years and go away. Lasting for ten years.

We need to work with the farmers in Midwest and the Great Plains region, to advise them what to expect. How do they adjust their agriculture practices?

How can they contribute? I think the main thing is conserve water use. It's not going to plentiful. Prevent greenhouse gases escaping from your farm, for example. The manure is a major source of greenhouse gas escaping. What can they do about? Very simple. Put them in bio-digesters, so the manure becomes biogas, which they can use for power. There are a lot of low hanging fruits, win-win solutions the farmers can adapt.

**Kelly:** When you look at this data, are there times you are already convinced that it's too late?
Ramanathan: Not at all. If it was too late, I would never be giving this message to the public. Then I'm doing a great disservice, right? Fortunately there's still time. Climate change is going to get worse, but at least 50% worse than when we were experiencing but it's not going to be catastrophic if they start cutting down the emissions. Starting today. Not 20 years from now. Not 15 years from now. But today. We have about 15 years from now to bending, what I call bending the curve. If we all start and unite, just like America unified before second World War, we just need that repeated.

Kelly: If the United States does do a better job of its preparation but there are still global effects on food supply in these other nations, even if America sustains itself, what are the impacts from food supply shortages back on this country?

Ramanathan: Let's assume America can deal with this. That's exactly what I thought until I saw what's happening to California last five years. I thought of California as the super technology, super rich amongst the U.S. This whole drought and fire of last five years has brought us to our knees. I'm not at all clear that if the changes happen on the scale many of us would do well, but a lot of the population are going to get hurt.

Let's assume that America can cope with this. Yet the burden on this is going to be huge. Just focusing on the three billion poorest population, they earn $1 a day, they depend on the next day's paycheck. Throw a five-year drought on them and I see how the world is unable to deal with one million Syrian refugees. There's no governing system. I'm talking about hundreds of millions. Fatalities, displacement, migration. It really worries me, concerns me.

Kelly: Last question. You're a little boy growing up in India. Other little boys thought they were going to be an astronaut or an actor or a cricket player. When you were growing up did you say, "I'm going to grow up to be an advisor to the pope?"

Ramanathan: It’s funny you ask. I grew up in small towns in India, spent most of my time in villages of my grandfathers. I had only one dream, when I came to America, not to pursue science. Definitely not climate change science. Not to pursue higher studies. I wanted to own a Chevy Impala. And live the American good life.

Kelly: Have you gotten it yet?

Ramanathan: It’s my fate I worked on climate change. I could never buy that Impala. If Chevy makes an electric Impala with batteries, I have solar in my rooftop, first thing I would do is buy that Impala.

Listen to this story here:

February 27, 2018

New project to challenge Catholics to reduce carbon footprint, care more for environment

By Mark Bowling
Catholic Leader

A project aimed at healing, protecting and caring for our common home is to be introduced in parishes and Catholic agencies across Brisbane archdiocese.

Called Living Laudato Si’, the project will draw on Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical – Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home – and will challenge Catholics to make practical changes to the environment around them.

“We want people to really understand the breadth and depth of what Pope Francis was saying (in Laudato Si’) and to embrace the notion of ‘ecological conversion’, as Pope St John Paul II called it,” Brisbane archdiocese’s Catholic Justice and Peace Commission executive officer Peter Arndt said.

“It will include challenges to people to make practical changes – reducing their carbon footprint, reducing our waste, caring for the natural environment – and maybe supporting poorer people who are facing the challenges of environmental damage like climate change.

“We are seeing Queenslanders in the Torres Strait, as well as people in the Pacific, who are facing serious problems because of climate change.”

Mr Arndt is a member of a newly formed Living with Laudato Si’ steering committee, headed by Auxiliary Bishop Ken Howell, which is considering how Catholics could get involved.

“We really expect to dive into the six chapters of Laudato Si’ one at a time … then we’ll start to look how we can roll it out in parishes, schools and agencies in the second half of 2018 and beyond,” he said.

“We are not starting from zero. There’s a lot of action already being taken, so in many cases we’ll be building on what is already there.”

The former director of Catholic EarthCare Australia Jacqui Remond will work as a facilitator on the project.

Mr Arndt ranks environmental protection as a crucial issue for Brisbane’s Justice and Peace Commission.

He spoke at a #Stop Adani anti-coal mining rally outside Queensland Parliament House on February 13, at which he advocated for alternatives to burning fossil fuels to reduce global warming.
“My speech was to address the concerns around employment and to say that one of the ways we can address the issues of concern to people in central and north Queensland is to build on the good work developing large-scale clean, renewable energy projects,” Mr Arndt said.

“Queensland is now the leading state with twenty large-scale projects in operation and more than five thousand full-time jobs – so that is quite a significant number directly employed there.”

March 2, 2018

Religious investors welcome Midwest utilities' action on climate change

By Dennis Sadowski, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Washington — Two religious communities have withdrawn shareholder resolutions filed with Midwest electric utilities after the companies announced they would publish climate risk assessment reports.

Officials at Michigan-based CMS Energy Corp. and WEC Energy Group of Milwaukee recently said their firms would publish an assessment looking at the long-term business impacts of limiting global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), the standard adopted by the Paris climate accord.

The resolutions had been filed by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Aberdeen, South Dakota, with CMS Energy and by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Central Pacific province (based in the central U.S.), with WEC Energy.

Corporations schedule annual meetings in the spring, giving shareholders the opportunity to file resolutions on which votes are taken in an attempt to shape company actions not just on social issues but business-related concerns as well.

The companies realized that it made sense from a business perspective to adhere to the Paris guidelines and work toward further reducing their greenhouse gas emissions, explained Frank Sherman, executive director of Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investment, of which the religious communities are members.

Sherman said it's unlikely that the resolutions from the religious orders alone persuaded the utilities to act, but that together with other investor voices, the companies realized it was important to align their business interests with the need to address climate change.

"The more enlightened companies recognize that their religious investors are the canary in the mine," Sherman told Catholic News Service. "It's happened with climate change, supply change
and human rights, and a host of social and environmental issues that eventually become front-page articles."

Presentation Sister Ruth Geraets called the companies' step "a big thing."

She said her congregation remains concerned about U.S. plans to withdraw from the Paris accord and the planned rollback of the Clean Power Plan, which called for significant reductions in power plant emissions by 2030.

"It's up to shareholders to put before corporations how important it is to work on less emissions," she told CNS.

The Notre Dame sisters were pleased to learn WEC Energy agreed with the congregation's view, said Tim Dewane, director of the province's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office.

"For us, we think it is in the strategic best interest for the company. It also makes sense for the common good and care for creation," he said.

"For us, we're about educating, advocating, and acting with others to make this world a better place. We recognize if we're going to deal with climate change, it requires individual action, government action and private action," Dewane said.

The discussions the order had with company officials opened the door to meetings on other issues as well, he added.

CMS Energy announced Feb. 19 that is planned to reduced carbon emissions by 80 percent and no longer use coal to generate electricity by 2040. It said that it expected to produce more than 40 percent of its energy from renewable sources and energy storage within the same time frame.

The company in 2015 was the 21st largest emitter of carbon dioxide among U.S. power generators. Since then it has retired seven of its 12 coal-fired plants.

WEC is the 22nd largest U.S. utility and the 13th largest carbon dioxide emitter, according to the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, of which Seventh Generation is a member.

ICCR said in a news release that WEC had set an emission reduction target for 2030, but had not provided information on how to reduce its carbon footprint to align with the 2-degree scenario.

The investor groups and the congregations planned to monitor the company's actions to ensure that their commitments are met.

March 5, 2018

Ottawa's conservation plan puts Indigenous people in charge of protecting land

By Gloria Galloway
The Globe and Mail

The federal government will ask Indigenous people to take on the job of protecting vast regions of Canadian wilderness after this week's budget promised "historic" investments in nature conservation.

Environmentalists, who praise Ottawa's decision to spend more than a billion dollars to meet the country's international biodiversity targets, say the Inuit, the Métis and the First Nations are eager to accept the official role of stewards of the land.

It is one, they say, that falls naturally to first peoples whose traditional territory encompasses most of the remaining undeveloped area of Canada, and who have both the traditional knowledge required to do the work and a personal stake in ensuring that the conservation projects are a success.

"They want to do it in a way that respects their culture, their history and their connection with the land, allowing them, for example, to harvest [natural resources]," Environment Minister Catherine McKenna said Wednesday in an interview with The Globe and Mail. "That's extremely important to them. And co-management is extremely important to them."

Finance Minister Bill Morneau has allocated $1.3-billion over five years to be used to protect species at risk and to implement broad recovery plans. That will pay for the expansion of national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries, as well as the management of protected areas and national parks.

As expected, gender equality was a major theme of the 2018 federal budget. The budget includes new measures aimed at encouraging greater participation of women in the work force, along with a program to encourage more men to take paid parental leave.

The investment includes a $500-million Nature Fund that Ottawa says will pair with matching funds from provinces, corporations and not-for-profit organizations to buy private lands, to support provincial and territorial conservation efforts, and to build the capacity of Indigenous people to conserve lands and species.

Under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Canada has pledged to protect at least 17 per cent of its land and inland waters by 2020. The money in the budget should pay for what is needed to meet that commitment. But the Liberal government says it is also an investment to address reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous people.

Ms. McKenna pointed out that the federal government has already negotiated a number of conservation agreements with Indigenous people and said there are many models that the Inuit and the First Nations have adopted to play key roles in those efforts.
In 2015, the Thaidene Nene national-park reserve was proposed in a 14,000-square-kilometre swath of boreal forest and tundra on the eastern end of Great Slave Lake. It is co-managed by the Dene who are sharing their cultural heritage with visitors while protecting a vast area of the country’s northern wilderness.

The 9,700-square-kilometre Torngat Mountains National Park in Labrador is being co-managed by Inuit, the staff is Inuit and the Inuit are protecting the endangered caribou herds.

And, in Gwaii Haanas National Marine Park Reserve on Canada's west coast, young Haida people who are part of an Indigenous Guardians Program are protecting the region but also introducing people to their culture and their connection with the land.

Some of the money promised by Ottawa could be used to train more Indigenous Guardians in other parts of the country, Ms. McKenna said. "Indigenous peoples are already engaged when it comes to species at risk," she said. "Indigenous peoples are living on the land and they can help."

Valerie Courtois, the director of the Indigenous Leadership Initiative, a collective of Indigenous leaders who are working to strengthen Indigenous nationhood, said the $1.3-billion commitment is "historic" and is exactly what the members of her group hoped to see in the budget.

In the past 20 years, Ms. Courtois said, the most creative, boldest and biggest proposals in terms of conservation and land use in Canada have come from Indigenous people.

Indigenous people across Canada "want to hold the pen on what happens to our lands," Ms. Courtois said, "because we have a responsibility to those lands and we have a right, as described in [the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples] to think about determining our future as a people and the way to do that, from an Indigenous perspective, is lands."


March 6, 2018

'For us, land is life'

United Nations Environment Programme

It’s a dangerous time to be an environmental defender. In 2017, 197 people – nearly four every week – were murdered for defending the environment.

To bring attention to this issue, UN Environment is launching today an Environmental Rights Initiative, which aims to raise awareness of the links between human rights and the
environment. The Initiative will work with governments and non-state actors alike to help them promote, protect and respect environmental rights.

Dulphing Ogan, an indigenous leader from the Mindanao region of the Philippines, represents the kind of environmental defender that the initiative hopes to support. Ogan hails from a region where indigenous access to land has long been threatened by extractive industries and government overreach. To shed light on some of the issues facing environmental defenders, we asked him to describe his experience working in the region.

**Tell us about yourself and where you come from.**

My name is Dulphing Ogan and I am the Secretary General of Kusog sa Katawhang Lumad or KALUMARAN in Mindanao, which translates to strength of alliance of Lumad (indigenous) peoples in Mindanao. Our people face a variety of issues, but we are proud to say we are environmental defenders. We say “no to mining” and “no to logging” in our communities, to save the last remaining forests in Mindanao.

**What are some key environmental issues on Mindanao?**

Large plantations are a big driver of deforestation and forced displacements of indigenous communities. The problem is that the government and the Department of Natural Resources (DENR) are considering crops such as papaya and bananas a form of reforestation, despite the fact they are monocrops and are environmentally unsustainable. The DENR and companies support this and showcase this as a way of mitigating global warming. They use this strategy to get people to give their Free Prior and Informed Consent, or FPIC, which legally means that the indigenous peoples have been informed about the project and consent to it being implemented on their land. Thus, it’s not always difficult for governments and corporations to get the consent of indigenous peoples and fool them into giving their FPIC, which opens the area up to destructive industries.

Once lands are opened to big corporations there are also environmental concerns like logging, mega-dams and destructive mining. Our stand is to resist these kinds of projects [and keep them] from entering our ancestral lands. As indigenous peoples, that’s our biggest contribution to protecting the environment.

**What are some of the biggest challenge you face as environmental defenders?**

As indigenous peoples, many issues we face are interrelated. In places where outside interests want to exploit the land, environmental defenders from indigenous communities are accused with trumped up charges, threatened, and even killed. One recent example comes from the people of the Dulangan tribe. On 3 December 2017, eight tribal members were killed by government forces for resisting logging and coffee farming on their ancestral lands in the Lake Sebu area. This is only the most recent example of private industry being favoured over local communities.

**Are there any possible solutions to the issues? Can communities, businesses, and the government coexist peacefully?**
In fact, Lumads (indigenous people) have a system of sustainable agriculture, which counteracts the continuous degradation of the environment. At the same time, we have reforestation initiatives in areas where planting crops such as corn is not feasible anymore. We also plant root crops and timber trees in deforested areas and watersheds. It’s a combination of protection and sustaining the economic needs of the people. The government should help local initiatives as well as allocate resources to help fulfill sustainable development programmes. What happens now is they prioritize big corporations, such as mining and logging, at the expense of the people. The government should support community projects that have proven to be environmentally sound and sustainable.

I think it’s better to have businesses that can develop national industries that support local needs, not resource extraction for foreign export. For example, coconut farming could be developed as a sustainable and profitable industry, an alternative that benefits companies and communities. Businesses and indigenous communities can co-exist by building together national industries that support local needs.

**Are indigenous communities the most effective stewards of the environment?**

We are the remaining populations that value connections between nature and the people. For us, land is life. If you cut the tree, destroy watersheds, there will be no life. We are environmental defenders.


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**March 7, 2018**

Lifestory: Evangelical Christian Makes the Case for Climate Change

By Sebastien Malo, Thomson Reuters Foundation
Sight Magazine

*Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist and evangelical Christian, says she gets slammed every day on social media for her contributions to establishing that climate change is human-made.*

But on Monday, she was welcomed with applause at a United Nations-backed climate summit in the capital of Canada's western province of Alberta, where polls show that climate scepticism rates are among the highest in the country.

Dr Hayhoe, a professor at Texas Tech University, has emerged in recent years as a leading voice sharing the science of climate change to sceptics - many of whom are fellow evangelical churchgoers.
A 2015 survey from the Washington DC-based Pew Research Center found that just one quarter of white evangelicals in the United States believe that climate change is caused by humans.

A separate Pew poll from 2016 showed that white evangelicals voted overwhelmingly to elect United States President Donald Trump, who has pulled his country out of the Paris agreement, a global pact to curb climate change.

But Dr Hayhoe said it is that same Christianity that fuels her dedication to climate science.

"I study climate change because I think it's the greatest humanitarian crisis of our times," she said.

"It exacerbates poverty and hunger and disease and civil conflicts and refugee crises," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Traits that have made Dr Hayhoe uniquely qualified to speak authoritatively in such conservative circles are best summed up by two accolades she has received.

For her work in explaining climate change, Dr Hayhoe has made TIME magazine's list of most influential people, and she was named one of the 50 Women to Watch by the evangelical magazine Christianity Today.

Her calling came "completely serendipitously."

Six months into her marriage, her husband, a linguistics professor, told her about his disbelief in global warming.

"You have somebody you respect and you also love, and you also want to stay married. I said well, 'Let's talk about it.'"

It took two years of discussion to agree that heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions attributable to human activity are driving today's climate change.

The marital episode and her subsequent engagement with faith groups have firmed up her views that the traditional conservative tenet of small government - not science - usually explains why some resist the issue.

"(It's) not because they really have a problem with the science," she said. "It's because they have a problem with the perceived solutions."

"Taxes, government legislation, loss of personal liberty...that's the real problem people have."

Dr Hayhoe did not field any questions from climate change sceptics during her talk at the summit in Edmonton. And her message struck particularly close to home in a province that is Canada's main oil producer.
"The world energy system is undergoing an energy revolution...from old dirty energies that we have been using for hundreds of years to clean, endless sources of energy like wind," she said, in an interview after her speech.

"Oil and gas companies, they look down the road and they understand that the world is changing."

Under the Paris agreement, nearly 200 countries agreed to curb planet-warming emissions enough to keep the rise in global temperatures to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times, ideally to 1.5 degrees.

But without unprecedented action temperatures could rise above 1.5 degrees, according to a draft report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change seen by Reuters earlier this year.


March 8, 2018

Pope chooses 2019 Synod of Bishops on Amazon theme, appoints council

By Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service
Crux

ROME — Pope Francis has chosen the theme and appointed members of the preparatory council for the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon region, which will take place in Rome in October 2019.

The theme, the Vatican announced March 8, is “The Amazon: New paths for the Church and for an integral ecology.”

The pope also named 18 members for the pre-synod council that will collaborate with the secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops in preparing for the special assembly next year.

A synod council usually prepares an outline and list of questions, which bishops’ conferences and other interested groups in the church respond to. The responses are then compiled and analyzed before a synod working document is prepared.

The synod will seek to hear the voice of those living in the Amazon region and identify new paths of evangelization, especially for indigenous people who are “often forgotten and left without the prospect of a peaceful future, including because of the crisis of the Amazon forest,” which plays a vital role in the environmental health of the entire planet, the pope has said.
“We have to break with the historical paradigm that views Amazonia as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants,” he said when meeting indigenous people in Peru in January 2018.

Rich in biodiversity, natural resources and cultures, the Amazon rainforest is the largest in the world, covering more than 2.1 million square miles in South America. The rainforest spreads across Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, Suriname, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Guyana and French Guiana.

Among the 18 new members of the synod council are three cardinals, 13 bishops, one nun and a layman — the majority of them are from countries in the Amazon region.

Council members include: Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, president of the Pan-Amazonian Church Network (REPAM); Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Mexican Cardinal Carlos Aguiar Retes of Mexico City; British Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister; Sister Maria Lopes Dos Santos, a member of the Carmelite Missionary Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and delegate of the Confederation of Latin American Religious; and Mauricio Lopez, executive secretary of REPAM.

March 9, 2018

In Peru's Madre de Dios region, church helps indigenous peoples survive

By Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Arazaire, Peru — Bishop David Martínez de Aguirre Guinea of Puerto Maldonado listened as Harakmbut leader Matilde Tije described the predicament of her people.

In this hamlet of 110 residents, there is no school or potable water, and children are seen drinking Coke from bottles. Although the Harakmbut obtained land titles in 1977, 18 mining concessions have since been granted on these lands. People say mining activities have polluted their rivers with mercury used in the extraction process, and the government body responsible for supervising forest resources constantly imposes fines and pressures community members to stop their agricultural, fishing and hunting activities.

"How can we live if we cannot fish or hunt?" asked Tije, tears streaming down her face. "Sometimes all we have to eat is plantains."

Currently, three members of the Arazaire community are in detention for failure to pay stiff fines originally imposed because illegal loggers cut down trees. And, recently, state officials have
ordered that each of the 22 families living here must pay the government 35 soles ($10) monthly for the rainwater they use.

"The situation you describe is the reason why Pope Francis visited Madre de Dios," Martínez told her, referring to Francis’ Jan. 19 visit to the Amazon.

Madre de Dios, the Kansas-sized region in the Amazon forest on the border with Brazil and Bolivia, has been described as "la periferia de las periferias" (the edge of the edge). Francis’ decision to visit highlighted the plight of indigenous peoples and a valuable rainforest that spans nine countries; both will be discussed at a special Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2019.

About 29,000 of the province's population of 348,000 are members of 22 indigenous tribes. They are descendants of people chained and enslaved on the plantations during the 19th-century rubber boom denounced by Pope Pius X in his 1912 encyclical Lamentabili Statu.

Today, gold lures prospectors to scramble on the artisanal mines here. The gold rush has brought environmental degradation; human trafficking, as indigent young girls are tricked into working as prostitutes in the illegal mining centers; and violent clashes between armed groups vying for the most lucrative seams. Madre de Dios today has the second-highest homicide rate in Peru.

Caritas, the church’s charitable agency, has worked with the Arazaire community to draw up a communal plan that sets out the collectively defined needs, priorities and proposals for income-generating activities. This key document is used as a baseline in all negotiations with the state or other stakeholders.

The church also is working to promote environmental and socially responsible initiatives to mitigate the damage wrought by uncontrolled mining activities. One such example of their help is in the settlement of Fortuna, where the people have opted for the creation of a responsible mining enterprise, Fortumil. The socially responsible gold-producing company, founded by 16 partners, is using minimal mercury, and profits benefit the entire community of 40 families. No alcohol is allowed here and prostitution is banned.

The Peruvian bishops' social action commission and the U.S. bishops' Catholic Relief Services have provided advice on running a small business and have generally accompanied the process.

A further priority for the church is income-generating agroforestry initiatives that revitalize the soil. About 25 miles from the wilderness of La Pampa, an association of cocoa producers — accompanied and supported by Caritas — is selling cocoa, fruits and vegetables at international fair trade and local markets.

Such initiatives, as well as promoting environmental restoration, also support the inhabitants of the region; Martínez worries about conservation groups that fail to take into account the needs of the people.
"These people must fish and hunt to survive, and their activities are small scale and sustainable," said Martínez. "Environmental policies to protect the Amazon must include the survival of its peoples."

The bishop is hopeful that the 2019 synod will bring improvements for the indigenous peoples here. Church organizations are already preparing for the synod.

The Amazon Center of Anthropology and Practical Application, known by its acronym CAAAP, is preparing extensive consultations with the local indigenous peoples of all the Amazon regions in Peru. The 13 bishops of the Peruvian Amazon created the social organization in 1974.

"We hope that the synod will raise awareness that the Amazon region is not just a pantry to be raided for its resources, but a space to protect," said Martínez. "We are an Amazon church, with the Amazon at its heart. We have to ensure the peoples of the Amazon have a stronger participation in the church, and that their contribution shows us the face of Christ and can enrich us."


March 11, 2018

Clifton Diocese: Laudato Si’ inspiring reflection and action

By Clifton, Mary Colwell, and Ellen Teague
Independent Catholic News

Catholic environmentalists Mary Colwell and Ellen Teague led a day of reflection on Saturday in Salisbury, focusing on the imperatives in the 2015 environment encyclical of Pope Francis - Laudato Si’. Around 40 people attended the event, 'Laudato Si': A Call to Action', organised by Salisbury Justice and Peace Group and Clifton Diocese Justice and Peace Commission.

Participants came from as far afield as Bristol, Bath, Rochester, and Swindon, and the day was ecumenical, with Quakers and Anglicans, including two Anglican priests and a strong representation from Salisbury Cathedral's Justice and Peace Group. "We have peregrines on the Salisbury Cathedral spire" reported one of them. An advisor to Catholic schools in Salisbury said she wanted "as a Christian to find out what my responsibilities are towards addressing justice issues and environmental problems". Others said they simply wanted to be encouraged in their work to care for God's creation. Many had already studied the themes in Laudato Si’ and were active in promoting "ecological conversion". One was involved in Salisbury's Transition Town Movement and participates regularly in the international webinars of the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

Suggestions for personal change towards sustainable living included eating less meat, wasting less water and finding out more about virtual water. Using less plastic, particularly single use,
was moving up priorities and supporting green electricity and public transport. The Laudato Si' Prayer would be brought back to parishes and consideration given to celebrating First Communion and Confirmations by planting trees. The livesimply award programme and eco-church were discussed. Many are involved in planning for Earth Day on 22 April and for Creation Time 1 September - 4 October. There was interest in the 'Joy in Enough' programme of Green Christians which looks at sustainable living.

Mary Colwell, an award-winning producer of programmes on nature and the environment, lamented the disconnection between human society and the natural world. "To me, God created this extraordinary universe which blows our minds with power, energy, diversity, constant transformations" she said; "the natural world speaks to me of what a wonderful God we have".

She led a reflection on the view from the venue's extensive windows, which overlooked a busy roundabout with the green oasis at its centre and a Church by the road. The Church was constructed using flint, an ancient building material, and perhaps built on an older site of worship. Cars whizzed round the noisy roundabout, prompting reflection on busy lives and the failure to slow down and appreciate nature. Within the roundabout bulbs could be seen appearing in the grass and Indian bean trees swayed in the wind, but there was little human access to the site. However, "we instinctively put nature back in our lives" reflected Mary, who has led a campaign to protect disappearing Curlews.

With Laudato Si' Pope Francis has brought the Catholic Church to the forefront of the ecology movement, according to Ellen Teague of the Columban JPIC team. Pope Francis has added his extraordinary moral leadership to the fight against climate change, she said, quoting his words that, "the climate is a common good" and "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". Pope Francis also says that, "living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience". Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

Ellen highlighted campaigns to tackle the commodification of natural resources, particularly water, and to urge the UK government to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. She facilitated a group reflection on creation-centred spirituality, and quoted eco-theologian Thomas Berry's words that, "our fulfilment is not in isolated human grandeur but in our intimacy with the larger Earth community".

**LINKS**

*Clifton Diocese Justice and Peace Commission*


https://cliftondiocese.com/faith/care-of-creation/
ICN Review of Mary Colwell's Book on John Muir

March 14, 2018

At Leköl Jezi-Mari, little by little, the bird builds its nest

By Geri Lanham
Global Sisters Report

Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our seventh round of bloggers: Viviana Garcia-Blanco is a Dominican Volunteer at the United Nations and Geri Lanham is a volunteer with the Religious of Jesus and Mary in Gros Morne, Haiti.

Giving directions to Leköl Jezi-Mari, a primary school in the neighborhood zone of Fon Ibo, is a bit morbid. The first landmark is a mint green morgue, followed by the stump of a mango tree.

But then the landmarks change and become living and life-giving. As I walk along the dirt road, I pass living walls of cacti that mark a garden's boundaries and an attempt to protect the growing produce from the never-satisfied stomachs of the local goat population. Then I follow the final bend in the road and am greeted by the cheerful yellow-and-chocolate-brown walls of Leköl Jezi-Mari.

There is no mistaking this place, with its large, bright buildings. It is a testament to permanence in an agrarian neighborhood of subsistence-farm families where people struggle to put food on the table each day.

As I approach, I see students looking sharp in their pressed sunshine-yellow and chocolate-brown uniforms. These 576 students are a living, breathing embodiment of Leköl Jezi-Mari and the education they are receiving, which is a lifeline for many of their families.

The majority of these students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. For them, the school is not just a place of book learning. It is also a place to learn life skills and to learn to interact with one another and with teachers who have compassion for them and who want them to succeed against the odds stacked against them. Some of these students will be the first in their families to graduate from sixth grade.

After an afternoon rain shower, I am always humbled to see how the older students pick up the younger students and place them on their backs to carry them across the muddy river that before the rain had been a road. No adult asks them to do this, but the older students feel a responsibility
to help the younger ones arrive at their destination. I do not have the balance to pick up anything or anyone on the muddy road, so I am in awe to see sixth-graders balancing a kindergartener in front, a second-grader in back, and their backpacks on their heads. These students may not be taller than me, but their sheer force of will makes them far stronger than me on this path.

Lekòl Jezi-Mari started under a mango tree in 1998. It was a group of children brought together by Claude Etienne and Jean Desinor, two community leaders in Fon Ibo who believe the children of the neighborhood merit a formal education.

Since that simple beginning, Lekòl Jezi-Mari has blossomed under the care of Sr. Pat Dillon of the Religious of Jesus and Mary, who has seen the school grow from a single classroom building to 16 classrooms today. The parish school is administered by the Religious of Jesus and Mary, and although it is a Catholic grade school, it welcomes students of any religion.

Sister Pat works tirelessly with Claude and Mèt Leny, the principal, to create a compassionate learning environment where the students can strive to achieve their potential. This includes engaging with the parents, many of whom are illiterate, to encourage them to support the learning of their children to the best of their ability.

When students have a scuffle on the playground that comes to blows, they do not face corporal punishment. The students face something much harder: a mandatory attitude adjustment. Mèt Leny hears both sides of the disagreement then sends the offending parties to sit under the mango tree to think about what they did. When they have calmed down and come to an understanding of how they will live together peaceably, they return to Mèt Leny and explain to him their solution to the disagreement. Lekòl Jezi-Mari students are challenged to learn and live the fact that one's right to swing one's arm ends when it hits another's face.

Lekòl Jezi-Mari students have some life-changing opportunities when they come to school. Thanks to the support of Mercy Focus on Haiti, Friends of Haiti and Fundación Juntos Mejor, the students enjoy a midday meal, which gives them the strength to learn. The lunch program is augmented with produce from the school garden, which is tended by the fifth-grade class.

Each week, classes spend at least one session in the solar-powered computer lab, where students use their math skills to save penguins from falling asteroids and do further research to expand their knowledge of topics in their history books. Students learn about their place in the world, and they are invited to think about how they will strive to change the reality of their neighborhood in order to begin to change the reality of their country.

There is a Haitian proverb, "Ti pa ti pa zwazo fè nich," which means, "Little by little, the bird builds its nest." Step by step, we change the world. The kindergarten teachers participate in a formation program called ti pa ti pa, since they are helping the children take their first steps into learning.

With the foundation they receive at Lekòl Jezi-Mari, these little ones will be able to grow into bright young people who will have the skills and the capacity to be life-giving agents of change.
in their families and in their community if they can only find the opportunity to utilize these skills growing within them.

[Geri Lanham lives in community with the Religious of Jesus and Mary in Gros Morne, Haiti.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/ministry/lek%C3%B2l-jezi-mari-little-little-bird-builds-its-nest-52536

March 15, 2018

Papua New Guinea’s first Cardinal says climate change is ‘disaster’ for his people

The Tablet

"Most of the islands are in danger," he told an audience at The Catholic University of America on Tuesday

People of the southwest Pacific Ocean nation of Papua New Guinea face severe threats from rising sea levels caused by climate change, the country's first cardinal said during a visit to Washington this week.

Cardinal John Ribat, archbishop of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, shared stories of his fellow Papuans who have been forced to move inland from ancestral lands along the ocean as rising seas have inundated their homes.

The same is true on hundreds of tiny islands throughout the Pacific basin, he told Catholic News Service yesterday, before a visit to Capitol Hill to plead for action to protect the environment and address climate change.

Ocean levels have risen in recent decades, overtaking low lying areas on tiny island nations and large land masses alike. Scientists attribute higher seas to melting polar ice as greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels accumulate in the earth's atmosphere, causing the planet to warm.

"We are responsible to voice this...If nothing is happening to us in the way of help, our people will be faced with disaster," Cardinal Ribat said. The Catholic Church must accompany people who face any type of difficulty, he added.

Since being appointed the country's first cardinal in 2016, Cardinal Ribat has focused much of his ministry on addressing climate change. He has called the environment the most important issue for the Papuan Catholic Church to address because of the risks facing thousands of people in the country of 8 million.

"We're accompanying people through this," the cardinal said, calling climate change a family issue that connects the words of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation on the family, "Amoris Laetitia," and his encyclical on the human relationship with the environment, "Laudato Si".
"The issue for us is the families are suffering," Cardinal Ribat said. "They are the ones that will be in more of a struggle."

Rising seas are affecting islands through the western Pacific, and Cardinal Ribat, who is president of the Federation of Catholic Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, said his fellow bishops agree that immediate action is needed to assist people who are being forced to relocate.

"Most of the islands are in danger," he told an audience at The Catholic University of America on Tuesday.

Drinking water also is at risk, he said. Some communities have seen their wells infiltrated by sea water, causing an increase in salinity, and some people have had to abandon traditional gardens, he said.

Cardinal Ribat arrived in the US to speak on the environmental impact of climate change at St Ignatius Loyola Parish in New York City on 12 March. A member of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he also received an award from the parish for his commitment to upholding the principles of Jesuit spirituality in his ministry.

He decided to add a stop on Capitol Hill, where, he said, he hoped that the stories of the climate challenges confronting average people will influence members of Congress to act to protect the environment.

The cardinal also expressed concern that US President Donald Trump had committed to withdrawing the country from the Paris climate accord reached in 2015.

"Pulling out of this is not realising the struggle we are going through," he explained. "I don't think they are fully aware of the costs of this. The pulling out by the president is so difficult for us to understand. We are the victims of what is happening."

Papua New Guinea is an overwhelmingly Christian nation. About 27 percent of residents are Catholic and 70 percent are Protestant. The remainder follow Baha'i, Islam or indigenous religions.

Cardinal Ribat's visit was coordinated by the Franciscan Action Network, Global Catholic Climate Movement, Catholic Climate Covenant, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic University's School of Theology and Religious Studies.


March 16, 2018

In Midst of 'Immense Suffering' Caused by Climate Crisis, Caribbean Religious Leaders Call for
Citing the destruction wrought by last year's uniquely devastating Atlantic hurricane season and other natural disasters, a group of Caribbean religious leaders issued a letter (pdf) on Friday calling on governments and international financial institutions to relieve the debt of island nations and allow them to devote their resources to meeting the needs of their citizens.

"Across the Caribbean, we still see immense suffering from the hurricanes that landed last year," Jubilee USA executive director Eric LeCompte said in a statement endorsing the Caribbean leaders' call. "Islands that are struggling to recover after natural disasters and meet basic needs of their people should not be making debt payments."

Signed by 22 faith leaders from several Caribbean islands, the letter notes that research "points to the fact that the growing severity of hurricanes in the Caribbean is related to man-made climate change."

"We in the Caribbean, like some other nations elsewhere in the global south, are least responsible for but most affected by climate change," the letter continues. "The few dozen small Island States across the world, for example, have neither the size nor developmental history to have been major contributors to current climate change. Yet these small Island States are the most easily devastated by rising seas and harsher storms. Our brothers and sisters who inhabit these places are in peril, through no fault of their own."

In order to be prepared for the next hurricane season and future disasters caused or made worse by the climate crisis, the faith leaders made three demands:

- Our own heads of state and government must unite and collectively demand the creation of an efficient debt relief option ahead of the next hurricane season through all available means, including the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions.
- The IMF must use its rule-setting power to endorse a full debt moratorium once a hurricane or any other serious disaster brings destruction beyond a predefined level and make sure that a serious debt restructuring of all external commitments shall be possible under due consideration of our peoples' human rights.
- The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank must act as supporters of a comprehensive debt restructuring process once it is needed.

"As churches in the Caribbean we have witnessed the grief and despair of our people last September, and we are not prepared to enter the next hurricane season without at least being able to tell them that our authorities shall be able to use scarce resources for immediate relief and midterm reconstruction rather than debt service," the statement concludes.

March 18, 2018

China is taking action to better protect its rivers

Feng Shuang, Editor
China Daily

The International Day of Action for Rivers has been celebrated across the world since 1997. Every year, on March 14, ordinary people raise awareness about the importance of healthy watersheds and the equitable and sustainable management of rivers.[Special Coverage]

China's rivers are an important part of its identity and heritage, having sustained Chinese people for more than 5,000 years. China's rivers have allowed the country to develop and prosper economically. They are important sources of food, energy and production of goods. By itself, the iconic Yangtze River contributes 73 percent of the country's hydropower while the provinces and municipalities in its basin contribute 42 percent of China's GDP.

Intensive development, however, has taken its toll on Yangtze and on all rivers in the country. The National Bureau of Statistics documented 50,000 rivers in China in the 1980s. Only 23,000 are left today. More than half of China's rivers have disappeared or become polluted. Travel to the countryside in China, and you will hear stories about the disappearance of these life-giving arteries. Look out of your window as you fly domestically, and you will see dry riverbeds where water once flowed. Protecting these powerful yet fragile life-support systems should be a strong focus to develop a "Beautiful China" by 2035.

There are encouraging developments. Measures are being taken to conserve the Yangtze River basin. In early 2016, China announced the creation of the Yangtze River Economic Belt which forbids any additional large scale development projects within one kilometer of a stretch of the Yangtze River, from Chongqing to Shanghai, as well as for the Yangtze's major tributaries. Large-scale heavy manufacturing and chemical plants already present are being forced to close or relocate.

Since the middle of last summer, over 200,000 river chiefs have been tasked and are being held accountable for the protection of China's rivers. River chiefs are government officials who have responsibilities related to water resource protection, pollution control and ecological restoration. There are billboards by many rivers with telephone numbers and QR codes so that citizens can report any water pollution or contamination.

In the past two years, provincial leaders in Southwest China's Yunnan province have taken important measures to protect the Nu River from large-scale and small-scale hydropower development. The Nu River is an ecological gem that hosts over 6,000 plant species, and supports 50 percent of China's animal species.
It is important that China continues to take leadership on river protection. Healthy rivers in China contribute toward regional stability and peacefulness among neighbors. China shares 110 of its rivers and lakes with 18 downstream countries, and 2 billion people depend on these rivers. In most cases, China controls the headwaters of these rivers.

Consequently, it is critical for China to manage these rivers in a consultative and cooperative manner and create transboundary environmental compensation mechanisms and transparent information sharing. China is building cooperation among Mekong countries by leading the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Framework, but there is an urgent need for more collaborative leadership. Though it is challenging, these rivers provide opportunities for cooperation across boundaries.

China continues to play a large role in creating a more sustainable planet by pursuing an "ecological civilization" and more balanced growth. As China curbs climate emissions, it must be careful not to sacrifice rivers by exploiting them for their hydropower potential. Rivers are global carbon sinks and ensuring their protection means that they can remove more carbon from the atmosphere. Healthy rivers help us to be resilient in the face of climate change.

A new Ministry of Natural Resources is being set up to manage State-owned natural resource assets and the environment. This will be a breakthrough, since currently Chinese ministries have unclear and overlapping divisions of responsibilities and compete to manage the country's water resources and rivers.

Rivers are the arteries of China and are powerful representations of the Chinese nation. Keeping the rivers of China healthy and free-flowing will continue to sustain the Chinese people and downstream neighbors for generations to come. Keeping healthy rivers will also help ensure internal stability and peaceful relations with China's neighbors.

*The author Stephanie Jensen-Cormier is China program director, International Rivers.*

http://www.ecns.cn/2018/03-18/296162.shtml

March 18, 2018

Water Woes at Katas Raj

By Syed Muhammad Abubakar

Dawn

Legend has it that, after the death of his wife Sati, Lord Shiva cried so inconsolably that his tears formed a pond that came to be known as the Katas Raj pond. Around this pond, temples were built dedicated to the Hindu deities Shiva, Ram and Hunaman. It is the modern-day Lahore-Islamabad motorway that leads tourists to the arcane and sacred site. Situated in Punjab’s Salt Range near Kallar Kahar (at an altitude of 2,000 feet), the Katas Raj Temple complex is
considered the second-most sacred shrine in Hinduism. The pond from the Hindu legend occupies an area of two kanals and 15 marlas, with a maximum depth of 20 feet.

The seven temples at Katas — believed to have been built around 650 and 950 AD — are connected to one another by walkways. The name of the temple complex is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘kataksha’ which means ‘tearful eyes’ and every spring and autumn, Hindu pilgrims from Pakistan and India visit the pond to bathe in it and ‘wash off their sins’.

The Katas pond drew attention last year when the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Mian Saqib Nisar took notice of the drying up of the pond. He stated, “This temple is not just a place of cultural significance for the Hindu community, but also a part of our national heritage. We have to protect it.”

Located in the Salt range, the second-most sacred shrine for Hindus faces peril at the hands of industrial development

Water from this pond has been used to irrigate the orchards of loquats in Cha\n
Water from this pond has been used to irrigate the orchards of loquats in Choa Saidan Shah, a small town and union council in Chakwal district. It also supplied water to the nearby town for drinking purposes but now its own survival is at stake, with unsustainable development threatening its very existence.

This is not the first time the water body has faced perilous conditions. In the early 2000s when cement factories began to be set up in the Salt Range, popularly known as Kahoon Valley — a rain-fed zone — the local communities started to experience a sharp decline in groundwater levels, as their bore wells started to dry out. The Katas Raj pond was no exception to this, and the pond slowly began to dry up. By May 2017, the water level of the pond was so low that it left the temple stairs, which were previously submerged, exposed.

Waseem Ahmed Raja, a resident of Chakwal has been fighting to save Katas Raj pond from drying up for years. He has suffered the wrath of those sitting in power corridors having been served non-bailable warrants and even having been barred from entering Chakwal on one instance. Raja explains that the pond began drying slowly in 2009 and, by 2012, had nearly dried up altogether. “The situation re-emerged in 2017 and since it is an internationally renowned site, the issue was highlighted [in the news],” he adds.

Raja explains that in order to ascertain the reasons behind the depletion of water in the pond, it is important to understand what led to this. He holds the cement factories, which became operational in 2007, responsible. “In October 2008, I filed an application to the Environment Protection Agency [EPA] that one of the cement plants prior to installation had said that they will bring water for their use from Malkana, a nearby village. They later deviated from their commitment.

“As I moved the application,” he says, “a site inspection was done on January 14, 2009, which confirmed that the factory deviated from their Environmental Impact Assessment [EIA], thus threatening the local flora and fauna. The District Officer Environment also confirmed that the springs of the valley are drying up but, in the end, the EPA gave an ambiguous verdict that the
deviation [from the commitment] had been proved but water scarcity could not be proved. The cement factory was then asked to plant 30,000 trees and stop causing pollution.”

In a report submitted to the Supreme Court, in answer to the CJP questioning the Punjab government for failing to safeguard the Katas Raj pond, the Punjab government admitted that an aquifer feeding the pond was depleting due to boring of tube wells by a cement factory.

The CJP advised the government that if the pond is drying due to groundwater abstraction by factories, an alternative water supply scheme should be found to spare the pond. “We have to find a solution as to how water can be provided to the pond. Even if we need to close down tube wells or halt the water consumption of the factories, we will do it,” he observed. A timeline was demanded of the factories for making alternative arrangements for water disbursement.

The National Assembly Standing Committee was told that these cement factories should be constructed on the other side of the valley, preferably in Lilla, as we knew that the pond at Katas Raj would dry up in a few years,” says former director-general of the Environment Protection Agency.

Asif Shuja Khan, former director-general of Pakistan EPA told Eos that when plans to build cement factories in Kahoon Valley were underway, he along with the then secretary to minister for environment strongly opposed the move for their construction, stating that a pristine environment will be devastated and all of its water springs will dry up, especially the Katas Raj pond. Despite their repeated warnings, Khan says, the EPA Punjab issued the environmental approval to the factories.

“The National Assembly Standing Committee was told that these cement factories should be constructed on the other side of the valley, preferably in Lilla, as we knew that the pond at Katas Raj would dry up in a few years,” adds Khan.

The CEO of WWF-Pakistan, Hammad Naqi Khan says that an EIA is a planning tool used worldwide to gauge whether a project should be undertaken or not. It is instrumental in identifying potential impact, alternate sites and processes that bear a sustainable environment in mind.

“Before the factories were established,” he says, “there was a plan to construct them in Lilla, a union council of Jhelum district, which was of course a viable option, and water availability was much easier, as the Jhelum river was close to it, but Chakwal was chosen due to proximity to the Lahore-Islamabad motorway.

“The present devastation of Kahoon Valley could have been prevented had the Environment Protection Department (EPD) and the project proponents incorporated WWF’s comments on EIA reports,” adds Hammad Khan.

“The Chief Justice of Pakistan has now expanded the scope of the investigation and ordered to submit a detailed report on how cement plants are affecting the entire area,” adds Raja who is also party in the case.
The Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO) Choa Saidan Shah, confirms that the cluster of cement factories in the area has led to the depletion of water levels. “The main water source at Katas Raj adjoining the cement factories and the tehsil municipal administration of Choa Saidan Shah provides water to the inhabitants of the area. This practice was enforced on a daily basis, but now the provision of water is limited to every four days.” The report even stated that if the situation persists, this “barani [rain-fed] area will face drought in future.”

Local communities say that these factories, in addition to producing cement are also producing ‘clinker’ which was not included in the approved plan, which means that the factories are consuming more water than their approved limits.

Naseem-Ur-Rehman, director of EPD, recalls that when the Katas Raj pond dried up previously, it was revived after de-silting. However in 2017, when de-silting was no longer helpful, Rehman suggested engaging the engineering department to solve the problem.

Rehman argues, “It is not correct to say that the cement industry is solely responsible, as excessive water consumption by domestic users of Kahoon Valley is also a major reason.”

Rehman points to population bulge, climate change and unpredictable rainfall patterns as contributing factors. He further said, “The groundwater level across Punjab has gone down and there is a need for groundwater regulation.

“An alternate solution to reduce burden on groundwater resources of Kahoon Valley, and discussed previously as well, was to bring water from River Jhelum for the cement factories, which can now be considered. We have also asked the cement factories to draw only the required amount of groundwater,” Rehman adds.

**URGENT MEASURES**

Asif Shuja Khan thinks that prospects of saving the pond are bleak. “It is too late now,” he says, “as water depletion has exacerbated to unprecedented levels. However, the last hope of saving Katas Raj pond is to chalk out a master plan of its environmental protection, entailing a thorough EIA and its subsequent implementation. An Environment Management Plan should be devised by independent consultants and then create a fund which the cement factories should contribute to, along with introducing inverted wells in the area to improve groundwater situation.”

Though cement factories are major stakeholders in the valley, pumping out water for their use, a surge in population, changing agriculture patterns and increased plantation of fruits and vegetables, increase in domestic tube wells and rainfall variability, along with other sources, are also responsible for worsening the situation. The hydrological study which is currently underway by the provincial government can help fix responsibility on the factors behind the groundwater depletion of the sacred pond.

The issue is not just of Katas Raj pond but for the survival of the entire Kahoon valley. If the situation goes unabated, a time may come when the groundwater for the valley is depleted, triggering migration of the local population. This would be a sheer violation of the land rights of
indigenous communities, which have been duly recognised by the United Nations (UN). Moreover, it is open defiance of the international environment-related conventions, especially the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN’s Paris Climate Agreement, that Pakistan is signatory to.

*Syed Muhammad Abubakar is an environmental journalist. He tweets [@SyedMAbubakar](https://www.dawn.com/news/1395457)*

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**March 19, 2018**

**Iowa IPL Names New Director**

**Iowa Interfaith Power & Light**

Iowa Interfaith Power & Light (Iowa IPL) has named Matt Russell, a sustainable agriculture leader at the Drake University Agricultural Law Center, as its new executive director.

Russell, a farmer and outspoken advocate for finding solutions to climate change, will fill the position starting in April. The Rev. Susan Hendershot Guy, the former executive director, left the organization in January to lead the national movement as president of Interfaith Power & Light.

“Matt was chosen to lead our statewide, faith based, grassroots organization because of his personal and professional commitment to care for creation,” says Brian Campbell, president of the Iowa IPL board of directors.

“Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time,” says Russell. “Iowa’s communities of faith play an unparalleled role in helping Iowans understand the moral imperative in solving this problem caused by human activity. I am excited and honored to lead Iowa Interfaith Power & Light into new opportunities, resources, and action.”

Under Russell’s leadership, Iowa IPL will develop a program to engage Iowa agriculture on climate change as well as continue its advocacy for sustainable energy policies and efforts to help Iowans reduce their carbon footprint.

Russell has spent his entire career with non-profit organizations in addition to eight years at USDA as a member of the Farm Service Agency state committee. Currently, Russell works as the Resilient Agriculture Coordinator at the Drake University Agricultural Law Center. He farms with his spouse in rural Lacona and grew up on a family farm near Anita. He received a bachelor’s degree from Loras College and studied for the Catholic Diocese of Des Moines at the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary in Illinois. He earned a master’s degree in Rural Sociology from Iowa State University.
Starting April 1, 2018, Iowa IPL’s new director can be reached at director@iowaipl.org and 515-689-1112.

https://iowaipl.org/2018/03/19/iowa-ipl-names-new-director/

March 21, 2018

The last male rhino of its kind dies. African religious leaders call it a spiritual loss.

By Fredrick Nzwili
Religion News Service

NAIROBI, Kenya (RNS) — Religious leaders who campaign for wildlife conservation are mourning the death of the world’s last male northern white rhino, calling the subspecies’ likely extinction a spiritual loss.

“We are staring at the extinction of the animal type, under our watch. I think it’s a spiritual matter,” said the Rev. Charles Odira, a Roman Catholic conservationist priest from Kenya, where the rhino lived.

“I feel as if we have neglected our duty as stewards of creation and should have done more for this species.”

The 45-year-old rhino – named Sudan – was euthanized Monday (March 19) after suffering an infection and serious complications due to his advanced age. He was kept under armed guard at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy, north of Nairobi, and left behind two female white rhinos – a daughter and granddaughter.

The two offspring have health problems that mean neither can likely carry a pregnancy to term, and that they will likely die as the last of their kind.

Sheikh Ole Naado, deputy general secretary of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, urged wildlife conservationists to take the lessons from the death of Sudan.

“It is a kind of warning that others are taking a similar path. It could be telling us that something bigger is happening — like the possible extinction of a community,” said Ole Naado, referring to the Maasai tribe to which he belongs and whose lands bridge Kenya and Tanzania.

Many Maasai fear encroaching government and commercial interests and the effects of global warming will compromise or obliterate their traditional way of life. But they themselves understand that they must co-exist with wildlife, said Ole Naado.

As religious leaders preach protection of the natural world, some spiritual beliefs are also part of the problem.
Many people in Asia believe that various body parts of rhinos, elephants and other endangered animals possess healing powers or bring luck. Poachers — driven partly by this demand — continue to hunt these species relentlessly.

While a few northern white rhinos roamed Africa wild in the 1960s, by 2008, they lived only in zoos around the world.

Campaigns against the use of elephants’ ivory tusks for carving religious objects in Asia have met with some success, but the demand for rhino is still high. In countries such as Vietnam, a belief that rhino horn cures hangovers and cancer is widespread.

“Religious demand for wildlife products in parts of Asia has been a problem. We have talked to religious leaders in the region about how this is killing our wildlife,” said Odira.

“We believe God cannot commission the death of species that he had brought to life,” the priest added.


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**March 21, 2018**

The Pacific Ocean, suffering servant

By Karan Varker
Global Sisters Report

What does the Jesus of Good Friday have to do with the Pacific Ocean?

In *Laudato Si*, on Care for Our Common Home, Pope Francis writes, "In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ … 'All things have been created through him and for him' (Col.1.16) … the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole." Francis reminds us that our earth is a "mother who opens her arms to embrace us … [but] we have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will."

The Good Friday liturgy puts before us Jesus, the Suffering Servant: "He was despised and rejected by others, a man suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces, he was despised and we held him of no account"(Isaiah 53:3).

Once I flew from New York to California. I had been away from Australia for some months. As the plane neared Los Angeles, I looked down and sighted the familiar, beautiful Pacific Ocean. I felt joy because I knew I was on my way home. I had grown up on the eastern coast of Australia, and the Pacific nurtured my love for the ocean, its life and those who live on its islands.
The islands of this ocean are home to many different peoples, speaking hundreds of languages. Some, like the Philippines, New Zealand, Indonesia and Japan are well-known.

Less known, yet equally important, are the people: Polynesian, Micronesian and Melanesian — all have lived in the Pacific for thousands of years. The Pacific has been the mother who protected and sustained them.

I spent considerable time during my ministry among the Melanesian and Polynesian peoples, whom I called "rainbow people" because of their colorful beauty. It was always a surprise and delight for me to learn about their cultures, languages and way of life.

I was particularly interested in their dancing, and their reasons for dancing; eventually I was able to tell their islands of origin by the way they danced. The Melanesian people of Papua New Guinea danced on serious occasions like funerals or at war dances — with much stomping of feet. In the Solomon Islands dancing was accompanied by flute and drums. In Polynesia, dancing was a joyous celebration of their culture and included wonderful arm and finger movements.

In living among these generous people, I learned that to survive I had to depend on them and trust them. Yet, I was often appalled at how they were treated. Many of these beautiful people can identify with Jesus, the Suffering Servant, as their needs are ignored and their countries exploited by the wealthy and powerful of the world.

While teaching in Melanesia on Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, I experienced the beginning of a vicious ten-years civil war, in which thousands of people died. In part it centered around the peoples' exploitation by foreign owners of one of the world's largest copper mines.

In the Solomon Islands, I saw foreign companies raping the sea with drift net and long line fishing; they were also logging the land, which resulted in disastrous mud slides. Local people showed me wrecked planes and tanks dumped by troops after World War II.

Because many Pacific Islands in Micronesia are low-lying coral islands, people are struggling with rising sea levels and the destruction of their homes due to global warming.

I taught in Samoa in the mid-1990s, during the latter years of the French nuclear testing. The people's main food crop, taro, became diseased with taro leaf blight, and I wondered if in some way this may have been connected to atmospheric nuclear fallout, as Samoa is only an hour's flight from French Polynesia.

Nuclear testing in French Polynesia had been done over several decades, and nuclear testing and nuclear waste are still contaminating the Pacific. Nuclear ballistic missiles are still being fired into the northwestern rim of the ocean.

In the same area, a tsunami caused one of the world's worst nuclear reactor disasters, and toxic waste from that is likely to be dumped into the sea.
Just recently, it was reported that highly contaminated radioactive nuclear waste is leaking on Runit Island, near the Marshall Islands, halfway between Australia and Hawaii. The waste had been buried by the USA in the late 1970s, under a vast 85,000 cubic meter concrete dome. This dome is now cracking and people who live on surrounding islands fear for their lives and for the widespread contamination of the Pacific Ocean and its food chain. It would likely be the largest nuclear cleanup in US history.

Closer to home, here in Australia, the Pacific Ocean offers us many great treasures. Among these is the World Heritage Great Barrier Reef. Sadly, so much of the reef is dying due to global warming, illegal poaching of fish, increasing numbers of the coral-eating crown of thorns starfish, and chemical run-off from agriculture and mining.

Mine run-off is a significant problem. There is fierce opposition to the government support of the development of the foreign-owned Adani Carmichael mine in Queensland, which would be the largest coal mine in Australia. The Sydney-based Climate Council of Australia recently warned the government that this mine would be a disaster for the Great Barrier Reef, for global warming and for people's health.

Another Australian treasure is our whales, particularly humpback whales. These amazing creatures make their mating journey annually from the Southern Ocean to the Reef. Afterwards the whales — including the mothers and calves — travel back to their home in the Southern Ocean, where they are facing major problems.

Because of global warming, Antarctic ice sheets may be melting more quickly than anticipated. Whales' major food source is the tiny krill that thrive in icy waters. As the ice melts, the migrating whales will be forced to travel much further south to their food source. The other danger is that they are still being illegally slaughtered by Japan, and perhaps for political, diplomatic reasons little is said about this.

As an Australian woman of Celtic origin, I have absorbed Christian Celtic spirituality in which the Divine presence was recognised in nature, landscapes and in the sacredness of everyday places. I have been influenced by Australian indigenous peoples' spirituality of the land, in which the earth is our mother from whom we come and to whom we return.

Reflecting on Scripture and theology has deepened and broadened my understanding of the presence of Christ, "the firstborn of all creation … in whom all things have been created."

I have been influenced by the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin, who saw the cosmic Christ as the Omega point of all creation, and by Saint Francis, who called Water his Sister.

So I believe that a oneness exists between the sufferings of creation and those of Christ, the Suffering Servant.

I believe that the Pacific Ocean, with all its peoples and living creatures, reflects Jesus, the Suffering Servant. So I conclude with a simple poem I wrote about our connectedness with the ocean:
I've a passion for the sea, and it's renewed in me

Each time I stand and let it be a part of me.

[Karan Varker is a Sister of Charity of Australia. She has been a teacher in in Papua New Guinea, America Samoa and Australia, served as a principal in Australia and Samoa, and trained Catholic teachers in Samoa and the Solomon Islands.]

http://www.globalsistersreport.org/column/spirituality-environment/pacific-ocean-suffering-servant-52711

March 22, 2018

Cardinal Ribat raises concerns with rising seas, deep-sea mining

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Rising seas and new technology to mine beneath them are forefront concerns these days for Cardinal John Ribat of Papua New Guinea.

During a 12-day U.S. trip along the East Coast that concludes March 22, the head of the Port Moresby archdiocese on the South Pacific island nation has in numerous settings expressed his worry with the continuing impact of climate change on his and other islands, as well as the development of first-of-its-kind deep seabed mining in waters off his homeland.

Ribat, 61, has long spoken out about the impacts of climate change on the people of the Pacific islands, considered one of the ground zeros of global climate change, where rising seas have submerged portions of islands and have already led to communities relocating from their homes to nearby islands.

Last week, Ribat raised his concerns about climate change again on Capitol Hill in meetings with Sen. Edward Markey (D-Massachusetts) and officials for Sen. Jeff Markley (D-Oregon). Both sit on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, and its subcommittee on fisheries, water and wildlife.

In their meeting, the cardinal pointed out on a map to Markey, who is Catholic, the locations of the islands as he described how rising seas have forced people to relocate farther inland every few years as the tides rise and come in farther themselves.

On Bougainville, one of Papua New Guinea's roughly 600 offshore islands, the diocese has offered a piece of land to help people resettle from the Carteret Islands, which have shrunk under rising ocean tides. Ribat said that during a trip around Easter last year to Ahus and Andra islands he witnessed similar scenes of shorelines and agricultural lands that had washed away.
Sea level rise is driven by two primary factors: the oceans expanding as waters warm, and increased water mass due to melting ice from glaciers and ice sheets. According to a climate science special report, published in November and compiled by 13 U.S. federal agencies, global mean sea levels have risen roughly 7 to 8 inches since 1900 — three inches since 1993 — with human-driven climate change making "a substantial contribution" during that period. Scientists project further rise of 1 to 4 feet by 2100 and have not ruled out a rise as high as 8 feet.

"When you're on an island, you get it, when you got to keep moving your house," said Franciscan Fr. Michael Lasky, who helped organize the cardinal's trip.

In the Capitol Hill meetings, Ribat also raised another problem accompanying rising tides: seawater seeping into the freshwater table underground and turning some crops inedible. "When they harvest them it's salty. They cannot eat them anymore because the sea is rising," he said.

**Clean water impacted**

The impact of rising seas on clean water came up as well during a meeting March 15 with officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. He also reiterated concerns he shared with the senators' offices about new seabed mining technology set to begin next year in waters east of Papua New Guinea.

Nautilus Minerals, a Canadian-based company, in 2011 received a mining lease from the Papua New Guinea government for extracting deposits of copper and gold from the floor of the Bismarck Sea. The project will be the world's first attempt at mineral extraction from the deep sea.

The mining operation — which would occur 1,600 meters, or nearly 1 mile, under the sea about 20 miles off the western coast of New Ireland and 31 miles north of New Britain, both islands east of Papua New Guinea — is set to begin in 2019. According to Nautilus, the deposits of the deep sea Solwara 1 Field ("salt water" in the Tok Pisin language native to Papua New Guinea) contain copper and gold at grades much higher than typically found in land-based mines.

The potential mining site holds added significance for Ribat, who calls home Watom Island, off New Britain's north coast. While on the island at Christmas, fishers shared with him anxieties over how the mining may impact fishing grounds. During meetings with U.S. government officials, the cardinal described the seabed mining process as "taking the lawnmower over the reefs where people fish," according to Lasky.

Ribat told NCR he is concerned that the project does not include the necessary oversight and monitoring of any underwater mining operations, particularly since the machines would be remote-controlled from a large sea vessel, and that not enough is known at this point to what effects such mining will have on local marine life and people reliant on fishing and the sea for their livelihoods. A particular concern is the mining operation's proximity to a tuna breeding ground.
"There's no clear information about how or what the negative effect it will bring to the environment and also to the marine life that we have," he said.

In an August 2016 statement, the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, of which Ribat is president, voiced their opposition to seabed mining, and instead endorsed sustainable development in coastal communities through tourism, fisheries and agriculture.

"The sea is a treasure for all and should never become a 'playground of exploitation,' " the statement said.

Ribat suggested it would be best "to delay this operation until we have people better prepared to assess and monitor this operation, so we're not destroying the environment for the sake of just testing this technology."

In an emailed response to NCR, a Nautilus Minerals spokeswoman called the Solwara 1 site "one of the best studied deep sea ocean sites on the entire planet," and said the company's work has been reviewed by external independent experts for the Papua New Guinea government and the International Seabed Authority.

"All of these reviews have confirmed that seabed mining has limited environmental impacts, and has positive net benefits," said Noreen Dillane, corporate communications manager for Nautilus Minerals.

She said that "independent expert observers" chosen in consultation with nearby provinces would be aboard the vessel to ensure compliance with the permit conditions. Its environmental impact statement, completed in 2008, found there would be no impacts from mining on reefs or tuna fisheries, and that any impacts would be limited to a 27-acre area and beneath 1,300 meters (.8 miles) below sea level.

Critics of the seabed mining project contend there has been no independent environmental study and the present one contains gaps. In December, the Guardian reported that the Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights, in Port Moresby, filed suit on behalf of several coastal residents over the operation, alleging that key documents were withheld and that residents had a constitutional right to that information. They have also questioned the relationship between Nautilus and the Papua New Guinea government, which holds a 15 percent share in the Solwara 1 project.

Dillane said that Nautilus has conducted "regular awareness meetings" in the coastal communities near the project site and has reached more than 30,000 people through such programs since 2008. She added that information sessions were being held in the western coastal areas of New Ireland this week.

As for communication with Ribat, Dillane said Nautilus Minerals and the government have made numerous attempts to meet with him.
"To date the Cardinal has not accepted any of these attempts to meet in person to discuss the topic, and provide him with all the independent expert advice in person. Similarly, the Company has never been approached by the Federation of Catholic Bishops to provide information on the Project, or to discuss their concerns one on one," she said in an email.

The cardinal did not respond for follow-up comment.

**Raising awareness**

The cardinal said he hoped his visit to Capitol Hill and EPA headquarters would raise awareness of what's happening in the South Pacific and amplify efforts to address issues they're facing, given that other islands in the region are U.S. territories.

While also in Washington, Ribat, who was elevated to cardinal in November 2016, spoke about climate change and mining March 13 at the Catholic University of America, and later met with a group of roughly 80 religious seminarians to talk about his vocation.

Before departing for home, he was set to meet in New York with members of Franciscans International, the religious order's NGO at the United Nations, to further discuss sea rise and seabed mining. He was also scheduled to meet March 21 with Kärenna Gore, the founder of the faith-based Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary; Gore is also the daughter of former vice president and climate activist Al Gore.

It was an award from the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, in New York City, that spurred the trip for the first cardinal of his island country. On March 11, Laetare Sunday, he presided at Mass and was honored with the parish's Loyola Medal, which recognizes people who have made significant contributions to their community.

"Our [parish] Lenten theme is healing," Elizabeth O'Sullivan told NCR. "And we believe that Cardinal Ribat's work in climate change, which is healing on a global level, is worthy of acknowledgement and worthy of honor."

Throughout his time in the U.S., Ribat has received updates from Papua New Guinea about the aftermath of an earthquake that rocked the island in late February.

In the early morning Feb. 26, a magnitude-7.5 earthquake struck the Southern Highlands province, that along with a landslide, has killed at least 145 people and displaced upwards of 35,000 others. The inland region is a remote part of the island, overlapping with the Mendi diocese led by U.S.-born Bishop Donald Lipert, which has made relief efforts and communication more difficult.

"The earthquake has been very devastating," Ribat said.

March 22, 2018
Pastor mobilizes black churches to act on climate
By Diana Madson
Yale Climate Connections

His own church is teaching children how to care for creation.

Reverend Doctor Ambrose F. Carroll says that African American churches are not often associated with environmentalism. But he wants to change that.

So he founded Green the Church, a campaign to motivate environmental action at black churches.

Carroll: “We are people of the African diaspora. We’re people who are ex-slaves, people who are migrant farmers, people who have spent eons with our hands in the ground, and even though we don’t talk the language of environmentalism, it’s really very close to who we are.”

At Green the Church trainings, workshops, and conventions, faith leaders teach pastors and other church representatives the religious importance of protecting the earth. And, they provide strategies for engaging churches in renewable energy, food security, and environmental justice.

Carroll says that action takes many different forms. For example, his church in Berkeley, California has switched to LED lighting and launched a program to teach children to care for God’s creation. He says the campaign inspires action, and shows that, in fact …

Carroll: “The African American church is engaged.”

Listen to this podcast here:


March 23, 2018
Latin American bishops call for 'ecological conversion'

By Barbara J. Fraser, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter
Lima, Peru — Less than two months after Pope Francis spoke out about environmental destruction in the Amazon basin during a visit to Peru, bishops from Latin America and the Caribbean have issued a pastoral letter calling the region's Catholics to an "integral ecological conversion."

The letter, published in early March, reflects on environmental issues in Latin America in light of "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," Francis' 2015 encyclical.

The Latin American bishops' council, CELAM, spent seven years drafting the pastoral letter, which will serve as input for the commission planning the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon, to be held at the Vatican in 2019.

The letter highlights "the serious consequences of the unbridled exploitation of natural resources and awareness that we must care for our common home," said Archbishop Pedro Barreto Jimeno of Huancayo, Peru, who oversaw much of its drafting.

The economies of many Latin American countries depend largely on exports of raw materials, especially minerals, the bishops note. Those countries experienced an economic boom over the past decade and a half because of high prices for oil, minerals and other commodities.

But while those revenues helped decrease poverty rates, the income gap in Latin America widened during those years.

Industries such as mining, oil and gas, timber production, industrial agriculture and large-scale energy projects cause "multiple impacts on the lives and health of people living near the projects, the environment and our entire region," the bishops wrote.

They called on business executives, government officials and investors to "prioritize the lives of territories and their people over any financial interest."

Governments must "fully assume their responsibility to protect the most vulnerable people and place the common good ahead of any private interest," the bishops wrote.

The pastoral letter reinforces ideas expressed by Francis during his encounter with indigenous people in Puerto Maldonado, a city in the Peruvian Amazon, during his January visit. The pope stressed the importance of safeguarding indigenous people's rights to their territories and the natural resources there.

The bishops emphasized that local communities must play an active part in decisions about development projects.

People today must safeguard the land, water and climate for future generations, the bishops wrote, because "justice demands that we give them a world fit for habitation."
On a page illustrated with a photo of Sister Dorothy Stang, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who was murdered in Brazil in 2005 for her defense of small farmers' land rights, the bishops called for safeguards for "those who care for our common home."

The bishops wrote that those people "often are threatened, abused, repressed and imprisoned for proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and denouncing the gods of power and money."

"There are many martyrs in Latin America who have given their lives in the struggle for the defense of life," the bishops wrote. "Their blood is the seed of freedom and hope."

Caring for creation is the task of all, the bishops said, adding, "The important thing is to 'begin at home.'"

Individuals can take steps to conserve energy, recycle, consume less and waste less, they wrote, while Christian communities should "live their mission of caring for the earth and for the lives of people, particularly the poor."


March 23, 2018

At global forums, church leaders advocate for safe water for all

By Lise Alves, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Brasilia, Brazil — Erileid Domingues said most of her indigenous village has, at one time or another, fallen ill due to contaminated water.

Domingues said her village in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul is surrounded by large soybean and corn plantations that use agro-toxins in their crops, which eventually seep into the soil and make their way into the waterbeds, contaminating rivers and wells used by her Guarani-Kaiowa tribe.

"Our fish have become contaminated; we can't grow a vegetable garden because the water is also bad," she told Catholic News Service. "Days after small planes spray the plantations, water from our wells turns milky white and remains that way for several weeks. Many of us suffer from chronic stomach pains and allergies."

To tackle the question of global access to clean water, hundreds of experts, policymakers, nongovernmental groups and members of civil society came together for two water forums held in mid-March in Brazil's capital, Brasilia.

Access to clean water is a fundamental right must be a global priority, said Catholic leaders present at the 8th World Water Forum and the Alternative World Water Forum. Catholic
representatives spoke about the need to find ways to create a sustainable supply of fresh drinking water for all, especially the poorer populations around the world.

"We have a mission," said Msgr. Bruno-Marie Duffe, secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. "The church has the responsibility to protect human rights, to protect the poorer communities, and this also includes being able to make sure these populations have access to clean water."

Msgr. Duffe attended the official forum. He said that, although the Holy See recognizes the enormous contributions of local communities and civil society, it is also important to listen to policymakers and politicians and to encourage them to look closely at the water issues and invest in improving sanitation and water, even in the poorest and most remote regions of the globe.

"The reality is that we have many people that live in terrible situations. There is data from 2015 that shows that over 844 million people around the world have no drinking water, and that more than 2 billion people drink contaminated water," said the Vatican official, who has worked for many years on issues involving human rights and pastoral care.

"We have the technical capacity and technical means to treat, transport, and transform sea water into drinking water," he told CNS. "It is not a question of not having the knowledge, it is a question of political and moral will."

Auxiliary Bishop Leonardo Ulrich Steiner of Brasilia, secretary-general of the Brazilian bishops' conference, spoke at the opening session of the alternative forum.

"We are not discussing what we should be discussing, deforestation. Society is not concerned with water sources and deforestation," he said.

"Pope Francis believes that we need to compensate the debt we have with the environment by now taking care and cultivating land and water. We do not wish to explore, but to cultivate and take care of our lands and waters," said Steiner, referring to "Laudato Si'."

"This is our common home; we should take better care of it," he added.

Patricia Antunes do Reis, representative of the Catholic Climate Movement and Franciscan Action Ecology and Solidarity, said she believes society must monitor more closely the private sector.

"Almost 100 percent of productive activities need water, so it is necessary to seek a more equitable system for distribution between the consumption by the productive sectors and consumption by human beings. Currently, there is no such equity, and the sacrifices fall mainly on the average consumer, with little restriction put on big industries," she said during a session of the alternative forum.
Although at different forums, do Reis echoed the words of Duffe, saying that access to clean water "is not a question of lack of resources, but a political and economic option to benefit private interests."

Caritas Internationalis, the confederation of Catholic relief, development and service organizations, called on all sectors -- international organizations, affected communities, and the political and social sectors -- to pull together to tackle water challenges in a "holistic and multidisciplinary approach."

"Water scarcity conditions compound already difficult situations on social, political, ethnic and religious levels; this may lead to conflicts or forced migration, with disastrous consequences for the communities involved and neighboring states," said the statement issued by the agency during the alternative forum.

Caritas called on each country to accept its responsibility "to guarantee access to safe, quality water for everyone, especially the most disadvantaged."

For the Brazilian bishops' Indigenous Missionary Council, or CIMI, the demarcation of indigenous territory by the Brazilian government would also help the water issues in the interior of the country.

"The indigenous are known for taking care of their land, their rivers and their water," said Cleber Cesar Buzato, CIMI's executive secretary.

Buzato said tribes such as the Guarani-Kaiowa have been waiting years for the permanent demarcation of their land. He said they are making do in temporary villages surrounded by farms or cattle ranches and are unable to protect rivers and water sources, which once their ancestors revered and shielded.

"When our land is finally given to us we will be able to take care of it," said Domingues, adding, "We live because of nature, so we have to take care of nature."


March 24, 2018

From Ecuador’s Amazon to president’s palace, indigenous women demand end to drilling

Stabroek News

BOGOTA, (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – Indigenous women from Ecuador’s Amazon rainforest have called on the country’s president to end oil and mining projects on their ancestral lands, as the nation pushes to open up more of its rainforest to drillers.
Their meeting with Lenin Moreno at the presidential palace in the capital Quito late Thursday comes after the Andean nation launched a new bidding round this month for foreign companies to develop oil and gas reserves.

Ecuador, one of the smallest producers in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), hopes to attract some $800 million in investment to boost production that the government says is vital to improve its sluggish economy.

But women from Amazon indigenous groups say oil exploration damages their livelihoods, the environment and water sources on ancestral lands, and comes amid growing deforestation in unspoiled areas of the biodiverse region.

“We don’t want more oil and mining companies,” Alicia Cahuiya of the Waorani group told the president at the meeting.

“Oil has not brought development for the Waorani – it has only left us with oil spills and sickness.”

The women also told the president, who was flanked by several ministers, that the government was failing to consult properly with indigenous communities about planned oil and mining projects on their lands, a right they are entitled to under law.

“The oil and mining issue does not stop worrying me, because there is a future to take care of,” Moreno said at the meeting, which was streamed live on Facebook.

“What you are completely right about is the importance of dialogue consensus, dialogue decisions … about any decisions of my government with respect to oil and mining concessions.”

The women presented the president with a list of demands they call the “Mandate of Amazonian Women”, which includes stopping oil, mining and logging projects, and conducting official investigations into attacks against indigenous leaders.

“I hope (the president) will take this mandate seriously,” Nina Gualinga, one of about a dozen women who took part in the meeting, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Simmering tensions – including protests – between indigenous communities seeking to protect their lands and state-owned and foreign oil companies have been ongoing in Ecuador for decades.

The issue has come before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which in 2012 ruled in favour of Ecuador’s Sarayaku indigenous community in the Amazon.

The court said Ecuador had violated their right to prior, free and informed consultation before drillers in the late 1990s started exploration on lands where the Sarayaku people live.
“We will return to our communities and wait for a response from the government,” said Zoila Castillo, vice-president of the parliament of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE).

“If we do not receive a response in two weeks, we will be back,” she said.


March 26, 2018

Irish missionaries aiming to plant a million trees in parched regions of Africa

Irish Examiner

Irish missionaries are spearheading a bid to plant a million trees as part of the re-greening of one of Africa's most parched regions.

The Republic has been invited by the United Nations to take a leadership role in helping deliver the Great Green Wall and combat desertification in a massive swathe of land south of the Sahara known as the Sahel.

The Laudato Tree Project, run by the Society of African Missions (SMA), hopes to create a lasting legacy from the Pope's visit to Ireland this August.

Irish President Michael D Higgins is expected to deliver a major speech on the issue of desertification and the country's response in Dublin today.

Don Mullan, a spokesman for the Society of African Missions (SMA), said: "As the emerald island, Africa's Great Green Wall gives Ireland an opportunity to establish a new beginning and demonstrate a new commitment to achieving promises made during the Paris Accord."

Africa's green wall, when completed, will span 13 countries. It will measure 8,000km long (4,970 miles) and 15km wide (nine miles).

The UN's proposal would also involve schools, parishes and community groups in planting trees in Ireland, increasing biodiversity and contributing to atmospheric improvement.

Mr Mullan added: "We will be asking the Government to consider matching every tree we plant in Ireland with 5-10 along the Great Green Wall."

The project takes its name from a 2015 papal encyclical by Pope Francis, Laudato Si’, on caring for the environment, and is intended to be a visible expression of the encyclical's intervention.
The Pontiff is visiting Ireland this summer as part of the World Meeting of Families in Dublin.

Mr Mullan said: "We are hoping that this will become a legacy project for the World Meeting of Families with the hope that the groups coming will bring the idea of the Laudato Tree Project back to their respective countries with the intention of increasing biodiversity at home while championing the cause of Africa's Great Green Wall.

"We are hoping this might become a world movement in support of Africa."

The executive secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, Monique Barbut, will meet the President and members of the Government this week.

Mr Mullan added: "The UN have put forward a major proposal to Ireland in terms of taking a leadership role in Europe and the international stage in helping progress, develop and accomplish the Great Green Wall."

He said: "Unlike the wall proposed along the US-Mexican border, this is a wall the whole world can believe in."

"It is about combating global warming and helping to provide food, jobs and a future for the millions of people who live in a region that is on the frontline of climate change."

Ireland has one of the lowest forest coverage levels in Europe and Mr Mullan said that needed to be increased to promote biodiversity and as a statement of intent that Ireland is serious about meeting its greenhouse targets and delivering on commitments made during the Paris Accord.

He and his colleagues are pressing for Government support as a way of redressing perceived shortcomings surrounding green energy use.

A range of views have been expressed about whether Ireland is on track to meet its 2020 renewable energy targets.

Irish government chief whip Joe McHugh is to co-ordinate a high-level ministerial meeting this week in Dublin with those behind the plan.

He said: "This is a hugely ambitious project and when you think about it, it's exactly the type of global response that's needed to tackle climate change."

"I've seen the impact on rural communities in Africa and at the heart of it, it's about protecting life and preserving livelihoods and communities in some of the hardest hit parts of the planet."

"It's time to open our hearts and minds to big ideas like this."

March 28, 2018

Deep incarnation liberates all creation

By Marian Ronan
National Catholic Reporter

CREATION AND THE CROSS: THE MERCY OF GOD FOR A PLANET IN PERIL

By Elizabeth A. Johnson

256 pages; Published by Orbis Books

$28.00

In January, Scientific American shared some disturbing news: Researchers had determined that between 1990 and 2015, concern about the environment and climate change had declined among U.S. Christians. Since the study didn't distinguish between denominations, and since Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," was published in 2015, you may find yourself hoping, as I did, that U.S. Catholics don't share this decline in concern.

Unfortunately, certain powerful theological paradigms going back well before the Reformation make such a distinction unlikely. In her splendid new book, Creation and the Cross, theologian St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson takes on one of them: the notion that salvation is an exclusively human matter, having nothing to do with the rest of creation.

"What would it mean," she asks, "to rediscover the biblical sense of the natural world groaning, hoping, waiting for liberation?"

Johnson traces this dualism between redemption and creation back to the work of the 11th-century theologian Anselm of Canterbury and, in particular, to his "satisfaction theory" of salvation, as formulated in his book Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Human). Anselm's answer to the question, Johnson explains, is that Jesus had to become human and die on the cross to pay back what was due to God for human sin. This theory, we learn, has played a pivotal role in Christian theology and practice ever since.

But Anselm's satisfaction theory is an interpretation of the cross, not its only possible meaning. Like all interpretations, it is shaped by the social context from which it emerged, in this case, feudalism, where local rulers required subjects to make satisfaction — to pay — for breaking the law.

In contrast, Johnson proposes an accompaniment theology of salvation, in which Jesus' brutal death "enacts the solidarity of the gracious and merciful God" with all those who suffer,
including the poor, species that undergo extinction, and all the rest of creation. She traces this back to the creator God of the Hebrew Bible, the Holy One of Israel who promises liberation to the Israelites in Egypt and later in Babylon.

But this redemption is not some tradeoff, as the satisfaction theory implies, but a redemption poured out by a God whose compassion for us is that of a mother for her child, a redemption that causes streams to flow in dry land and wilderness to bloom.

It is this liberating God who sends Jesus, not to pay for our sins, but to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free. But Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom constituted a serious challenge to the Romans who ruled Israel during his lifetime. The cheering crowds who greeted him, especially during his entry into Jerusalem, as well as his confrontation with the moneychangers in the Temple, constituted such a threat to the unjust power of empire that the rulers crucified Jesus in order to silence him.

Yet, instead of death silencing him, the Resurrection made Jesus present to the disciples in an entirely new way, enabling them to take the liberating message of the compassionate God to the ends of the Earth and to all of creation. And through the early church's recorded memories of the crucified and risen Christ, this understanding of the cross as an expression of the compassion and mercy of God spread throughout the world.

The culmination of this accompaniment theology is something Johnson calls "deep incarnation." The creator God is, she explains, the God of all flesh, with flesh not signifying only sin, as the dualism between spirit and matter suggests, but the finitude and death suffered by all creation, including God's own son. With the Resurrection, this "flesh was called to life again in transformed glory."

*Creation and the Cross* concludes with a call to all of us to a conversion, in our actions as well as our beliefs, to love of the Creator/Redeemer of the whole world and the entire cosmos. Within this conversion, mistreatment of the Earth is as much a sin as mistreatment of other humans.

In order to repent, we must understand ourselves as members of the whole "community of creation," whose suffering is our suffering. The cross, then, is the icon of God's compassionate love for everyone and everything.

For all Johnson's disagreement with Anselm's satisfaction theory, she does show her appreciation for another aspect of *Cur Deus Homo*, and to such an extent that she actually imitates it: the question-and-answer format Anselm uses to make his theology accessible. Of course, no book is perfect, and in the case of *Creation and the Cross*, Johnson's interlocutor, "Clara," sounds, from time to time, suspiciously like a theology professor.

That limitation notwithstanding, the Q&A format, combined with Johnson's gift for clarity and strategic summarizing, makes this book an ideal tool for helping us all expand our understanding of redemption to include all of God's beloved creation.
In a review of this length, it is not possible to do justice to the range of biblical and theological sources Johnson draws upon to lay out her deep incarnation theology. The depth and accessibility of such material throughout the book makes *Creation and the Cross* an ideal resource for RCIA participants seeking to achieve an understanding of the faith.

But, really, given the feeble concern so many U.S. Christians feel for God's creation even in the face of increasing numbers of massive fires, extreme weather events, droughts and flooded cities, *Creation and the Cross* is a book we all need to read, and we need to read it soon.


March 29, 2018

Q & A with Sr. Miriam MacGillis, co-founder of Genesis Farm

By Dan Stockman
Global Sisters Report

Sr. Miriam MacGillis of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey, was a very happy art teacher in the 1960s. Then one of her students began to ask her questions about the Vietnam War, questions she had trouble answering. Questions that showed how naive MacGillis was on the issue.

Soon, MacGillis, now 77, had her own questions about the war and how the world works and her role in it.

Those questions would lead her on a path to a farm, of all places. And not just any farm: MacGillis in 1980 became the co-founder of *Genesis Farm* in Blairstown, New Jersey, which became a model for 50 similar ecological centers founded by women religious in North America.

*GSR*: How do you go from being an art teacher to a farmer?

*MacGillis*: I wouldn't call myself a farmer because that's an incredible vocation. I've been holding the vision of this farm since 1980, but other than some small gardens on the side, I don't do any real farming.

I had a major shift in my worldview back in the 1960s. My questioning went on for five years until I went into working for justice and peace. By 1974, I was focusing on world hunger, which by then was emerging as a major world crisis.
I found myself asking: How could there be hunger on a planet of such abundance? So I began delving into an analysis of the economics and policies that were shaping the growing and distribution of food.

Then, in 1977, I heard Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry for the first time. In 1979, I came to Genesis Farm, which had been left in someone's will to the Dominican sisters. We didn't really know what we were doing, but we were entering into an effort to live in harmony with the Earth.

So that's what we've been doing for the last almost 40 years. We look at local, national and global policies and systems, such as economics, health, governance and architecture, based on Berry's profound understanding.

Mankind has been farming for thousands of years. What makes Genesis Farm different?

We have grown up for thousands of years believing that humans who engage in farming are growing food. That is absolutely not the case. The earth basks in sunlight, synthesizes it and returns it to itself, and all the living things then live on that. The earth is growing the food. You're just a participant in the already-existing miracle of that.

Our model of how the world came to be that's described in the sacred texts is a very, very different perspective than what we understand through our scientific research. It calls everything into question that you once thought and once believed. You are part of the earth, not separate from and walking on the earth.

When you talk about these things, you almost never mention God. Some people would be surprised to hear a sister talking about creation and not mention God. How do you explain that to them?

It's an understandable question. The answer is that God is a mystery. We make images and pictures to describe the mystery, but those things limit the limitless. A picture is a prison for that mystery.

When we say, "Where is God?" we know from what we've been able to observe that the universe goes back almost 14 billion years. But even that's so far beyond our brains' ability to comprehend, why don't we let it be what it is and be grateful? It's 13 billion years later, and you're standing in a field, and that initial energy [from creation] has morphed all that you see into these different things. You're barely able to take it in. It's phenomenal.

Either the whole of everything that is reveals that mystery or nothing does.

So what has happened on the farm in the last four decades? What has changed?

The first 10 years, we were really struggling, not just to physically and economically survive, but more importantly, to clarify what our mission would be. For almost 20 years, we had residential programs where people could come here to study. Gradually, it became a program of undergraduate and graduate certification, where you take a 12-week plunge into ecology. And
not just farming and ecology, but the implications of all that. What does it mean to be a human, and how do we bring our own activities into harmony with the Earth and the universe?

Lately, we have been in a revisioning period, which has taken almost six years of groping in the dark, asking: How can we take this same mission and put it into forms that are accessible for anyone who were to come here, not just for graduate credit?

There are two new and very serious circumstances around that. The first is climate change, which is irreversible and more serious than any leader is telling us about. The second is the implosion of our institutions, which are not capable of dealing with the crisis. The volatility of it, the unpredictability of it is just imploding everything. That will color everything we do in the future.

We need our old institutions. We need our religious wisdom, we need our governmental institutions, but they're no longer adequate on their own. They taught us that we have dominion over the Earth and that we could buy it and sell it. But we have to try to decontaminate radioactive water still leaking from Fukushima — no religion can help that. We have 85,000 synthetic chemicals we've made since World War II that we are now finding in mothers' milk and polar bears. We thought those things were part of progress, and we're realizing now it's not. It's a whole new order of wisdom that we need.

These are the real questions. These are the religious and spiritual questions. There's something terribly wrong with our Western civilization's way of thinking. And you can't solve it inside the worldview that created the problem.

If the universe is holy and everything is holy and sacred, we sure don't act like we believe that.

[Dan Stockman is national correspondent for Global Sisters Report. His email address is dstockman@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter or on Facebook.]


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March 30, 2018

SE Asia’s ‘Environmental’ Monks Need International Support

By Kalinga Seneviratne
Eurasia Review

A 76-year old Buddhist monk living on his own in his forest monastery in North-eastern Thailand has appealed for international help after receiving death threats from illegal loggers according to a report in Bangkok Post.
In neighbouring Cambodia, monks who are mobilizing under the banner of ‘Independent Monk Network for Social Justice’ have regularly put their lives in danger in fighting illegal logging operators who sometimes have the protection of government officials. They also spoke out July 2016 in an appeal via the German television network Deutsche Welle (DW).

The Germans were given access to film a workshop the monks conducted near Prey Lang – one of Cambodia’s largest and evergreen woodlands. In the workshop the monks taught the local people how to use social media to protect themselves and the forests. Large parts of the forest has already disappeared paving the way for plantations and those that remains, illegal loggers are at work cutting tree after tree as government agencies that are supposed to protect the environment turn a blind eye.

In Thailand’s Si Songhram district, illegal loggers are threatening to cut down trees in a forest that has over 1,000 old trees, which is ironically a part of a royal project to promote conservation. The monk, Luang Pu Kittiphong Kittisophon, abbot of Wat Pa Kham Sawang temple in Tambon Nakham has formally petitioned the local authorities asking them to help save the forest surrounding his temple that has over 1,000 Siamese Rosewood trees that are believed to be 2 to 3 centuries old.

The monk wants the provincial governor to step in to protect the trees, and has also called upon the local media to help him fight the logging gangs after shots were fire at night into a hut near to his own. He believes this is a warning for him to leave the forest temple so that the loggers can have their way.

Both in Thailand and Cambodia rural monks often “ordain” trees, chanting and wrapping them with the yellow robes so that devout Buddhists will not touch them. The ceremonies are large and well publicized in a hope to discourage loggers who might not want to make the bad karma of cutting down the forest around an ordained tree. But the greedy loggers and corrupt government officials – who sometimes include law enforcement officials – have no respect for such religious traditions.

In Cambodia – which has one of the world’s highest de-forestation rates – Buddhist monk Buntenh who has been a monk for 16 years, told DW that he is trying to convince the people that the world cannot exist without trees. “The people who cut down the forest think they are superior, but in reality they are stupid. Only the forest is superior,” he argues. “No one has told me that I should go out there to protect the forest, but for me it was a logical thing to do. I am doing all I can to save it. I plant new trees, I help the people who live from the forest, I am reminding the government of the promises they’ve made.”

Bhikkhu Buntenh’s network consists of over 5,000 monks, and they believe that saving the forests needs to be fought with the same passion and determination as the fight for independence against the French in the 1950s. But, this time they may have to fight their own government that is indifferent to the environmental concerns of the people.
In Cambodia, Buddhism has undergone a miraculous revival after it was almost destroyed by the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s. Today over 90 percent of the people consider themselves as Buddhists and the orange-robed monks enjoy great respect.

Thus, as activists they enjoy a certain amount of protection from government crackdowns against civil society protest groups. As Bhikku Buntenh told DW, the monks are speaking out because it is the peoples’ right to live in a healthy environment with trees and nature. It is what their religion also encourages.

Cambodian strongman, Prime Minister Hun Sen has spoken publicly in support of the monks’ concerns and he even gave the police permission to use rocket launchers and helicopters in the fight against illegal logging. The monks, however, remain sceptical.

Meanwhile in the Buddhist kingdom Thailand, following Bhikku Kittisophon’s petition to the provincial governor Somchai, he has visited the temple accompanied by local police, military and forest protection officials to discuss with the monk measures to protect him and the surrounding forests.

In 2017, the 120-rai forest has become part of a forest protection project implemented by the Royal Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, but the monk has told the Bangkok Post that although he has complained to the local police about logging activities there, no serious attempt has been made by the police to deal with he logging gangsters. Instead the loggers have made threats against the monk, which made him to go public regarding the issue.

The governor has asked the rural community to work with the local authorities to share information to fight the loggers and emphasized the importance of the local community taking an active role to save the environment.

In Asian Buddhism, forests have been a tangible part of Buddhist practices for centuries. The monks see the forest as one of their closest connections to the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha spent over 6 years in the forests of India gathering wisdom, and was enlightened under the Bodhi tree. For centuries monastics have used the forests as a way to truly understanding the Buddhist path and the spiritual well being of the population.

But, in the modern world of greedy consumerism, these monks need international support in identifying the perpetrators of these environmental vandalism, who are usually foreign companies working in tow with corrupt local politicians and government officials, and perhaps mounting international campaigns to boycott their products – some of the forests are cut for palm oil plantations – and businesses. International organisations and media could also help to name and shame corrupt politicians, whom the local monks may not be able to do.

https://www.eurasiareview.com/30032018-se-asias-environmental-monks-need-international-support/
March 30, 2018

Faith-based group launches Asia Pacific faith-based coalition for sustainable development

World Vision International


The coalition was formed to amplify and engage with the voices of faith communities in Asia Pacific, focusing contributions on achieving the SDGs, represented by different faiths towards achieving sustainable development and peace.

"Faith-based organizations are unique as they are able to represent their faith communities on issues of social justice, enabling organisations and faith leaders to come together and effect change inside and outside of their communities,” says Norbert Hsu, World Vision Regional Leader in Asia Pacific.

At the forum, representatives from different Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in the region tackled the importance of bringing FBOs in advancing development goals and how best to engage them at local, national and regional levels to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“We have seen results of advocacy efforts at regional platforms, of joint capacity building initiatives at regional levels engaging faith leaders. Another is by developing faith-sensitive materials, collaborative regional research of how FBOs can work together, organizing some big events, faith-inspired action as well as joint position papers around critical issues like climate change,” says Masud Siddique, Head of Asia Region of Islamic Relief Worldwide.

During the panel discussion, the group emphasized that encouraging faith-based groups to tap opportunities and participate in more dialogues are valuable to share common goals. The group also challenged FBOs to prioritise the vulnerable groups and build up efforts in making communities resilient and socially cohesive to achieve sustainable development.

“Some challenges are unique to the entire region (Asia Pacific) while others are more specific to subregions, countries or communities. So as we move forward in our joint efforts, we could explore flexible approaches and arrangements based on the needs,” says, Hiro Sakurai, Director of the Office for UN Affairs, Soka Gakkai International.

John Patrick Murray, the representative from National Catholic Commission on Migration added, “At the core of our faith is social justice, social teachings, and those teachings both give us a guide and motivate us to action and they motivate faith people through faith to act in their world.”
In response to coordination and working alongside with UN and Civil Society Organizations in addressing issues, Shinji Kubo, UNHCR Representative suggested, “Dialogue is the most important tool for us. So I really believe that the FBOs should find a way to mobilize their communities to work together especially by disseminating what these SDGs are.”

Moving forward, Anselmo Lee representative from Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development, suggested to come up with a simple policy review of why SDGs matter for people from different religions and faith. “We need to come up with a good narrative and capture stories on how different religions can work together to achieve the SDGs,” says Lee.

On March 28-30, 2018, the Fifth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, is engaging member States, United Nations bodies, other international organizations, major groups and other stakeholders in highlighting regional and sub-regional perspectives on the theme of the high-level political forum in 2018, “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”.

The forum will support the presentation of voluntary national reviews and will assess the progress made with regard to the regional roadmap for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

The Member States, major groups, and other stakeholders and representatives of the international community will be invited to share their views and recommendations to improve implementation of the SDGs and quality of data to assess progress in Asia and the Pacific Region.

**World Vision Background**

*World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organisation conducting relief, development and advocacy activities in its work with children, families, and their communities in nearly 100 countries to help them reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.*

*World Vision is the convener of the Asia Pacific faith-based coalition for sustainable development this year.*

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CAMBRIDGE: Green is the color of Islam and also the color that symbolizes eco-friendly, sustainable living.

A building under construction in Cambridge seeks to marry both in what will be Europe’s first eco-mosque.

The project is 10 years in the making and has tested the ingenuity of architects and engineers. But it is on track to open in early 2019 not only as a place of prayer but also a space for teaching and welcoming people of all faiths.

“It is a place for the whole community, not just Muslims,” said Tim Winter, a lecturer in Islamic studies at Cambridge University.

Winter converted to Islam almost 40 years ago, taking the Arabic name Abdal Hakim Murad. He has studied in Egypt and Saudi Arabia and performed Hajj three times. His day job is lecturing in Islamic studies, but his other passion is the mosque.

A place for Cambridge Muslims to worship in is long overdue. According to the last census in 2011, Cambridge is home to 8,000 Muslims, but that figure fails to take into account overseas students at the two universities (Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin) and 50 language colleges, or the growing number of “new Muslims.”

At last count, there were 100,000 Muslim converts in Britain.

Cambridge has five mosques, but none is purpose-built and all are too small. For years, worshippers have made do with rented halls, often spilling out into the corridors or street. So, 10 years ago, Winter established the Cambridge Mosque Trust, a registered charity dedicated to raising funds to build a mosque that was fit for purpose.

It was also his idea to make the mosque as “green” as possible. Care for the environment is important in Islam, but the eco-mosque should also keep the bills down, too.
In 2008, the trust acquired a one-acre derelict site for £4 million in Mill Road, an area of Cambridge with a significant Muslim population. The city council unanimously granted planning permission and, in 2009, an international architectural competition was held to find the right design.

A jury with representatives of the trust, the Muslim community and an architecture lecturer chose a design by London architects Marks Barfield, the firm behind the London Eye.

Winter gave Arab News an exclusive tour of the project. Even in its half-finished state, the building looks breathtakingly lovely. Curved timber supports shaped like trees hold up a latticed ceiling. The walls will be clad in honey-toned gault bricks with red bricks in relief. Entrance to the mosque from the street will be through a garden and open portico with Turkish marble tiles featuring a geometric design.

As well as a prayer hall holding 1,000 worshippers, the complex will have a restaurant, teaching spaces, a room for weddings, an exhibition area for local artists (of any faith), and two four-bedroomed apartments for a resident imam and the center’s director.

At the rear of the building will be a fully fitted mortuary for those taking their last journey, and another garden with a play area for children.

The mosque’s green credentials are impressive. The timber supports are made of Scandinavian larch wood from a sustainable forest. The complex has underfloor heating and rainwater collection points on the roof. Water from the ablution areas will be recycled for use on the garden and for toilet-flushing.

The roof will be covered in sedum moss, which improves insulation and provides an environment for insects and birds to thrive. Heating and hot water will come from photovoltaic panels donated by a local businessman. A sophisticated heat pumping system will identify pockets of warmer air and constantly adjust the overall temperature.

“As technology improves over time, we should be able to reduce our energy costs even more,” said Winter.

The complex also has eight boxes for swifts. These will provide a habitat for a species that is endangered in Britain and also evoke the sight of the birds that circle the Suleiman mosque in Turkey.

“It’s called ‘creation care’ —

acknowledging and respecting the order in nature created by a higher being,” said Winter.

Raising the £22 million cost of the project began with crowdfunding and has continued with private donations. Some have been sizeable — a million riyals from a Saudi princess, an even larger sum from an Emirati, and substantial sums from a Muslim group in Hong Kong — but most are small amounts from individuals.
“We carry out due diligence for anything over £10,000. We have to be sure where the money is coming from and there must be no strings attached. It would be hard to say no to requests or demands if there are strings,” said Winter.

He hopes the mosque will host parties of schoolchildren and other visitors “coming to learn about a religion that is misrepresented and misunderstood.”

The Cambridge community has been almost entirely supportive, he said. “The only opposition has been from the far right. There have been two marches organized by the English Defense League and the police operation was the biggest ever in South Cambridgeshire. The people in the march were not local, they were bussed in. The local people are all on our side and we had a spike in donations afterwards.”

The prayer hall has two spaces for women: one an area with partial screening at different heights “for those who require it” and a gallery upstairs “for those who want a grand view of what’s going on.”

Cambridge has a long association with Islam, dating back to traders and scholars in the Middle Ages. After the Crusades, masons came from Syria and worked on English Gothic architecture.

More recently, Muslims began arriving in the 1950s and 1960s, mainly from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Today, there are also sizeable contingents of Turks, Kurds, Algerians and Kazakhs, as well as “new Muslims.”

“At last count, there were 100,000 converts in Britain,” said Winter.

Sunnis and Shiites will worship together at the new mosque “as they do in most places.” The imam will be chosen carefully. “There is no place for sectarianism or radicalism here.”

Winter, 57, is a founder of the Cambridge Muslim College, which trains British-born imams (and where he is known by his Arabic name Abdal Hakim Murad). A widely respected scholar, he is frequently included in the list of 500 most influential Muslims published by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center. Shepherding the mosque project is clearly an act of faith, but it is also a labor of love.

“I want this to be a place that brings people together and benefits not only Muslims in Cambridge but anyone from anywhere who comes here,” he said. “This is not a place to keep Muslims apart but a place for the whole community to enter.”

As to what form the grand opening will take or who will officiate, Winter said there are no firm plans yet.

A member of the royal family, perhaps? “I really don’t know — although we do have a Duke of Cambridge, don’t we?”

http://www.arabnews.com/node/1279731/world
Baptism is our call to care for water  

By Martha A. Kirk  
National Catholic Reporter  

In this Easter season, when we were blessed again with the waters of baptism, do we have eyes to see the sacredness of water? May we who have passed through the waters of baptism recognize that as our call to speak and work passionately so all in our global family may have clean water.

What if I had a day without water? No coffee, no toilet, no water to brush my teeth, no refreshing drink at the water fountain in the hall between classes, nothing to wash the dishes and the clothes — not to mention the dirt on my windshield — no water along the way as I bike a few miles, no water to make the soup for supper, no hot shower (not even a cold one).

I could endure a day, but what if I were a mother with small children in sub-Saharan Africa, where the deserts are increasing in size? Or what if I was one of the children I saw last summer in Chimbote, Peru, in a neighborhood without a clean water supply?

My heart was cracking open, and when I came home, I invited people in our city of San Antonio to be a part of the Global Water Dances movement, and join groups on six continents who are focusing on water issues.

We danced at the dry "Blue Hole."

Though my community, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, did not have enough money in the late 1890s to purchase the land around the headwaters of the San Antonio River from Col. George Washington Brackenridge, they worked hard to raise money over a period of years. They believed that being close to nature is educationally beneficial and spiritually renewing. People need to learn of nature and learn to care for nature.

Abundant springs once bubbled up from the Edwards Aquifer, providing for the growing population and delighting sisters and students. The aquifer has been depleted and now the "Blue Hole," the largest of the springs considered sacred by the native peoples, is almost always dry.

Nothing but a dry hole is now at this place, the Headwaters of the San Antonio River, where students and sisters once enjoyed abundant springs and boating, circa 1907.

This was the beginning of the San Antonio River and it has drawn people for over 11,000 years. When there are very heavy rains, some water may come up for a while, but then the hole is dry again.
World Water Day, observed annually on March 22, reminds us that 2.1 billion people live without safe drinking water at home, which affects their health, education and livelihoods.

Wars have been fought over power, land and oil. Now, life’s most basic need — water — is causing escalating violence.

If we want a safe world, if we want a healthy world, now is the time to rally about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6, and work together to ensure that everyone has access to safe water by 2030. Budgets for water have more potential to contribute to global security than budgets for weapons.

Because water easily comes out of your faucet now, don’t forget that the city of Cape Town, South Africa, is due to run out of water this year. Its reservoirs are nearly dry.

Let us consider that we may be called to the spiritual discipline of learning where local water supplies come from, or following state and national legislation relating to water issues — and using our individual and corporate influence to advocate for the wise use of it.

The theme of World Water Day 2018 was "Nature for Water." Many problems like damaged ecosystems can be helped by nature-based solutions.

And working for water may call us to global solidarity.

Last year at the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, we attended a session given by Lisa Uribe, director of Women’s Global Connection — one of our sister’s ministries. Lisa told a story about a girl in Tanzania who was often punished for being late to school, but she couldn’t get there sooner because she had to carry water for her family.

Women’s Global Connection started a rainwater-harvesting project to assist and encourage local women; now, there are 700 women in 60 villages harvesting rainwater. The little girl was profoundly grateful and could get to school more easily.

In the midst of the San Antonio metropolitan area of almost 2.5 million, our sisters are the guardians of a 53-acre nature sanctuary, the Headwaters at Incarnate Word. This nonprofit Earth care ministry seeks to increase biodiversity and benefit local wildlife, offers educational programs for adults and children, and provides a sanctuary where people are encouraged to reflect and reconnect with the Earth.

As we let the Earth restore us, we can be better at restoring the Earth.

As we renew our baptismal promises and reflect on the waters of our baptism, may we deepen in our commitment to ensure life-giving water for all.

[Martha Ann Kirk, a Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word, is professor of religious studies at the University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, and the author of Iraqi Women of Three]
Generations: Challenges, Education, and Hopes for Peace, based on her exhibit of photos and interviews.

http://globalsistersreport.org/column/spirituality-environment/baptism-our-call-care-water-53106

April 9, 2018

Native Americans, Fossil Fuels and Climate Change

By Tracey Osborne
Scientific American

*Indigenous people are rejecting oil, coal and gas extraction in favor of renewable energy to save their land, increase employment and fight global warming*

A historic number of Native Americans are running for political office this year in congressional, state legislative and gubernatorial races. Although candidates are running on a variety of platforms, candidates like Deb Haaland put the environment front and center. Haaland, who is making a bid for Congress in New Mexico, is committed to addressing climate change through a transition to 100 percent renewable energy. “The fight for Native American rights is also a fight for climate justice,” she said in an interview.

In the U.S. Native American reservations represent only 2 percent of the land but hold approximately 20 percent of the country’s fossil fuel reserves, including coal, oil and gas. Together these fuels are worth some $1.5 trillion, according to the Council of Energy Resource Tribes. Whereas some have called for privatizing and exploiting native lands to unleash the economic potential of fossil fuels, many indigenous leaders from both the U.S. and other countries disagree with this approach.

Patricia Gualinga, for example, the international relations director for the Sarayaku indigenous community of the Ecuadorian Amazon, has traveled around the world to fight fossil-fuel exploitation—including the United Nations’ annual climate change meetings, where I first met her. Following the 2014 People’s Climate March in New York City she wrote in a blog: “The Sarayaku indigenous people believe that instead of bringing ‘development,’ the oil industry is destructive for indigenous society, nonindigenous society, the planet and nature.”

This worldview gives considerable weight to the social, cultural, ecological and sacred value of land over the purely economic, and it was evident in the Standing Rock conflict, where thousands of indigenous peoples and allies challenged the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The project was suspended by Pres. Barack Obama, but under the administration of Donald Trump it was approved and completed last year. Oil has begun to flow under Lake Oahe, the main water source for local communities and a sacred site for the Lakota and Dakota peoples.

In addition to approving the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines, the Trump administration has introduced numerous policies to promote fossil-fuel development as a strategy...
for job creation. To be sure, stimulating energy-related employment is important, but fossil fuels are the wrong place to look: It is well documented that the renewable energy sector is not only better for the environment but also better at job creation. According to a World Bank report, wind and solar produce about 13.5 jobs per $1 million spent in the U.S. compared with the 5.2 jobs created in oil and gas and 6.2 in coal.

Furthermore, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, whereas the number of U.S. jobs in coal, oil and gas have declined in recent years, the workforces for solar and wind power increased by 25 and 32 percent, respectively, in 2016 alone. The future of employment in the energy sector—including construction workers, technicians and engineers—lies in renewable energy not fossil-fuel extraction.

This fact has not been lost on those advocating for renewable energy on native land. Given the current economic challenges of the coal industry in Arizona, exemplified by the scheduled closing of the Navajo Generating Station in 2019, Jihan Gearon, executive director of the Black Mesa Water Coalition, is calling for a transition to renewable energy on the Navajo Nation to create jobs and support tribal sovereignty.

Tribal sovereignty has been consistently undermined by fossil-fuel development, as evidenced by the Trump administration’s recent unleashing of two million formerly protected acres in Bears Ears National Monument for oil and gas extraction. The monument was designated by Obama at the request of several Southwestern tribes including the Navajo, Ute, Paiute, Hopi and Zuni, who claim ancestral and ongoing ties to the land. Given the growing impacts of climate change, instead of opening new areas to drilling we should respect the demands of indigenous people and keep fossil fuels in the ground.

Honoring such demands would also dovetail with arguments by leading climate scientists that the best, perhaps only, way to reduce emissions is to stop extracting fossil fuels. According to a 2015 study by Christophe McGlade and Paul Ekins at University College London, more than 80 percent of coal, half of gas and one third of oil reserves must be left untouched in order to stay beneath the 2-degree Celsius upper limit for global warming set by the Paris agreement.

Meanwhile climate inaction carries an enormous price tag. Last year alone the types of extreme weather events likely to increase in a warmer world, such as Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, have cost the U.S. an estimated $150 billion to $200 billion. Avoiding these costs will greatly strengthen the economy in the long run. This is even more evidence in support of a just transition to renewable energy that represents our best bet for protecting people and the planet.

It is time world leaders honor indigenous sovereignty over their ancestral lands and promote renewable energy as an important strategy for mitigating global climate change.

Tracey Osborne is a professor at the University of Arizona with expertise on climate change and Indigenous rights, Director of the Climate Alliance Mapping Project, and is a Public Voices Fellow with the OpEd Project.

April 9, 2018

'It's our lifeblood': the Murray-Darling and the fight for Indigenous water rights

By Anne Davies
The Guardian

When the water levels of the Darling river fall, local elders in Wilcannia, New South Wales, say, the crime rate spikes, particularly juvenile crime.

It seems like an odd correlation until the elders explain just how important the river is to their everyday lives.

“It’s boring here when the river stops running,” says Michael Kennedy, chairman of the Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council. “It becomes a lifeless place. We can’t find the tranquilities and therapies of the river.”

The people of Wilcannia are Barkandji people. The Darling river is known in the local language as the Barka and the Barkandji are, literally, people of the river. The Darling has sustained them for thousands of years but now they say the river is in crisis.

Badger Bates, a Barkandji elder, says when he was a child growing up at Wilcannia, the river always had water.

“It might have only been a foot but it did not run dry as it does now,” he says.

Kerry King, an elder and a director of the land council, says: “It’s much harder to get a feed from the river.

“I used to go with my mother to collect duck eggs and catch ducks. Now the closest the kids get to a duck dinner is watching My Kitchen Rules.”

Now a major campaign is under way to give meaning to the idea of Indigenous cultural flows. A major research project documenting the case for cultural flows is due to be released around April. Representatives of Indigenous nations along the Murray-Darling river system have also stepped up their lobbying of federal politicians.

The Murray-Darling basin plan recognises Aboriginal people have a right to cultural flows for spiritual, economic and environmental purposes but in practical terms the concept of cultural flows remains just that: a concept.

In the same way as Indigenous people secured native title, this campaign to secure water allocations would enable Indigenous communities along the river to take part in the management of the river system.
A 2012 study undertaken as part of the Barkandji native title claim – one of the largest in Australia – found only 0.01% of water rights are under Aboriginal control.

“Back in 2015, the government gave us native title rights but no water rights,” Bates says. Exactly what quantum of water will be sought will probably hinge on the cultural flows project and the outcome of political wrangling.

Environmental flows are not the same as cultural flows, Bates says. There will likely be overlap in the objectives of a healthy environment and Aboriginal custodianship of water but a release for environmental reasons – say to flush a wetland – might not necessarily align with Indigenous environmental aspirations for the river.

Along the Murray, the campaign for cultural flows is further advanced.

The Nari Nari Tribal Council, a not-for-profit Indigenous environmental conservation organisation, holds five water entitlements and manages 11,300ha of riverine land.

It has completed projects in cultural site protection, revegetation, bank stabilisation and water efficiency to the value of $1.2m.

In 2001, the Indigenous Land Corporation, on behalf of the NNTC, purchased three pastoral leases, Toogimbie, Lorenzo and Glen Hope station, situated 40km west of Hay. These properties include regionally important environments such as plains rangelands, seasonal floodplain wetlands and an 18km riparian zone along the Murrumbidgee river.

The group leases land to a farmer and temporarily trades its high-security water licence to generate income for its environmental and cultural preservation activities.

Will Mooney, executive officer of the Murray-Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN), is at the forefront of a campaign that is seeking greater ownership of water rights by Aboriginal nations across the basin, which could be used by communities for cultural, environmental or economic purposes.

“We need policies that give voice to these aspirations,” he says.

When the cultural flows project is released, it may well redefine the water equation, which currently defines it as a balance between farming and the environment.

Several groups are planning to make claims for hundreds, even thousands of gigalitres of water in the Murray-Darling system to be put under Indigenous control.

The cultural flows project will include detailed evidence of Indigenous relationships with river systems and how water is used by Indigenous people, as well as an attempt to identify what sort of policy changes are needed to make cultural flows a reality.
Bates argues that, without control or access to water in the dry inland, native title can have only limited utility.

“What good is all that land if we don’t have a say in the way the river is managed? It’s our lifeblood,” Bates says.

Mooney also sees ownership of water as a way of building capacity in their communities, in dealing with water agencies and providing employment and skills in the same way that stewardship of land has created jobs as rangers.

Central to Barkandji culture, spirituality and teachings is that the Barka is home to the Ngatji (Rainbow Serpent), who created the lands and the rivers. The Barkandji are responsible for the Ngatji’s health and wellbeing, although they find this increasingly outside of their control under contemporary water governance arrangements.

“If we don’t protect the river, the serpent will get wild with us,” Bates says.


April 10, 2018

Indigenous knowledge is critical to understanding climate change

By Timothy J. Greene
Seattle Times

As we prepare to join Saturday’s March for Science, please understand that by integrating traditional knowledge with Western science, we can solve some of our biggest challenges, including those brought by our changing climate.

Good science is critical to our health, ability to live full lives and community well-being. We use science to advance medicine, enhance our use of natural resources, ensure our food supply and much more. That’s why more than a million people around the world joined the March for Science in 2017 and why we are gearing up again to march for science on April 14.

Western science is just one way of knowing. Indeed, traditional knowledge and wisdom of indigenous peoples is recognized by the United Nations for its potential to sustainably manage complex ecosystems. Yet all too often, Western science has disregarded centuries of science-based knowledge coming from Native Americans and other indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples have lived in our particular locations for many generations, and we define ourselves in relation to our home environment. Our deep and long-standing relationships with the environment are unique; our very existence depends on our ability to conserve and maintain our lands and waters for future generations.
Today, tribes, First Nations, indigenous peoples and Aboriginals are sounding a loud alarm about the impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels, broken natural systems, and increasing fire and flooding are apparent and documented.

For example, stocks of many fish species like Pacific hake are sensitive to ocean temperature along the California Current, and recent declines in their numbers have serious implications for the well-being of my own Makah Tribe.

While others debate the causes of climate change, we who live close to the land are experiencing major impacts from our changing climate and call for immediate and strong action to protect the resources on which we all rely. We can’t afford to disregard indigenous knowledge about climate change.

Growing up as a member of the Makah Tribe, I relied on the empirical knowledge of my ancestors to determine where to fish and how to locate other sources of food. My community relied on indigenous experiences to understand how to keep ourselves healthy.

When I was a child, my father taught me to navigate our ocean territory through currents, tides and landmarks. This knowledge, along with the life cycle of fish and time of year, allowed for the successful, sustainable harvest of species such as halibut, black cod and lingcod. In the years that followed, my peers and I transferred knowledge to other members of the family who integrated the information into current fishing and management practices.

As a youth, I’d get up in the mornings, often before sunrise, and leave the house overlooking a beach. There was no backpack, no lunch box. I was taught what our land would provide through all the seasons: roots, berries, sea urchins and mussels, to name a few. The knowledge of how, where and when to harvest is a way of life, always done in a manner that ensures the resources are sustained for the next person. These teachings and values laid the foundation for the work I completed in tribal leadership.

To our north, Tlingit and Haida elders observe young herring following older herring to spawning grounds. When industrial fishing removes the elder herring from spawning sites, the stock is destroyed, as the young fish can no longer find their way home. Failure to heed these traditional observations is leading to the demise of herring and threatening aspects of Tlingit and Haida culture that are closely tied to herring.

A recent news item featured the astonishing observation that birds in Australia intentionally spread fire by carrying burning sticks. While this is fascinating, it has long been known to the Aboriginals. Using fire as a management tool is widespread throughout indigenous cultures. Makah is no exception. For centuries our ancestors used fire to manage crops of cranberries and tea. These resources are currently threatened by our changing climate, as well as the laws and regulations that govern the use of fire.

Respecting and embracing indigenous knowledge as important science benefits all of us. In looking for solutions to the environmental dilemmas that confront us, it is critical to apply indigenous knowledge. All of us are looking for a better understanding of the Earth and her
By integrating traditional knowledge with Western science, together we can solve some of our biggest challenges, including those brought by our changing climate.

As communities worldwide prepare to March for Science, this focus is appropriate and important. Threats to scientific knowledge must be rejected, and decision making based on fact must be embraced. Equally important, we should also embrace 10,000-plus years of field observation by indigenous peoples around the world.

This empirical knowledge has sustained people and cultures and has laid the groundwork for many modern “discoveries.” Indigenous peoples are truly the experts of their area and place, with a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of nature and our role in conserving resources for future generations.

Timothy J. Greene Sr. is a former chairman of the Makah Tribal Council and a trustee for The Nature Conservancy in Washington.

https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/indigenous-knowledge-is-critical-to-understanding-climate-change/

April 11, 2018

Syracuse Symposium to Conclude with Visit by Writer, Zen Teacher David R. Loy

Boulder native will consider social, ecological implications of Zen Buddhism

By Rob Enslin
Syracuse University

Syracuse Symposium concludes its yearlong look at “Belonging” with a contemplation on the Buddhist concept of nature.

On Thursday, April 19, David R. Loy, a renowned professor, writer and Zen teacher in the Sanbo Zen tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism, will give a public talk titled “Does the Earth Belong to Us, or Do We Belong to the Earth?: Buddhism and the Ecological Challenge.” The lecture is from 7-9 p.m. in Watson Theater (382-392 Waverly Ave., Syracuse). He also will lead a group meditation from 6-6:45 p.m.

The following day, Loy will lead a small-group workshop called “Healing Ecology: A Buddhist Perspective on the Eco-Crisis” from 9-11 a.m. in 304 Tolley. The event will explore in detail some of the ideas from the night before. Space is limited; registration is required. To R.S.V.P. or request special accommodations, please contact Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz in Hendricks Chapel at Bshoultz@syr.edu.

Syracuse Symposium is sponsoring both events, which are free and open to the public. For more
While in Syracuse, Loy will participate in two other events, which are free and open to the public. On Saturday, April 21, he and Onondaga Clan Mother Freida Jacques ’80 will discuss “Buddhist and Indigenous Values and Perspectives on the Ecological Challenges Facing Us” from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Skå·noh—Great Law of Peace Center (6690 Onondaga Parkway, Liverpool). The session includes a light vegetarian lunch.

On Sunday, April 22, Loy will celebrate Earth Day with a special Dharma talk from 10-10:50 a.m. at the Zen Center of Syracuse (266 W. Seneca Turnpike).

Additional support for his visit comes from Hendricks Chapel, the University’s Contemplative Collaborative, the Department of Religion in A&S, the Student Buddhist Association in the Division of Student Affairs and the Zen Center.

“David Loy works at the unexpected intersections of Buddhism and secular society,” says Vivian May, director of the Humanities Center and professor of women’s and gender studies in A&S. “He is primarily concerned about social and ecological issues, and suggests that Buddhism says a lot about our personal and collective predicaments in relation to the rest of the biosphere.”

In addition to being a regular magazine contributor, Loy is the author of 13 books. His best known ones are from Wisdom Publications and include “A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment, Evolution and Ethics in the Modern World” (2015); “The World Is Made of Stories” (2010), which Spirituality & Practice named one of the year’s best books; and “Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution” (2008), available in eight languages.

Loy is co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center, near his home in Boulder, Colorado. He also serves on the advisory boards of the Buddhist Global Relief, the Clear View Project, Zen Peacemakers International and the Ernest Becker Foundation.

For more than 45 years, his work has straddled theory and practice. “He understands the dialogue between Buddhism and modernity, particularly the social implications of Buddhist teachings. This likely is an outgrowth of his philosophical education,” says May, referring to Loy’s Ph.D. in philosophy from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and M.A. in Asian philosophy from the University of Hawaii.

In addition to studying analytic philosophy at King’s College London, Loy has trained under Yamada Koun Roshi and Robert Gyoun Aitken Roshi, seminal figures in the Western expansion of Sanbo Zen, an international Zen school in Kamakura, Japan.

A professor of Buddhist and comparative philosophy, Loy has held appointments at NUS (Malaysia), Bunkyo University (Japan), the University of Cape Town (South Africa), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel), Radboud University (The Netherlands), Xavier
University in Cincinnati and Naropa University in Boulder.

His visit coincides with Earth Day on Sunday, April 22.

“Without a better understanding of the ways in which we belong to and depend on the Earth, and greater awareness of other ways of dwelling on it, it is likely that our now-global civilization will remain unable to respond adequately to this new challenge,” May says. “Rather than thinking of ‘Belonging’ in dualistic terms—who belongs and who does not belong—David Loy offers a non-dualistic approach to understanding belonging and living.”

Organized and presented by the Humanities Center, Syracuse Symposium is a public humanities series that revolves around an annual theme. Programs include lectures, workshops, performances, exhibits, films and readings. Located in the Tolley Humanities Building, the Humanities Center serves the campus community by cultivating diverse forms of scholarship, sponsoring a broad range of programming and partnerships and addressing enduring questions and pressing social issues.

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April 13, 2018

The litter-collecting monk of Tibet

By Feng Hao
China Dialogue

A Buddhist lama and his local volunteers search for a solution to the growing piles of rubbish on the remote Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau

It’s seven o’clock in the evening Beijing time, but out on the Ganjia grasslands, in Xiahe county, the sun shows no sign of setting. Outside the yurts of Sirou village several marmots rest by their burrows, plump rears upturned, showing no fear of people.

I was enjoying this scene when Sangay Gyatso, sitting by my side, suddenly asked: “Do you know any Tibetan?”

“Um… Tashi delek [hello]?” I replied.
“Yes! The ‘ta’ in tashi delek means ecological balance,” Sangay said, explaining that maintaining a balance between humans and nature is a central part of Tibetan Buddhist teachings.

Sangay is a lama (a teacher of the Dhamma in Tibetan Buddhism), with a degree from the nearby Labrang Monastery. He believes that the ideals of environmental protection match up closely with the traditional culture and Buddhist thought he has spent years studying.

“The core of our traditional culture is the foundation and motive for my work on environmental protection here,” said Sangay.

And his main task when protecting the environment of his home? Collecting litter.

**Junk food creates junk**

The Ganjia grasslands lie in the north-east of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, a vast and fertile plain on the border of Gansu and Qinghai provinces, encircled by precipitous mountains. In recent years, livestock on the pastures have started dying inexplicably – and plastic food wrappers have been found in their stomachs.

In the past the herders ate meat and butter tea, natural foods, and any waste would naturally degrade. But with the growth of modern lifestyles, processed foods have become popular and herders discard the plastic packaging on the grasslands when they are grazing their livestock, polluting the environment.

Wandaike, a Tibetan youth from the village, said much of the litter he sees isn’t left by tourists, but by the herders themselves.

In 2013 Sangay founded the Ganjia Environmental Volunteers Association, building on existing local volunteer teams that clean up in and around Waerta village about once a fortnight.

The villagers thought they were daft and their families didn’t understand. “Why are you doing that, you’re not getting anything in return?” they said. Local volunteer Leihexi found the criticism hard to deal with at first, but he continued with his task: “When you see the sheep cut open and their stomachs are full of plastic, then you’ll understand why we do it,” he explained.

**Grassland rubbish, water pollution**

Grasslands across the plateau have been facing the same problem. It’s a similar story in Yueguzongli, a grassland at one of the sources of the Yellow River.

Rigzin Dorje is a local of Qumarleb village and one of the founders of the Sprouting Grain Association, an environmental organisation. He said that organisations come from all over China to work on environmental protection, community building and conservation – but actually litter is the most pressing issue.
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Rubbish is a particular scourge during the big annual horse-racing festival. Young people and children love to drink soft drinks as part of the celebrations, but when the races are over metal, plastic and glass containers are left scattered across the ground. These are eaten by livestock or slowly leech toxins into the ground, polluting nearby water sources. And up on the high grasslands, nobody collects the waste for recycling. The litter sits there forever, with huge environmental consequences. The Qinghai Tibet Plateau is the source of Asia’s major rivers and so this pollution will make its way downstream into China and other parts of Asia.

Wang Yongchen is the founder of Green Earth Volunteers, a group that documents the environmental problems along the course of the Yellow River and she has been visiting the river’s source for seven years. She explained that the rubbish problem has improved in recent years with the growth of volunteer litter pickers. In the past, waste was simply dumped by the river side, she said.

**Sacred rubbish**

Gongbu Zeren is a lecturer in natural resource management at the Southwest University of Finance and Economics. He believes the Tibetan traditions of circumambulation of sacred mountains, and making sacrifices in sacred lakes, are contributing to the mounting litter problem.

Ritual offerings are placed in ceremonial bottles, sometimes made of plastic, or wrapped in a scarf and then thrown into a lake. Those bottles have become one of the main sources of pollution threatening the local ecosystem, he explained. Scarves made from synthetic fibres and plastic bottles can take over a century to break down, during which the pollutants released threaten local plants and wildlife.

Sangay and his volunteers in Ganjia are aware of the problem and focus on areas around water sources and sacred sites during their clean-ups. An increasing number of people come to worship
at two sacred sites, the White Rock Cliffs and a limestone cave set within those cliffs. Volunteers have set up signposts and started collecting litter along a circumambulation route. Government waste collection and disposal systems simply don’t reach as far as these remote grassland sites.

**The litter problem**

The locals have gradually come to understand what the volunteers are doing and the team has expanded to include 230 people across the 13 villages on the Ganjia grasslands. Thanks to Sangay’s efforts, the association has won some funding to pay for the gloves, brooms, bags and transportation the volunteers need.

Transportation costs have always been a headache for Sangay. “If the government could invest a little more money and labour to build waste sorting points in villages, so waste could be handled centrally, there’d be a bigger impact,” he said.

But the local government doesn’t have the funding or the organisational capacity to set up such a system. Peng Kui, a conservation expert with the Global Environmental Institute, said that centralised systems, where waste is collected at the village level and transported to the county town for treatment, make economic sense in more populous areas, but are unsustainable and impractical in vast herding areas.

It isn’t that the local government doesn’t want to help, said Peng, there’s just nothing they can do. “It’s not even happening at the city and county level, so how can there be the spare capacity and funding for townships and villages?”

Peng explained that GEI’s “Clean Water Sources Programme” is trying a new approach. In the village of Maozhuang in Yushu, Qinghai, they formed a team of volunteers to teach people in schools, monasteries and villages how to sort and reduce waste. They then allocated volunteers to clean-up areas around water sources, so waste is regularly removed before finally being transported for sorting at a community waste facility. The volunteers separate and store recyclable materials until there is enough for a trip to sell them at the county seat. Non-recyclable materials are used as fertiliser, burned or buried. This method has reduced the burying of waste by 70%.

**A different approach**

The serious problem of waste collection and disposal across the vast grassland area has attracted attention from commercial businesses. Taiwanese firm Miniwiz has designed the Trashpresso, a mobile and solar-powered unit which provide plastics recycling in remote areas.

In 2017 Miniwiz arrived in Zaduo county, the source of the Lancang River, and turned a week’s collected waste into environmentally-friendly building materials. Founder Huang Qiangzhi told chinadialogue that the technology behind Trashpresso isn’t actually that advanced, but he hopes the project will show the local nomadic herders that their waste can be turned into something useful.
Sangay is also trying to come up with new ideas. He believes the whole community will need to get involved if they want to significantly reduce waste. Recently, he and some PhD students from Lanzhou University have been working on a plan to get environmental experts to train his volunteers in more formal approaches to waste handling and sorting.

The grassland ecology in Qinghai was once only supported yaks and herders, but rapid modernisation has changed all that, and old approaches will not work on new problems. But Sangay hopes that his innovative ideas and growing band of volunteers can restore the delicate ecological balance to the grasslands.


April 14, 2018

Activist priest John Dear tours with new book on resisting climate change

By Tom Boswell
National Catholic Reporter

Just prior to the December 2015 Climate Change Conference in Paris, Pope Francis warned a group of reporters that the world is on the brink of committing "suicide." Less than a year later, Donald Trump won the U.S. presidential election and then, after he took office, pulled out of the Paris accords. These days, it's hard to believe that the state of our planet could be more dire.

But John Dear, Catholic priest, longtime peace activist and, more recently, a global-warming warrior, still brims with hope, energy and optimism.

"There's more happening in active nonviolent movements around the planet right now than ever before in history," he told NCR in an interview in early April. "There's massive change happening beyond the bad news from the current administration. There's incredible organizing going on, such as the teacher's strikes, such as the anti-gun-violence organizing, such as all the people working on immigration. And some people working against war, but not enough."

Dear visited Madison, Wisconsin, April 4 as part of a 50-city, three-month book tour to promote They Will Inherit the Earth: Peace & Nonviolence in a Time of Climate Change, the latest of his 37 books. A former Jesuit who left the order after 32 years, Dear is now a diocesan priest and a staff member of the national peace organization Pace e Bene. He lives on a remote desert mesa south of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and east of Los Alamos, the birthplace of the atomic bomb.

Dear spoke at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist on the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. He sprinkled his talk with direct quotes and anecdotes from King's teachings on nonviolent social change.
"One of the great casualties of violence and warfare is the loss of imagination, the loss of vision," Dear said, and then quoted King as saying, the night before he died, "Hope is the final refusal to give up."

In *They Will Inherit the Earth*, most of it written while on a retreat with Buddhist leader and author Thich Nhat Hanh, Dear traces his personal spiritual journey, what he calls “a long pilgrimage of peace.” The journey has included ministering to the family members of the victims of the World Trade Center attacks; visiting Standing Rock with more than 600 other clergy to stand in solidarity with the Dakota, Lakota and Sioux against the Dakota Access Pipeline; and presiding at Masses in Yosemite National Park.

"Because we have practiced violence — global, structured, institutionalized violence — and created systems of total violence, we have hurt and killed one another and destroyed the creatures and the Earth. With the onslaught of climate chaos, we have entered the full consequences of global violence. … We are killing the Earth, but it will not go down without a fight."

In another chapter, Dear describes the struggle of the indigenous community of the Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, whose home just below the mountain of Los Alamos and the nuclear weapons national laboratories has become a lethal radioactive waste dump. The labs upon the mountain make up “the second richest county in the U.S., with one of the highest per capita rates of Ph.D.'s and millionaires anywhere on earth,” Dear points out. But down below is the second poorest county in the U.S. It's an egregious example of environmental racism.

During his Madison talk, Dear stressed what Christians and everyone else can and must do to resist the Earth's doomsday scenario.

"I think the only way change happens is bottom-up, people-powered, grassroots movements of creative nonviolence in the tradition of Gandhi and King, which, by the way, goes back to Jesus, who was a movement builder and organizer," he told NCR after his speech.

"After studying nonviolence for 40 years, I've decided that nonviolence requires three simultaneous attributes. First, you have to be nonviolent to yourself. We have to stop cooperating with our own inner processes of violence, beating ourselves up, fueling our anger, our rage, hatred and resentment. Second, we have to practice meticulous, interpersonal nonviolence towards everybody in our lives, everybody in the world, and all the creatures and Mother Earth. Third, you have to be involved in the struggle for justice, disarmament and creation.

"We're usually good at one of these," said Dear, "but very few of us reach the level of Dr. King, who did all three."

In both his book and talk, Dear outlined a list of "rules for living in solidarity with Mother Earth." The first speaks of our need to grieve and to be joyous.

"We need to take quiet time and sit in the beauty of creation in the presence of the Creator and grieve," he writes in his book. "We grieve for our sisters and brothers, for the death and
extinction of billions of creatures, and for Mother Earth herself. The more we take formal time to quietly grieve for suffering humanity and suffering creation, the more nonviolent and compassionate we become."

Other "rules" include practicing meditation, prayer, mindfulness and nonviolent communication, cultivating fearlessness, taking public action for climate justice, and teaching nonviolence, particularly to priests and ministers.

Dear, who is a co-founder of Campaign Nonviolence, a project of Pace e Bene, was offered an opportunity to teach nonviolence to clergy two years ago, when 80 Catholic peacemakers from more than 25 countries were invited to the Vatican for a conference to discuss abandoning the church's just war theory. While there, Ken Butigan of Campaign Nonviolence, Marie Dennis of Pax Christi International, and Dear were asked to help draft a statement for the pope for the 2017 World Day of Peace.

It became the "first statement on nonviolence in the church since the Sermon on the Mount," Dear said, with obvious pride. "It's a huge breakthrough."

Now Dear is hopeful that Francis will craft an encyclical on nonviolence to match "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," his encyclical on the environment. "That's my personal hope and prayer and goal."

[Tom Boswell is a freelance journalist, photographer and poet living near Madison, Wisconsin.]


April 14, 2018

Midwest Catholic Workers hold retreat and pipeline protest

By Maria Benevento
National Catholic Reporter

Duluth, Minn. — A Catholic Worker retreat culminated in an action at a pipeline storage facility April 9 in Carlton County, Minnesota, where 27 people risked arrest for trespassing when they occupied the yard with banners, signs, jars of blessed water and sacred objects in an effort to "transform" the space and oppose a pipeline project.

"We're hoping that the prayers that we leave behind and the sacred items that so many people have put in … will have an effect," Brenna Cussen Anglada of St. Isidore Catholic Worker Farm in southwest Wisconsin told NCR the night before she risked arrest. "For a lot of us, we believe we're acting in cooperation with God's grace and, ultimately, God and love win out over evil."
The Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat, held April 6-9 in the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Duluth, was almost entirely focused on education, relationship building and action planning related to opposing the proposed Line 3 pipeline project in Minnesota.

Enbridge, the pipeline company, commonly refers to the project as a "replacement" of outdated pipes, but the Catholic Worker group and indigenous activists said the plan constitutes an "abandonment" of old pipes and an expansion of the pipeline through an alternate path that would threaten areas sacred to local indigenous people.

The pipeline currently cuts through the Fond du Lac and Leech Lake reservations, both located in Minnesota and home to groups of the Anishinaabe people. The proposed re-routing would skirt the reservations, but cross wild rice lakes that the Anishinaabe consider sacred and where they have the right by treaty to hunt, fish and gather.

Since the company does not have the necessary permits to start construction, a high level of confrontation with Enbridge was not possible or necessary, but "we can still invite them to transform what they have already done," said Michele Naar-Obed, a retreat organizer and member of Hildegard House Catholic Worker in Duluth.

Almost all of the approximately 60 retreatants attended the action along with a few additional protesters. Most were current or former members of the Catholic Worker movement—a decentralized network of houses of hospitality and farms whose members usually live in community, practice the works of mercy and protest violence and injustice. College students, extended community members, indigenous activists and others also attended.

Carrying signs and banners with slogans such as "Honor the Treaties," "Defend the Sacred," "Green Energy Now," "Pipe Organs not Pipelines," "Pipes Leak," "Pray for the Water" and "Sale: All Pipes Must Go," protesters did not attempt to damage the pipeline materials.

Instead, they placed jars of blessed water inside pipes and created a makeshift altar covered in sacred items they had collected over the past few months, including a carving of Jesus that belonged to Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day, contributed by her granddaughter Martha Hennessy. (Hennessy was recently arrested for breaking into a nuclear weapons base as part of the Plowshares movement.)

Members of the group, who recorded their action in several livestreams on social media (posted on the retreat's Facebook page), also read a statement of purpose about the event, prayed, passed food and supplies back and forth through the fence, and sang songs modified to fit the occasion, such as "99 Pipes in the Pipe Yard."

Although the participants split into two groups based on whether or not they planned to risk arrest, with 27 entering the fenced-in yard where the pipes were stored while over two dozen others remained outside, law enforcement decided to let the protesters disperse naturally without making arrests. A small group remained until about 9 p.m.
Early that afternoon, Naar-Obed had told the group that "everything we envisioned happened," including placing the water and sacred items and receiving media attention from several outlets.

Some participants also emphasized that the action should be considered in the context of the whole retreat, which helped members integrate faith and action. It also provided them with knowledge and experience that they could apply to pipeline protests closer to home or use as inspiration for future actions near Duluth.

During the retreat, group members participated in a "blanket exercise," which visually represented colonization; visited the Fond-du-Lac Reservation; and listened to indigenous people talk about their spirituality, the effects the pipeline would have and efforts to oppose it.

"I think it's important to mention that it's called the Faith and Resistance retreat," said Steven Fisher from the Su Casa Catholic Worker in Chicago. "Because it's not just one or the other. … We came here on Friday to gather together and think in terms of how [the protest] intersects with our prayer life, our spirituality, our commitment to Christ."

A common theme in discussions was how the history of racism and oppression of native people affected the mainly-white Catholic Worker group's efforts to build trust with indigenous people and collaborate with them in opposing the pipeline.

"I told some native friends that I was with the Catholic Workers," one indigenous activist said during the April 9 action, speaking into his phone as he livestreamed the event, but raising his voice so the crowd could hear. "And they said, 'Oh no, not them again!' " Over the crowd's laughter, he explained that this group might not fit his friends' negative expectations of Catholics.

Ricky DeFoe, a local linguistic, cultural and spiritual leader, spoke at the "teach-in" portion of the retreat April 7 about the damage caused by papal bulls that gave America to Europeans without regard for native people, and the hierarchical Catholic worldview that people have "dominion over all things."

But DeFoe also brought up the themes of solidarity and mutuality, saying that descriptions of genetic differences "never tell you about the spirit — all of these things are superseded by the spirit."

Sheila Lamb, an indigenous activist who spoke after DeFoe, echoed this theme and emphasized that the pipeline issue affected everyone. "I don't want to see any more of our people suffer," she said. "Or any of yours."

Meanwhile, several retreat participants said they were motivated both by solidarity with indigenous groups and by their recognition that environmental concerns affect everyone.

"The native struggle for their land rights and water rights are now the struggle for the planet and the survival of the species," said Des Moines Catholic Worker Frank Cordaro. "Here in Duluth,
the Catholic Workers are connecting with the native impulse for survival — which is happening all over the globe — and we're lending our voices, our life, our tradition to their efforts."

"We're trying to figure out how we can be the best allies" for the native community, said Naar-Obed, "recognizing that what they're fighting against and what they're fighting for affects all of us, not just the native community, although they take a bigger hit because of what it means to them in their culture."

Cussen Anglada said that while she was generally opposed to increased oil flow, knowing the indigenous community opposed the pipeline was an even stronger motivation for her action.

"Meeting those people who it will impact, it has even more strengthened my resolve to speak out against it, even if it's at a personal risk," she said, "because whatever happens to me I know will be a slap on the wrist compared to what's happening to them."


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April 17, 2018

Turn climate 'words into action' say Faith Leaders

Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)

Devastating flooding across South Asia in 2017 displaced 41 million people and resulting in the deaths of more than 1,000 people

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Williams and more than 170 faith leaders from across the Commonwealth have issued a call to governments to turn "words into action" on climate change at a summit in London this week.

A letter published in the Daily Telegraph in London and signed by dozens of religious leaders states that "Not even the remotest corner of the Commonwealth remains unaffected" by the changing climate, with the greatest impact felt by the poorest people in the group of nations.

The signatories – including archbishops, church moderators and rabbis from all continents in the Commonwealth – call for politicians attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to pursue "every effort" to keep global temperature rises below the Paris Agreement target of 1.5 degrees Celsius. The meeting will take place at Buckingham Palace, St James's Palace and Windsor Castle between Monday 16 and Friday 20 April.

Some of the religious figures to sign the letter include Cardinal Maurice Piat of Mauritius, the President of the Antilles Episcopal Conference Bishop Gabriel Malzaire, the General Secretary
of the Evangelical Fellowship of India Vijayesh Lal and Senior Rabbi of The Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London Alexandra Wright.

The official website for the summit states that "urgent action" on climate change is needed "to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience" and notes that 39 of the 53 Commonwealth countries are classed as small or vulnerable states.

The faith leaders' statement is the latest in a series of calls by religious figures for action on climate change at international summits. Several heads of government cited Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment as a catalyst for the success of the UN climate talks that resulted in the Paris Agreement in 2015.

The letter says:

We, faith leaders from across the Commonwealth, representing peoples of Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Europe and the Americas, come together in friendship and co-operation to mark the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London.

Not even the remotest corner of the Commonwealth remains unaffected or unthreatened by the impacts of climate change. Commonwealth citizens, especially the poorest, struggle to thrive amidst our changing climate.

Subsistence communities in African countries struggle to grow crops in increasingly arid earth. In the Pacific, rising sea levels threaten the existence of whole countries. In Asia, salination is driving people from their land. Arctic communities’ ways of life are undermined. Ever more violent and unpredictable storms devastate the Caribbean.

At the scale of the Commonwealth we can see that the crisis of poverty and the crisis of ecology are one; each of our faith traditions reminds us of the deep interconnectedness of people and our planet. As a common problem, this crisis requires a common solution. And it is needed now.

The Charter of the Commonwealth affirms the foundations for cooperation between Commonwealth nations. But it is time to turn words into action. We call on the Heads of Government gathering in London to commit to urgent action on climate change adaptation and mitigation in line with the Paris Agreement and to pursue every effort to keep the increase in average global temperature below 1.5 degrees.

Our people call out to you. We stand beside them. Your time to act is now.

Signed by:

Africa : Frank Nubuasah, Bishop of Francistown, Botswana, Jan Ozga, Président, Caritas Cameroon, Ludovic Lado SJ, Former Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Management Catholic University of Central Africa, Yaoundé, Cameroon, Francis Dominic Mendy, Secretary General, Caritas Gambia, Samuel Zan Akologo, Executive Secretary, Caritas Ghana, Gabriel Dolan, Director Haki Yetu, Kenya, Susan Nagele, Maryknoll Lay Missioner,
**Americas:** Gabriel Malzaire, Bishop of Roseau, **Dominica** and President of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and The Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago), Frank Power SVD, Priest and Administrator, Holy Family Cathedral, Antigua and Barbuda, Sarita Vasquez RSM, Coordinator of the Mercy Community, **Belize**, Nigel J. Karam, Dean of Roseau Cathedral, **Dominica**, Julie Matthews, President, Sisters of Mercy, Caribbean, Central America, South America Community, Guyana, Susan Frazer, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, **Jamaica**, Jordan Cantwell, Moderator of The United Church of Canada, Ron Cutler, Anglican Archbishop of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, **Canada**, Muaz Nasir, Editor – Khaleafa.com, **Canada**, Brian Dunn, Bishop of Antigonish, **Canada**, Mariam Lucas-Jefferyes, Coordinator, Environment Network, Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island, **Canada**, Jim Hodgson, Justice Activist, **Canada**, Michelle Schofield Bull, Rector of Emmanuel Anglican Church, Spryfield, Nova Scotia, **Canada**, Matthew Spongale, Priest and Regional Dean, **Canada**, Reid Moore, Layreader, **Canada**, Charles Edgar Bull, Rector, Anglican Parish of St. Margaret of Scotland, Halifax, Nova Scotia, **Canada**, Marg Murray, Retired Minister, Social Justice Division of London Conference, United Church of Canada, Jane Alexander, Bishop of Edmonton, **Canada**, Lucy Cummings, Executive Director, Faith and the Common Good, **Canada**, Jack Panozzo, Social Justice and Advocacy Program Manager, **Canada**, Margaret Newall, Unitarian Minister, **Canada**, Larry Dobson, United Church of Canada, Ian Dewar McPherson, Earthkeepers: Christians for Climate Justice, **Canada**, Douglas Buck, **Canada**, Jason Wood, Community Organizer, Earthkeepers: Christians for Climate Justice, **Canada**, Joe Gunn, Executive Director, Citizens for Public Justice, **Canada**, Karen Boivin, Minister and Senior Pastor, City View United Church, United Church of Canada, Mary Anne Byrne, Poet, **Canada**, Tim Kuepfer, English Pastor of Chinatown Peace Church, **Canada**, Arleen Brawleu, Treasurer, Sisters of Charity, **Canada**, Bernice Steele, Leadership Team, Sisters of Charity, **Canada**, Maureen Wild, Sisters of Charity, **Canada**, Sabrina Malach, Director of Community Engagement, Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs, **Canada**, Helen Wallace, Sister of Charity, **Canada**, Sheila E. Moore, **Canada**, Sheila Martin, Teacher, **Canada**, Anne Harvey, Sisters of Charity, **Canada**, Susanne Lachapelle, Coordinator, Justice and Peace Commission, **Canada**.

**Asia:** Shourabh Pholia, Bishop of Barisal Diocese, Church of **Bangladesh**, Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, **Malaysia**, Joseph Hii Teck Kwong, Bishop of Sibu, Malaysia and President of the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice for Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and **Singapore**, Geraldine Clare Westwood, Head of the Creation Justice Commission of the Diocese of Penang, **Malaysia**, Vijayesh Lal, General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, Allwyn D'Silva, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Bombay, **India**, Patrick Hansda, Caritas India, Charles Irudayam, Priest and Secretary of the Justice, Peace and Development Office, Catholic Bishops Conference of India, Liam O'Callaghan, Coordinator for the Ecology Commission of Hyderabad Diocese, **Pakistan**, Robert Younas, Regional President, World Apostolate of Fatima, **Pakistan**, Mahendra Gunatilleke, National Director, SEDEC/ Caritas Sri Lanka

**Oceania:** John Ribat, Cardinal Archbishop of Port Moresby, **Papua New Guinea** and President of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conference of Oceania (Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu,
Vanuatu), Eveline Crotty, Leader of the Sisters of Mercy (Australia and Papua New Guinea), Laiseni Fanon Charisma Liava'a, Priest, Anglican Diocese of Polynesia,
Tonga, Tuvalu, Andrew Shepherd, National Co-Director, A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand, Julianne Hickey, Director, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, Richard Milne, Associate Professor, University of Auckland, New Zealand, John Atcherley Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland, President, New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, David McDonald, Leader of the Marist District of the Pacific (Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Aotearoa New Zealand), Bridget Crisp, Coordinator, Mercy Global Action, Aotearoa New Zealand, Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane, Vice-President Australian Catholic Bishops Conference on behalf of the Australian bishops, Jeremy Greaves, Bishop, Northern Region of Southern Queensland, Australia, Peter Albert Moore, Chair, Anglicgreen, Anglican Church Southern Queensland, Australia, Duncan Reid, Adjunct Lecturer, Trinity College Theological School Melbourne, Australia, Veronica Lawson, Sisters of Mercy, Australia, Judith Glaister, Sisters of Mercy, Australia, Theresa Ann Foley, Sisters of Mercy, Australia, Carol Mitchell, Director, Justice, Ecology & Development Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, Australia, Katie Hunt, Australia, Roger Jaensch, President and Chair of the Board of Directors, A Rocha Australia, George Browning, Past Chair, Anglican Communion Environment Network, Australia

Europe : Charles J Scicluna, Archbishop of Malta, Bishop Mario Grech, Bishop of Gozo, Malta, Melissa Chedid, Executive Manager, Caritas Cyprus, Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, United Kingdom, Leo Cusshley, Archbishop of St Andrews, Scotland, United Kingdom, David Pickering, Moderator of the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland, United Kingdom, John Davies, Anglican Archbishop of Wales, United Kingdom, Loraine Mellor, President of the Methodist Church in Britain, United Kingdom, Alan Yates, General Assembly Moderator, United Reformed Church in Great Britain, United Kingdom, Kevin Watson, General Assembly Moderator, United Reformed Church, United Kingdom, Philip Mounstephen, Executive Leader, Church Mission Society, United Kingdom, John Battle, Former MP and Minister, Chair, Diocese of Leeds Justice & Peace Commission, United Kingdom, Barbara Kentish, Coordinator of Westminster Justice and Peace, United Kingdom, Gregory Cameron, Bishop of St Asaph, United Kingdom, Andrew John, Bishop of Bangor, United Kingdom, Joanna Penberthy, Bishop of St Davids, United Kingdom, June Osborne, Bishop of Llandaff, United Kingdom, Richard Pain, Bishop of Monmouth, United Kingdom, Denise Boyle, Coordinator Global Justice Programme, United Kingdom, Monica Killeen, Sisters of Mercy, United Kingdom, Mary Judge RSC, United Kingdom, Chris Naylor, Executive Director A Rocha International, United Kingdom, Catherine Gibbons, United Kingdom, Peter Zabala, United Kingdom, John Keenan, Bishop of Paisley, United Kingdom, Michael Pryke, Youth President, Methodist Church, United Kingdom, Elisabeth Jill Baker, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2017-18, United Kingdom, Andy Atkins CEO, A Rocha UK and Chair, CTBI Environmental Issues Network, United Kingdom, Arthur Champion, Diocesan Environmental Adviser, United Kingdom
April 18, 2018

Do you believe in God? Then you have a moral duty to fight climate change, writes Jim Antal

By Tom Montgomery Fate
Chicago Tribune

Jim Antal recognizes that most Americans are not engaged by the climate change issue. “Two in three Americans think global warming is happening (67%), yet most Americans (65%) rarely or never discuss it,” he writes, citing a Yale study in his new book, “Climate Church, Climate World.”

Antal thinks a central reason we have ignored global warming is because the problem is a “long emergency” and overwhelming in scope. “(N) euroscientists tell us that our brains are not suited to respond appropriately to long-term threats such as climate change,” he writes.

This is why, he suggests, we know how to respond to the immediate threats and destruction caused by a major hurricane, like Harvey: by repairing Houston’s collapsed bridges and infrastructure and other present-tense problems. But we always seem to miss the big picture — for example, the fact that “Hurricane Harvey was Houston’s third once-in-500-years flood in the last four years.”

The question Antal poses is when will climate change feel immediate enough for us to think and act decisively on behalf of future generations? He argues that we’ve developed an “environmental generational amnesia,” and that we need to think long term in both directions. Thus, he includes a useful history of climate science and of our evolving understanding of the problem. This runs from the 1850s, when John Tyndall first suggested that CO2 created a greenhouse effect, trapping the sun’s energy and warming the climate, to Wallace Broecker’s groundbreaking research and climate projections in the 1970s, to Bill McKibben’s landmark 1989 book, “The End of Nature,” and leading up to the policies of the Trump administration.

Given that President Donald Trump withdrew from the Paris climate accord and — along with Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt and U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry — doesn’t view climate change as a crisis, nor tie it directly to human behavior, Antal doesn’t place his hope for change in the current political leadership.

The subtitle of the book suggests where his hope does lie: “How People of Faith Must Work for Change.” A longtime Congregational pastor and activist himself, Antal identifies with the social gospel and prophetic tradition of the church — going all the way back to the abolitionist movement. Early in the book he shares his central vision.
“I believe that people of faith the world over have the capacity to determine the trajectory of our common future,” Antal writes. “Here in America, if Christianity continues to emphasize personal salvation while ignoring collective salvation, if we continue to reduce the Creator to an anthropocentric projection who privileges and protects humanity, however alienated we may be from God’s created order, then the practice of religion will continue to diminish and it will add little to the redemption of creation.”

After analyzing the history and social implications of climate change, Antal reimagines the role of church communities and their capacity to confront and resolve the problem. After each chapter throughout the book, there are discussion questions aimed at prompting readers to engage in their communities — through everything from Bible study to civil disobedience. Clearly, Antal’s purpose in writing is not simply to educate but to inspire readers’ hearts, heads and hands to “repurpose” the church, and reimagine its moral calling.

The chapter titled “Discipleship: Reorienting What We Prize” outlines the basic changes in social and economic priorities Antal thinks are necessary to realize this goal. Americans, he believes, must reject and rethink “our insatiable desire for material growth, our uncompromising insistence on convenience, and our relentless addiction to mobility.”

But this is of course no easy task. Such a shift in priorities is antithetical to America’s thriving high-tech culture of accumulation and convenience. The challenge is formidable. And it’s complicated by the fact that climate change has not been a central focus or mission of the church until recently.

In his introduction, friend and fellow activist McKibben, explains: “For religious people the environment was a second tier problem: for liberal Christians it was secondary to the ‘real issues’ of hunger and war; to conservative people of faith it represented a way station on the road to paganism.”

Nevertheless, in spite of all the challenges, Antal’s central message is one of engaged hope. Like Pope Francis and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, he sees the current climate debacle as “a Kairos moment, an opportune moment fraught with God-inspired possibility.”

“(O)ur present social and economic system needs a moral intervention,” Antal writes. “And so does the church. It’s time to declare a new moral era.”

Tom Montgomery Fate, author of the nature memoir “Cabin Fever,” is a professor of English at College of DuPage.


April 19, 2018

‘Laudato Si’ universities’ commit to forming environmental consciences
Moravia, Costa Rica — Universities worldwide may be answering a call to become their communities' environmental consciences if they take an active role in an awareness effort launched by the Catholic University of Costa Rica, based on Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si',* on Care for Our Common Home.*

The effort includes the launching of the *Laudato Si’* Observatory and the release of the first results contained in the *Laudato Si’* Social and Environmental Development Index. The index was developed from key actions taken during the symposium "*El Cuidado de la Casa Común, una conversión necesaria a la ecología humana*" ("On Care for Our Common Home, a necessary conversion to human ecology"), held Nov. 29 through Dec. 1 in Costa Rica.

The observatory and the index are meant to have an impact on the development of countries as well as environmental public policy, and universities are seen as a channel for this, Catholic University rector Fernando Sánchez told NCR at the education center’s headquarters in Moravia, a district on the northeastern outskirts of San José, the Costa Rican capital.

The first such meeting held in Latin America — coinciding with Catholic University's 25th anniversary — the symposium, which was organized by the university and the Fondazione Vaticana Joseph Ratzinger — Benedetto XVI, was grounded on several basic premises, according to Sánchez.

"The first is that this is a real problem, it's an urgent problem, it's a global problem we can't simply ignore," and "the other thing is that, despite the data, we should not face this from a fatalistic perspective," he said.

Sánchez referred to data gathered for the first index, covering 127 countries that hold around 97 percent of the planet's population. According to the study "more than 55 percent … live in conditions, whether human or environmental, that are not acceptable according to the Holy Father and the *Laudato Si’* encyclical," said Sánchez, an ex-congressman of the former ruling Partido Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Party) and a former Costa Rican ambassador to the Vatican.

Among the top-20 countries in the index, the data places Finland in first position, with 88.77 points out of 100 for "care for our common home," followed by New Zealand (88.03) and Australia (86.78). Only two countries in the Americas made it into this group, with Canada ranking fifth (82.18) and Costa Rica placing in the 20th position (82.33).

"The Holy Father tells us: neither think that with some technical measures we'll solve the problem nor think that any human intervention is harmful — a balance must be sought," Sánchez said. This "must be done with a positive vision, one of hope, knowing that things can be changed because, if not, what are going to make the effort for?"
The effort calls for continuity, which opened the way for the creation of the *Laudato Si'* Observatory. Headquartered at the university in Costa Rica, its various aims include drawing up and publishing the index on a yearly basis. The observatory's main purpose is sharing the index with as many universities, Catholic and non-Catholic, as possible, and producing a local and international compilation of the best practices to help improve each country's index, Sánchez explained.

Sánchez underlined that since the encyclical, which he described as "within the church's social doctrine," deals with two major topics, "human development and environmental development or sustainable development." Prior to the symposium meetings were held with experts who, for years, have been measuring both situations.

"We are interested in knowing what's going on in the world that, one way or another, positively impacts the index," Sánchez said. "That is, which one, in one way or another, is improving or responding to what the pope requests in *Laudato Si*:

Once it is published, if "we manage to have universities interested in receiving the index, the idea is for them to publicize it in their countries so they can also explain what's going on, why we did poorly or well, what we did wrong or well," Sánchez added.

Regarding the possibility of any positive action being taken, the universities "can tell us what initiatives in their countries are … pushing the index upward and are thus responding to what the pope is asking of us," he said.

"The aim is that it acts as some kind of impact measure starting from the Holy Father's exhortations. And this is the observatory's other major goal: to cause positive impact wherever we have access," Sánchez said.

"At the end of the day, we'd want to be able to say that somehow, for some reason, knowledge of the index will generate some impact on the public policy of nations. That would be a major future goal, but if we have to have an impact … we have to publicize it," he added.

That is where universities come in.

"The first thing that's going to happen is that those of us who adopt this have to be consistent universities," because "we can't go around preaching to everyone a conversion to human ecology if our university has not converted to human ecology," said Sánchez.

Some progress in this regard had been made already before the symposium, including the creation of *Laudato Si'* professorships and, in the case of Brazil's Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, PUC-Rio), the creation of rooftop gardens.

Sánchez stressed that some universities have been taking *Laudato Si'*-type initiatives: "What happens is that the symposium brings us all into a logic. So, now it will be very interesting to see how much universities that accept this initiative actually change."
In his view, the encyclical’s major advantage is that it deals with an awareness issue more than a religious one.

"There could hardly be a more ecumenical issue than the environmental issue because we're all in the same, common home. Doctrinal differences have no weight. Awareness and responsibility have weight," he said. "We have some fertile ground to work on."

[George Rodriguez, a freelance correspondent based in Costa Rica, has reported for Reuters and other international news agencies.]


April 20, 2018

Access to clean water is a life issue that the church must defend

By Christiana Zenner
National Catholic Reporter

Five years ago, few people thought of the Catholic church as ecologically activist or environmentally diplomatic. But Pope Francis' election to the papacy changed that, especially since the promulgation of his 2015 ecology encyclical, "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home." In my analysis, fresh water is the most important point of papal reflection at the intersection of environmental and social justice. Fresh water is, in no uncertain terms, a fundamental life issue.

The magisterial Catholic Church has articulated two fulcrums for environmental reflection — theological and ethical — that apply in specific ways to fresh water.

Theologically, water is the matrix of creation, a ritual substance par excellence, and a gift from God intended for the benefit of all people.

Ethically, fresh water is a substance that requires attention to justice: It is the poor and vulnerable who are first and most profoundly affected by lack of sufficient, clean, fresh water.

Francis is surely the most visible, and most recent, authoritative Catholic voice on the topic of the centrality of fresh water to environmental and social justice. Citing his and Pope Benedict XVI's papal precedent, Francis' concluding salvo at a 2017 Vatican-hosted "Dialogue on Water" exhorted:

The questions that you are discussing are not marginal, but basic and pressing. Basic, because where there is water there is life, making it possible for societies to arise and advance. Pressing, because our common home needs to be protected. Yet it must also be realized that not all water
is life-giving, but only water that is safe and of good quality — as St. Francis again tells us, water that "serves with humility," "chaste" water, not polluted. All people have a right to safe drinking water. This is a basic human right and a central issue in today's world.

Both Francis and Benedict declared that the fundamental human right to water is a core aspect of Catholic social teaching, which now includes environmental aspects in a central way. The Catholic Church was among the first major international institutions to defend the idea that access to fresh water is a fundamental human right, and it has enshrined this idea in authoritative teachings, such as the 2004 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, *Caritas in Veritate* and *Laudato Si*.

There is abundant skepticism in Catholic social teaching that the mechanisms of the free market, especially the tendency to treat water as a commodity, are sufficient to ensure just access to fresh water for all. Water is to be seen as a human right precisely because it undergirds all life and is central to human dignity.

The popes also point out that fresh water is essential to the fulfillment of all other rights. More broadly, sufficient access to clean, fresh water is fundamental to the achievement of all manner of public and private goods, such as education, economic activity and social equity.

It's worth noting that the Catholic Church — despite its patriarchal structure, and yet in line with social realities around the world — has noted that gender is a major factor in water and sanitation, for it is often women and girls who bear the burden of procuring water when it is scarce.

Given papal leadership and the powerful tradition of Catholic social teaching, what more might be worth exploring with regard to fresh water? I suggest five aspects that will be important for the church to consider as it deepens its analysis and moral advocacy on the subject of water.

First, individual versus structural responses to water challenges. Fresh water is a reality that is simultaneously hydrological, climatological, social and institutional. The way fresh water flows depends not only on the weather and the water sources in a region, but also on the ways that infrastructure is constructed and access given to some users rather than others, as well as incentives given to some types of water uses over others.

Twenty-first century moral reflection on fresh water requires not just attention to individual practices of conservation, but also to the political and economic frameworks within which fresh water is withdrawn from its sources, valued, exchanged and distributed. The Catholic Church, as a repository of theological insights and ethical reflection, is a needed voice in defending the preferential option for the poor and marginalized.

Second, water and migration. Scientist Travis Huxman points out, "Water is the hammer with which climate change will hit the earth." One way this is visible is with regard to environmental refugees who have left their homes in response to drought, especially in agricultural regions. Given the church's advocacy for displaced persons, it is well-poised to advocate for environmental immigrants to be granted the status of refugees, a status that confers special rights
that are more conducive to well-being, especially in an era of migration prompted by water scarcity.

Third, water and sanitation. Scholars recognize that the right to water is deeply interwoven with the right to sanitation for all people, and especially significant for girls and women. How gender, water and sanitation intersect is a crucial topic, and one that the global Catholic church could rightly identify as an equity issue, since women and girls are more negatively impacted by lack of sanitation infrastructure. The church is already an outspoken critic of the fact that upward of 1,000 children die every day due to waterborne, and entirely preventable, deaths.

Fourth, rights of the environment. Human rights are focused on the human, as the name suggests. But Francis has suggested, since 2015, that there might be a "right of the environment." Is it possible that, given the intrinsic theological goodness of creation, as well as water's centrality to human flourishing, that waters could have rights in themselves, worthy of protection not only for human beings, but also for the life-giving qualities they embody?

Fifth, institutional proof of concept. The Catholic Church as a global institution has surely demonstrated the importance of conceptual leadership on the topic of fresh water and human rights. It also has the potential to demonstrate institutional commitments to best practices regarding fresh water. The Vatican's installation of showers for the homeless in Vatican City is one example of water and social justice.

Multiple orders of women religious worldwide have been at the vanguard of watershed practices and water justice efforts. The church and the world would do well to listen to these women and the truths that they proclaim in daily practice.

[Christina Zenner is an associate professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University, where she is affiliated faculty in environmental studies and American studies. She is the author of *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis.*]


**April 23, 2018**

Cardinal Turkson emphasizes importance of caring for creation at St. Louis Climate Summit

By Joseph Kenny

St. Louis Review

Cardinal Peter Turkson gave a bonus talk at the St. Louis Climate Summit, which is hosted by St. Louis University as a way to advance the Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si'." In both talks, the cardinal referred to the need to respect creation.

Cardinal Turkson, the prefect of the Vatican Discastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, had a key role in the formulation of the encyclical, a document that reflects upon
humankind's moral obligation to address the issue of climate change. He was delayed in Canada due to a visa issue, and gave an abbreviated talk April 22 at St. Francis Xavier (College) Church on the SLU campus after two others filled in for him. He then was added as a speaker at the start of the next day's program.

Cardinal Turkson stressed that creation is the loving work of God, something that doesn't have an ownership and exists to support human life. Because creation is "a fruit of God's decided action," everything in it has a purpose, the native of Ghana said.

Creation has order and beauty so human life can thrive, he said, comparing it on a small scale to a garden. It needs to be treated respectfully, he added.

Cardinal Turkson cited seven characteristics of the encyclical, the "magnificent seven" as he called it. They are:

• **Continuity** — Pope Francis was not the first pope to talk about ecology. Following up on his predecessors, "he's bringing it all together," Cardinal Turkson said, in an "integral ecology."

• **Collegiality** — The document is a teaching done with all the Catholic bishops from around the world.

• **Conversation** — It calls for dialogue, listening to all points of views and the need for everyone to come together to solve a common problem.

• **Care** — With a couple exceptions, instead of using the word stewardship, Pope Francis refers to a more compassionate, loving and tender way of approaching our common home.

• **Conversion** — We need to change habits, behavior and lifestyles.

• **Citizenship** — Education is important to accept our responsibility toward the care of the earth.

• **Contemplation** — Prayer is a way to worship our creator and helps lead us to God.

While waiting for Cardinal Turkson to arrive, Peter Raven and Mary Evelyn Tucker filled in with talks and answered questions. Raven, a conference co-chair, is a botanist and advocate of conservation and biodiversity who headed the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis for four decades. "I don't want to see civilization being destroyed," he said, adding that it is threatened unless people pay attention and adjust their activities.

Raven, a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and contributor to the development of "Laudato Si'," pointed to the need to work together to "build a better, sustainable world instead of leaving a depleted" world.

Tucker, co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, called the encyclical, especially its take on the Gospel of creation, a "hymn to the universe." It awakens
people to the view that "hyper individualism won't get us to a common good for our common home," Tucker said.

While calling for alternative, renewable energy sources, she said "we are losing God's creation" and "the future of life lies in our hands."

Tucker also showed optimism for "not just a sustainable future, but a flourishing future."


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April 23, 2018

Church teaching leads Catholic entities to divest from fossil fuels

By Dennis Sadowski

Crux

A wind turbine turns in front of a fossil fuel power plant in Charlestown, Mass., in this 2013 file photo. Catholic institutions are planning to divest part of their financial portfolios from the fossil fuel industry because of its impact on climate change. (Credit: Brian Snyder/Reuters via CNS.)

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Caritas Internationalis, the Catholic Church’s worldwide network of humanitarian aid agencies, three German banks and more than 30 other Catholic institutions are planning to divest at least part of their financial portfolios from the fossil fuel industry.

The divestment announcement by the Global Catholic Climate Movement April 22, Earth Day, is part of a continuing campaign to convince Catholic entities to move investments to renewable energy enterprises.

Divestment from the fossil fuel industry is crucial to addressing climate change and upholding the commitments to reduce carbon emissions set in the 2015 Paris climate accord, Tomas Insua, GCCM executive director, told Catholic News Service.

“This announcement is the result of many months of hard work. Our team has been working pretty hard raising awareness. I think there is so little understanding about the fossil fuel industry being at the core of the environmental crisis,” he said.

The divestment campaign also falls in line with the message of Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home, Insua explained.

“It’s just unacceptable to treat the fossil fuel industry as just another industry,” he added. “The call of Laudato Si’ to move away from fossil fuels is crystal clear.”

Desmond Wilson, chief financial officer at The Catherine Donnelly Foundation in Toronto, told CNS the divestment decision falls in line with the organization’s ties to the religious community.
“We came to understand that there were moral and ethical issues in play here,” Wilson said, explaining that the world’s poorest people are most affected by a changing climate. “If climate change is caused by the action of humans, we have a responsibility to reflect on that and take some measures to keep that threat under control.”

While its fossil fuel investments totaled just $1 million in a $45 million portfolio, Wilson said the foundation felt it was important to adhere to its Catholic roots.

“Eventually we came to understand cigarettes, tobacco, was a harmful product. It’s the same sort of thing with fossil fuels. We see more and more that it is a harmful product in the way it affects climate,” he explained.

Three German Catholic banks, with more than $9.2 billion in holdings, are among the divesting institutions: Pax-Bank, Bank im Bistum Essen and Steyler Ethik Bank. Pax-Bank said it was partially divesting while the others announced they were pulling investments from coal companies.

“In view of the progressing climate change and its social consequences, we consider the exploitation of fossil fuel for their incineration as a threat to the common good,” spokesman Alfred Krott wrote in an email to CNS. “We want to promote renewable energy and exclude companies that mine hard coal or lignite (soft coal), peat, oil and natural gas.”

In a statement, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila, Philippines and president of Caritas Internationalis, said poor people around the world suffer “greatly from the climate crisis and fossil fuels are among the main drivers of this injustice. That is why Caritas Internationalis has decided not to invest in fossil fuels anymore.”

The cardinal encouraged members of the humanitarian aid network and other church organizations “to do the same.”

Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, president of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community, or COMECE, said bishops were joining other Catholic institutions in “making financial decisions that are in line with our moral values.”

“Divestment is an important way for the Church to show leadership in the context of a changing climate,” he said in a statement. “Praise be to all those who service ‘the least of these’ by protecting the environment.”

Other divesting institutions include the Jesuit European Social Center in Belgium; Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis and Ursulines of the Chatman Union in Canada; China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation; Caritas France; Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry and Sisters of Mercy, Northern Province in Ireland; Archdiocese of Salerno, Italy; Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Kenya; International Association of World Peace Advocates in Nigeria; Jesuit-run Environmental Science for Social Change in Philippines; Justice and Peace National Commission of the Portuguese bishops’ conference;
Pope Francis brings a new lens to poverty, peace and the planet

By Robert W. McElroy
America: The Jesuit Review

Five years ago, Jorge Bergoglio became Francis, choosing at the moment of his election in March 2013 a name that no pope had taken before. His choice of the name served as a signpost for the direction in which he would lead the global church. In his embrace of the poor, his pursuit of nonviolence and his care for all of God’s creation, Pope Francis has brought the legacy of the great saint of Assisi to the very heart of the church’s proclamation to the modern world.

It is especially fruitful, then, in assessing the first five years of the Francis pontificate, to examine how the pope’s contributions to Catholic social teaching have reflected the three Franciscan priorities of poverty, peace and the planet. In what way has the leadership of the first pope from the New World enriched or altered the body of Catholic social teaching? What is it about his papacy or perspective that has generated such substantial opposition to Pope Francis, particularly within the United States? How should we characterize the mission that the pope has taken on behalf of economic justice, building peace and caring for our common home?

A New Lens

The starting point to answering these questions lies in recognizing that the relationship between the social teachings of Pope Francis and his predecessors is not, fundamentally, one of continuity or discontinuity. Rather, the relationship that Pope Francis’ teachings on poverty, peace and the environment have with the tradition he inherited is one of fundamental continuity but refracted through a strikingly new lens.

This new lens reflects in a fundamental way the experience of the church in Latin America. Critics of Pope Francis point to this as a limitation, a bias that prevents the pope from seeing the central issues of economic justice, war and peace and the environment in the context of the universal church. But St. John Paul II certainly enriched key aspects of Catholic social teaching from a perspective profoundly rooted in the experience of the Eastern European church under communism. Contemporary critics of Pope Francis voice no objection to that regional and historical perspective.
Furthermore, the church in Latin America constitutes more than 40 percent of the Catholics in the world. When combined with the Catholic populations of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, which face similar economic and environmental challenges, the church of the global south constitutes more than two-thirds of the universal church. The Argentine pope’s perspective on Catholic social teaching is, then, one shared by the majority of Catholics.

There are four major elements that shape how Pope Francis understands the Catholic tradition on the issues of poverty, peace and the planet.

See-judge-act. The first and most important element is the recognition that Catholic social teaching must be comprehensively inductive. Specifically, Pope Francis employs the see-judge-act methodology, which roots Catholic teaching and action in the world as it is, rather than the world as one imagines or wishes it to be. This is the central methodology used by the church in Latin America to discern how the church is being called to respond in areas ranging from evangelization to spiritual formation to social justice.

The see-judge-act method begins theological reflection by seeing the world as it truly is, then pondering the implications in light of our faith and the Gospel and, finally, promoting action in concert with those implications. As the pivotal final document of the Latin American and Caribbean bishops’ meeting at Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007 stated, “This method enables us to combine successfully a faithful perspective for viewing reality; incorporating criteria from faith and reason for discerning and appraising it critically; and accordingly acting as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Throwaway culture. Next, Pope Francis approaches the tradition of Catholic social thought through the theme of exclusion. Marginalization, viewed as a denial of the right to participate meaningfully in political, economic, social and cultural life, has long been a major focus of Catholic social teaching. The concept of exclusion that Pope Francis deploys is broader than marginalization; it is reflective of the interwoven deprivations that do not merely banish entire populations to the margins of society but exclude them entirely. In Pope Francis’ memorable terminology, such people are victims of a “throwaway culture,” discarded from any meaningful participation in society.

The colonial history of Latin America and the neocolonialism that endures on many levels today has attuned this pope to the manner in which grave inequalities of wealth and power inevitably result in the patterns of exclusion that pulverize the human spirit.

In light of this history, the Latin American church is suspicious of globalization. The bishops’ Aparecida document explicitly states: “In globalization, market forces easily absolutize efficacy and productivity as values regulating all human relations.... In its current form, globalization is incapable of interpreting and reacting in response to objective values that transcend the market and that constitute what is most important in human life: truth, justice, love and most especially, the dignity and rights of all, even those not included in the market.”

Our common home. The third element of the pope’s new lens on Catholic social thought is the recognition that integral human development includes the protection of the earth, our common
home. Latin America is the home of Amazonia, a region so rich in its biodiversity that it is literally vital for the preservation of life on earth. Francis has seen firsthand the destruction of the Amazon; there is an environmental catastrophe underway that can suffocate the earth even while it destroys ancient cultures and impoverishes vast populations.

Latin America is a prime example of how economic systems that internalize profits while externalizing costs and risks must be reformed or replaced. It is also a prime example of how deep engagement with the environment informed by the scientific consensus of the world can begin to reclaim the health of our common home. The see-judge-act method reveals an ongoing abuse of the creation that God has entrusted to us, and none of the alternative realities painted by the extractive industries of our nation can obscure that simple fact.

**Pacifist roots.** The final element of the new lens that Pope Francis brings to Catholic teaching on poverty, peace and the planet is the reintegration of nonviolence into the heart of Catholic teaching on war and peace. In the early church, pacifism was the dominant theme of Christian theology. For most of the church’s history, however, nonviolence has been seen as a heroic though unrealistic choice, an eccentric part of our patrimony that was displaced by St. Augustine’s powerful logic of war as last resort.

In his “World Day of Peace Message” in 2017, Pope Francis reclaimed the tradition of pacifism as a major theological current in the life of the church. He reiterated the contention of the early Christian community that Christ’s call to love of neighbor and enemy alike is, in an unrelenting way, incompatible with recourse to war. Francis teaches that the time in which Jesus lived was one of great violence, and yet he preached nonresistance. Can the church do anything less than seek to construct a powerful and realistic politics of nonviolence rooted both in reality and in the words of the Lord himself?

**A Threefold Mission**

The first five years of Francis’ pontificate suggest that the pope, through this new lens, has undertaken a different mission within each of the three major priorities of the Franciscan legacy.

**Poverty.** On the question of poverty, Pope Francis has undertaken a mission of application and renewal. Specifically, the pope has sought to enact Catholic moral teaching in the light of the forces of globalization that are transforming our economies, cultures and societies. In a very real way, Pope Francis approaches globalization with the same perspective that characterized Pope Leo XIII’s critique of industrialization in “Rerum Novarum” in 1891. Francis is under no illusion that globalization can be reversed. Rather, it is his conviction that the tremendous upheaval in economic, familial and cultural life caused by globalization requires the creation of major new structures of social justice designed to mitigate the consequences and claims of globalization that have devastated so many sectors of the human family.

The great theme of the preferential option for the poor, which has resonated in Catholic teaching since the time of Paul VI, lies at the heart of this renewal. The methodology of see-judge-act, so consonant with the Second Vatican Council’s exhortation to look carefully at the “signs of the times,” provides the pathway for meaningful reform. And the questions of participation and
marginalization, so central to the social thought of St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, have been amplified by the prism of exclusion that ultimately is determinative in Pope Francis’ judgments about the morality of globalization. Even refracted through the distinctive lens that Pope Francis brings to Catholic social teaching on the issue of poverty, his project is fundamentally one of continuing the long trajectory of the church’s commitment to the defense of the poor, using the rich doctrinal resources that have been forged over the past 125 years.

**Peace.** If the relationship between the initiatives of Pope Francis and the tradition he inherited can be seen as one of continuity and renewal in the area of economic justice and poverty, Pope Francis’ mission in the area of peace is best seen as one of recovery. On one level, Francis has continued the trajectory of the modern popes in tightening the moral requirements under just war theory for recourse to war and the formulation of nuclear policy. The pope’s bold decision last November to proclaim the very possession of nuclear weapons morally unacceptable is a sign of that continuing trajectory.

But on a more fundamental level, the initiatives of Pope Francis in the area of nonviolence and peace-building constitute a major shift in orientation in Catholic social teaching designed to truly empower the church’s ancient pacifist traditions. This shift is rooted in the see-judge-act methodology that looks to the demonstrated successes of nonviolence in civil conflicts around the globe in which violence had been tried and failed. By pointing to the viability and moral superiority of nonviolence, this recovery of the pacifist tradition provides a necessary complement to a just war tradition that must become ever more restrictive if it hopes to preserve a claim as an authentic Christian ethic.

**Planet.** Pope Francis’ teachings on the environment constitute a mission of neither renewal nor recovery but rather of wholesale transformation. For most of the church’s history, Catholic social teaching on the environment has reflected a theme of mastery and domination. St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict both sounded a piercing alarm about the well-being of the planet in their writings about the pillaging of the earth. But it has fallen to Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si’*, to construct a breathtaking theology of creation for an age in which the earth itself is imperiled.

Francis is a pope uniquely equipped to carry out this transformation. The first son of Latin America to be pope, he instinctively appreciates the richness of biodiversity as the lifeblood of the planet and has witnessed the degradation of the earth and destruction of peoples brought by rampant exploitation.

*“Laudato Si’”* is a prayer; it is a warning; it is an affirmation of the power and beneficence of God; it is an analysis of the contending forces and bad decisions that have brought our planet to a point of deepest peril. Most of all, it is the re-creation of Catholic teaching about the nature of the human person in relation to the earth that is our common home.

The renewal, recovery and transformation that Pope Francis has launched in Catholic teachings on poverty, peace and the planet are firmly rooted in the doctrinal tradition of the church. Yet they bring the enriching perspective of the Southern church—the majority of Catholics in the world today—to bear on the themes of exclusion, pacifism, the preservation of our common
home and the massive threats that globalization poses for humanity. St. Francis of Assisi must be very pleased.


April 23, 2018

Divestment from fossil fuels is a witness to our faith

By John O'Shaughnessy and Erin Lothes
National Catholic Reporter

This week, an international coalition of Catholic institutions announced its divestment from fossil fuels. These include Caritas Internationalis (a Vatican-affiliated institution), Catholic banks with combined balance sheets of approximately €7.5 billion and Catholic bishops, among others.

All of us who share life on Earth should applaud this decision. After all, it will protect us from the respiratory diseases, extreme weather, and hunger we see with climate change, which is driven largely by use of fossil fuels. Less fossil fuel use means a better chance of building a healthy, safe world for our children and the most vulnerable of our sisters and brothers. Because we ourselves are Catholics who have struggled with decisions about how to manage our reliance on oil, coal and natural gas, we especially applaud the courage and conviction of these Catholic institutions.

The truth is that Catholics are, at long last, among those leading the charge to make the tough but fundamentally moral decisions about fossil fuel use and climate change. As the CEO of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary and an energy ethics theologian, we have witnessed firsthand the moral reckoning of divestment.

In 2014, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, a congregation of women religious, removed all public companies that extract, hold and sell fossil fuel reserves from their investment portfolios. For these followers of St. Francis of Assisi, change couldn’t wait. They view compassionate care of creation as the focus of their mission. In weighing the comfort of sticking with status quo investments with the greater good of a fossil fuel-free world, they made the tough but courageous decision to divest.

With help from professional advisors, the sisters shifted assets from fossil fuels to enterprises that grow the energy systems we need and preserve the lands and waters we were given. This prayerful, sustainable investment strategy has not only provided the sisters greater joy and satisfaction, it has also produced better financial returns and created social and environmental benefits they can measure.
The sisters help lead a growing movement that seeks justice in investments. With their firsthand experience and success, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary helped form the Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative, whose participants today collectively manage over $50 billion in assets. From women and men religious to health systems and humanitarian organizations, the movement toward better stewardship of our resources is thriving.

We are at a turning point in history. For much of the twentieth century, fossil fuels were the backbone of technologies that created prosperity and security. Without a doubt, we’re grateful to the miners, oilmen and engineers who have worked so hard to provide the energy we’ve relied on.

Now, however, we know that an economy built on dirty energy will not serve us in the long term. And institutional investors have the long-term interest of their congregations, unions and retirement systems at heart. We believe that the tide of investment is turning.

In seeking a transition from investments of the past to investments of the future, a strategy of “investor engagement,” or creating dialogue about change from the position of shareholders, has arisen. We applaud the spirit of dialogue. Unfortunately, in this case, it has not kept pace with the scaled-up transition to renewable energy that science tells us we urgently need.

For those who see dialogue as essential to their moral witness, we suggest a “both-and” strategy. A portfolio that maintains the minimum shares needed to support shareholder engagement and reinvests any divested shares in clean energy keeps the lines of dialogue open, while also making a clear commitment to the future our children will inherit.

We believe that given the depths and urgency of this crisis, we no longer have the luxury of only talking about change. We must now actively pursue it by funding clean energy.

As our brothers and sisters around the world face increasing hunger, sickness and conflict related to climate change, Catholic investors are finding continued reliance on fossil fuels will lead to harm for the human family, the young and most vulnerable above all. For many of us, divestment is a way of expressing the faith values that we hold most dear.

[John O'Shaughnessy is the CEO and CFO of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary and the founder of the Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative. Dr. Erin Lothes is an associate professor and theologian at the College of Saint Elizabeth in Morristown, NJ.]


April 24, 2018

Water unites us, so make it available to all
By Alex Mikulich
National Catholic Reporter

Water literally is both the gift of life and a threat of death. In my home of New Orleans and many places like it throughout the world, we know too well the death-dealing power of water. While we have spent billions to build a levee system to protect people and buildings, the failure to rebuild aging sewerage pipeline infrastructure exacerbates larger fiscal crises. We can't live with too much of it, and we can't live without its life-giving and cleansing powers.

In Genesis, water is both the source of life-giving creation and the chaos of the flood. In Exodus, water becomes a weapon against the oppressive Egyptians. Physical thirst is a symbol of the deepest human desires for eternal life and love in God.

The prophet Isaiah calls "all who are thirsty" and "have no money" to drink and eat until they are filled. And just as the heavens pour rain and snow on the earth to make it fruitful, so Isaiah reminds us that God is "generous and forgiving" (Isaiah 55:1, 7, 10).

Jesus is the living water of salvation (John 7:38). During the Easter liturgy, the Easter candle is lowered into water three times, depicting how Christ was lowered into, and rose from, the tomb. There is no more integral religious symbol of the possibility of the transformation of death into life.

Although 71 percent of Earth is covered with water and the adult human body is at least 60 percent water, there is no law that guarantees access to clean water. The Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church states that "the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right."

Yet this Earth Day we may not realize how a water crisis impacts at least one in every three people globally and nearly 10 million people in the United States. The people of Flint, Michigan, are not alone in their struggle for clean, accessible and affordable water. If infrastructure and costs are not addressed immediately, more than 40 million American households will likely face a crisis in cost and/or access.

Imagine a life without water. Privileged Americans take for granted our access to, and use of, clean water. Yet nearly 850 million globally — about one in every nine people — lack access to safe water. And 2.3 billion people have no access to a toilet. We Americans have not given this national and global crisis the attention it deserves.

According to a 2017 study, Michigan State University researchers found that water prices need to increase by 41 percent in the United States over the next five years to cover the costs of replacing aging water infrastructure and adapting to climate change. That means that more than one-third of all Americans may not be able to afford water by 2020.

In states like Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi, as many as 83 percent of residents are at high risk of becoming unable to pay their water bills. These include people who live in rural and urban areas.
The American Society of Civil Engineers' 2017 infrastructure report card issued U.S. drinking and wastewater grades of D and D+, respectively. According to the American Water Works Association, an estimated $1 trillion is necessary to maintain and expand service to meet demand over the next 25 years.

Nevertheless, the Trump administration and many libertarians believe water is merely an economic good to be privatized for monetary gain regardless of its impact on the poor. Privatization and deregulation threaten both access to, and affordability of, clean water.

The advocacy group Food and Water Watch reports that the Trump administration is gutting federal clean water standards and its infrastructure plan favors privatization over existing public systems. Privately owned systems charge 59 percent more than publicly owned systems. Moreover, by cutting the relative tax benefit of tax-exempt municipal bonds, the Trump tax changes mean that local and state governments are going to pay higher interest rates on those bonds to attract buyers.

This Earth Day, people of faith must address this fundamental pro-life issue. Catholic Climate Covenant and Eco-Jesuit, among others, regularly offer action tips to implement the environmental encyclical of Pope Francis, "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home.”

Water.org provides an outstanding example of the kind of creative social innovations necessary to care for both the Earth and our most vulnerable brothers and sisters. Water.org utilizes micro-financing as a way to build local infrastructure, increase water access, and reduce water costs to millions of people throughout the world.

Perhaps there is no more apt symbol for our time than water. Many march and cry out to God for justice and the need to be cleansed of the moral and political scandals that wreak havoc upon the most vulnerable in our society. May we find in water our shared vulnerability and humanity. May we recognize how water unites all people to the Earth, to one another and to God. It is time we extend its affordability and accessibility to all.

[Alex Mikulich is a Catholic social ethicist.]


April 26, 2018

Native Knowledge: What Ecologists Are Learning from Indigenous People

By Jim Robbins
Yale Environment 360

From Alaska to Australia, scientists are turning to the knowledge of traditional people for a deeper understanding of the natural world. What they are learning is helping them discover more about everything from melting Arctic ice, to protecting fish stocks, to controlling wildfires.
While he was interviewing Inuit elders in Alaska to find out more about their knowledge of beluga whales and how the mammals might respond to the changing Arctic, researcher Henry Huntington lost track of the conversation as the hunters suddenly switched from the subject of belugas to beavers.

It turned out though, that the hunters were still really talking about whales. There had been an increase in beaver populations, they explained, which had reduced spawning habitat for salmon and other fish, which meant less prey for the belugas and so fewer whales.

“It was a more holistic view of the ecosystem,” said Huntington. And an important tip for whale researchers. “It would be pretty rare for someone studying belugas to be thinking about freshwater ecology.”

Around the globe, researchers are turning to what is known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to fill out an understanding of the natural world. TEK is deep knowledge of a place that has been painstakingly discovered by those who have adapted to it over thousands of years. “People have relied on this detailed knowledge for their survival,” Huntington and a colleague wrote in an article on the subject. “They have literally staked their lives on its accuracy and repeatability.”

This realm has long been studied by disciplines under headings such as ethno-biology, ethno-ornithology, and biocultural diversity. But it has gotten more attention from mainstream scientists lately because of efforts to better understand the world in the face of climate change and the accelerating loss of biodiversity.

Anthropologist Wade Davis, now at the University of British Columbia, refers to the constellation of the world’s cultures as the “ethnosphere,” or “the sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, ideas, inspirations, intuitions, brought into being by human imagination since the dawn of consciousness. It’s a symbol of all that we are, and all that we can be, as an astonishingly inquisitive species.”

One estimate says that while native peoples only comprise some 4 or 5 percent of the world’s population, they use almost a quarter of the world’s land surface and manage 11 percent of its forests. “In doing so, they maintain 80 percent of the planet’s biodiversity in, or adjacent to, 85 percent of the world’s protected areas,” writes Gleb Raygorodetsky, a researcher with the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria and the author of The Archipelago of Hope: Wisdom and Resilience from the Edge of Climate Change.

Tapping into this wisdom is playing an outsized role in sparsely settled places such as the Arctic, where change is happening rapidly – warming is occurring twice as fast as other parts of the world. Tero Mustonen, a Finnish researcher and chief of his village of Selkie, is pioneering the blending of TEK and mainstream science as the director of a project called the Snowchange Cooperative. “Remote sensing can detect changes,” he says. “But what happens as a result, what does it mean?” That’s where traditional knowledge can come into play as native people who make a living on the landscape as hunters and fishers note the dramatic changes taking place in
remote locales – everything from thawing permafrost to change in reindeer migration and other types of biodiversity redistribution.

The Skolt Sami people of Finland, for example, participated in a study that was published in the journal *Science* last year, which adopted indicators of environmental changes based on TEK. The Sami have seen and documented a decline in salmon in the Näätämö River, for instance. Now, based on their knowledge, they are adapting – reducing the number of seine nets they use to catch fish, restoring spawning sites, and also taking more pike, which prey on young salmon, as part of their catch. The project is part of a co-management process between the Sami and the government of Finland.

The project has also gathered information from the Sami about insects, which are temperature dependent and provide an important indicator of a changing Arctic. The Sami have witnessed dramatic changes in the range of insects that are making their way north. The scarabaeid beetle, for example, was documented by Sami people as the invader arrived in the forests of Finland and Norway, far north of its customary range. It has also become part of the Sami oral history.

It’s not only in the Arctic. Around the world there are efforts to make use of traditional wisdom to gain a better and deeper understanding of the planet – and there is sometimes a lot at stake.

Record brush fires burned across Australia in 2009, killing 173 people and injuring more than 400. The day the number of fires peaked – February 7 – is known as Black Saturday. It led to a great deal of soul searching in Australia, especially as climate warming has exacerbated fire seasons there.

Bill Gammage is an academic historian and fellow at the Humanities Research Center of the Australian National University, and his book, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How the Aborigines Made Australia*, looks at the complex and adept way that aborigines, prior to colonization in 1789, managed the landscape with “fire and no fire” – something called “fire stick farming.”

They used “cool” fires to control everything from biodiversity to water supply to the abundance of wildlife and edible plants. Gammage noted five stages of the indigenous use of fire – first was to control wildfire fuel; second, to maintain diversity; third, to balance species; fourth, to ensure abundance; and five, to locate resources conveniently and predictably. The current regime, he says, is still struggling with number one.

“Controlled fire averted uncontrolled fire,” Gammage says, “and fire or no-fire distributed plants with the precision of a flame edge. In turn, this attracted or deterred grazing animals and located them in habitats each preferred, making them abundant, convenient, and predictable. All was where fire or no-fire put it. Australia was not natural in 1788, but made.”

While the skill of aborigines with fire had been noted before the giant brushfires – early settlers remarked on the “park-like” nature of the landscape – and studied before, it’s taken on new urgency. That’s why Australian land managers have adopted many of the ideas and partnered with native people as co-managers. The fire practices of the aborigines are also being taught and used in other countries.
Scientists have looked to Australian natives for other insights into the natural world. A team of researchers collaborated with natives based on their observations of kites and falcons that fly with flaming branches from a forest fire to start other fires. It’s well known that birds will hunt mice and lizards as they flee the flames of a wildfire. But stories among indigenous people in northern Australia held that some birds actually started fires by dropping a burning branch in unburned places. Based on this TEK, researchers watched and documented this behavior.

“It’s a feeding frenzy, because out of these grasslands comes small birds, lizards, insects, everything fleeing in front of the fire,” said Bob Gosford, an indigenous rights lawyer and ornithologist, who worked on the research, in an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 2016.

Another recent study down under found that an ancient practice of using fire to clear land to improve hunting also creates a more diverse mosaic of re-growth that increases the number of the primate prey species: monitor lizards and kangaroos.

“Westerners have done little but isolate ourselves from nature,” said Mark Bonta, an assistant professor at Penn State Altoona who was on a co-author on the paper on fire and raptors. “Yet those who make a point of connecting with our earth in some form have enormous knowledge because they interact with a species. When you get into conservation, [that knowledge] is even more important.” Aboriginal people “don’t see themselves as superior to or separated from animals. They are walking storehouses of knowledge,” he said.

The Maya people of Mesoamerica have much to teach us about farming, experts say. Researchers have found that they preserve an astonishing amount of biodiversity in their forest gardens, in harmony with the surrounding forest. “The active gardens found around Maya forest villagers’ houses shows that it’s the most diverse domestic system in the world,” integrated into the forest ecosystem, writes Anabel Ford, who is head of the MesoAmerican Research Center at the University of California at Santa Barbara. “These forest gardeners are heroes, yet their skill and sophistication have too long been set aside and devalued.”

Valuing these life ways is an important part of the process. For the Skolt Sami, writes Mustonen, “seeing their language and culture valued led to an increase in self-esteem and power over their resources.”

It may not just be facts about the natural world that are important in these exchanges, but different ways of being and perceiving. In fact, there are researchers looking into the relationship between some indigenous people and the very different ways they see the world.

Felice Wyndham is an ecological anthropologist and ethnobiologist who has noted that people she has worked with can intimately sense the world beyond their body. “It’s a form of enhanced mindfulness,” she says. “It’s quite common, you see it in most hunter-gatherer groups. It’s an extremely developed skill base of cognitive agility, of being able to put yourself into a viewpoint and perspective of many creatures or objects — rocks, water, clouds.
“We, as humans, have a remarkable sensitivity, imagination, and ability to be cognitively agile,” Wyndham says. “If we are open to it and train ourselves to learn how to drop all of the distractions to our sensory capacity, we’re able to do so much more biologically than we use in contemporary industrial society.”

Among the most important messages from traditional people is their equanimity and optimism. There “is no sense of doom and gloom,” says Raygorodetsky. “Despite dire circumstances, they maintain hope for the future.”

https://e360.yale.edu/features/native-knowledge-what-ecologists-are-learning-from-indigenous-people

April 27, 2018

Forum on ecological civilization mulls China's role in way forward

Xinhua Net

CLAREMONT, the United States -- The 12th International Forum on Ecological Civilization, an initiative to create and promote new modes of development in China and the West, kicked off in Claremont, Southern California, Friday.

Themed "Ecological Civilization and Symbiotic Development", the two-day conference is hosted by the Institute for Postmodern Development of China, a non-profit organization.

Over 160 scholars from China, the United States and other countries are exchanging views on the latest developments in ecological civilization.

John B. Cobb Jr., a 93-year-old member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, called to improve the quality of community life in a way that would leave everyone better off while reducing the pressure on the natural environment, suggesting that China could lead the way.

"We need to describe the need in a different way, such as freeing everyone from degrading poverty while reducing the overall pressures on our natural environment," he said. "This would require changes in our lifestyle that are not now seriously discussed in any nation. Perhaps China can lead the way."

David Korten, co-founder and president of the Living Economies Forum,a non-profit that promotes positive living principles and a new economy grounded in them, said we have arrived at a defining moment in the human experience.

"Either we find our common path to an ecological civilization that meets the essential material needs of Earth's human population in a balanced relationship with (Earth's) natural systems, or we risk being the first Earth species knowingly to choose self-extinction," he said.
Korten, the author of influential books including "When Corporations Rule the World," and "The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community", said this poses a distinctive challenge to China, which must now choose between leading the world on one of two paths.

The mayor of Claremont, Opanyi Nasiali, welcomed scholars from around the world, saying, "I hope this conference stresses the importance of collaboration and strengthens the respect we must have for each other in this global village."


April 28, 2018

7 arrested as faith leaders protest Trans Mountain pipeline expansion in Burnaby

By Chad Pawson
CBC News

Leaders from a broad spectrum of religious faiths stood with Indigenous people at a Kinder Morgan work site in Burnaby, B.C., on Saturday to protest the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Unitarians, two choirs, members of 10 Christian denominations, and interfaith groups all participated by singing and chanting but also fixing prayers, rosaries and flags to the gates of Kinder Morgan's site at Shellmont Street and Underhill Avenue.

Amal Rana placed a quote from the Prophet Mohammad on the gates.

"Environmental justice is a huge part of the Islamic faith, actually all our faiths," she said. "We are here to stand with Indigenous people and also for the earth ... that is part of our spirituality."

Seven people were arrested by Burnaby RCMP officers for breaching a court-ordered injunction that prevents people from obstructing or impeding access to Kinder Morgan facilities in Burnaby.

The groups said they were against the expansion because of concerns it could cause environmental damage, and that there was not enough meaningful consultation done with Indigenous stakeholders.

Bat-Ami Hensen, a member of Metro Vancouver's Jewish Community said it was important to stand with people from other faiths in opposition to the project.

"We have common values," she said of all the groups gathered on Saturday.
Others like independent Christian Reverend Dr. Vivian Marie says the event was also to show a commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous people.

"Our faith demands that as well as care of the earth," she also said.

Laurel Dykstra, a priest with the Anglican Church of Canada, says religious leaders are putting prayers into action by being willing to be arrested.

"People of faith are standing in solidarity with Indigenous people to say this pipeline will not be built," she said.

Meanwhile, parts of a protest camp set up in Burnaby appeared to have been vandalized with spray paint saying, "protesters not welcome," and "go home."

Burnaby RCMP have not yet confirmed if it received complaints about the spray paint or if they are investigating.

The Trans Mountain project received federal approval in November of 2016. The National Energy Board (NEB) concluded that the project is in Canada's public interest and it could proceed with 157 conditions.

Since then, legal challenges and political wrangling have stalled the expansion, which would increase the amount of oil or products being transported from Edmonton to Burnaby from 300,000 barrels per day to 890,000 barrels per day.

On Friday, the B.C. government asked the B.C. Court of Appeal if it has the jurisdiction to bring in stricter rules for companies to ferry more heavy oil — like diluted bitumen — through the province.

This week Environment and Climate Change Minister Catherine McKenna wrote an open letter to B.C.’s environment minister proposing the creation of a joint scientific panel to study oil spills and response measures.

Trans Mountain says it has prepared extensive plans to help emergency responders react faster, and more effectively, in limiting potential impacts of a spill.


April 30, 2018

Mormon environmentalist conveys ecological message through fiction
The phrase “Mormon environmentalist” is not one you hear every day, given that Mormons in the United States are often politically conservative. But Utah resident George Handley is exactly that – committed to both the Mormon faith and to rescuing the environment.

As a professor of interdisciplinary humanities at Mormonism’s flagship school, Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, Handley has long penned nonfiction that has addressed the impact that human beings are having on the planet. But now he’s channeling his creative energies in a new direction, through fiction. His debut novel American Fork has just been released from indy press Roundfire Books.

Set in 2001, American Fork tells the story of a reclusive botanist, Zacharias Harker, who enlists the help of a young artist, Alba, in chronicling the damage climate change is wreaking in Utah’s Wasatch Mountains.

“Alba is someone, as an artist, who is just discovering her love of the natural environment,” says Handley. “And Mr. Harker has a deep connection to the natural world that’s not a function of an academic or political interest, but something deeper. He’s wrestling with deep existential questions that emerge from the suffering he’s had in his own life, which unfolds as the novel moves forward.”

Alba’s interest in the environment is strongly influenced by her Mormon faith, which is also true of the author, who says his approach is “strongly influenced by literature and art and spirituality. I certainly am interested in the politics surrounding environmentalism, but I tend to think of those issues as less of an activist and more of a humanist and a believing Mormon.”

Not all Mormons would agree. In the Next Mormons Survey, a nationally representative sample of Latter-day Saints conducted in 2016, only 41% of Mormons agreed with a statement that “the earth’s climate is getting warmer because of human activity.”

The results were even lower among Mormons in Utah, the setting of Handley’s novel: just over a third of Utah Latter-day Saints say the climate is changing because of human activity.

Handley says he’s not surprised by this resistance to scientists’ findings about climate change and the environment, though it saddens him. “I live it and experience it all the time,” he says, noting that in two decades of teaching at BYU, he has worked to bring people with different ideas into dialogue with each other.

“I spend a lot of time trying to help people identify the common ground they already have. Obviously, I’m interested in helping people understand the science and be informed with the best information, but you can’t go into discussions seeing climate change as some kind of culture war. It’s such a non-starter.”
At BYU, he has co-taught a course with biology professor (and novelist and friend) Steven Peck, focusing on religion and the environment. Because of the success of that course, Peck offered a related spinoff elective in the biology department, and Handley wound up designing an environmental humanities program.

Now through fiction, he is able to weave environmental themes into the lives of his characters. “There is increasing interest in the ways in which fiction can help us think about the environmental crisis in productive ways that are harder to come by in other forms of writing,” he says. He cites the nature writing of Barbara Kingsolver and Amitav Ghosh as formative in the burgeoning field of environmental fiction.

“The compelling case to be made for narrative is that it allows you to step into a world that can shape your moral imagination in vital ways. If the fiction writer is doing his or her job well, the novel can retrofit your imagination.”

Handley will promote the novel with readings and book signings in Utah, including an appearance at the King’s English Bookstore in Salt Lake City on the evening of Tuesday, May 29.

So far, he says, the early response has been quite positive, though he would not be surprised to have some pushback from a few conservative Latter-day Saints. Handley says he wishes religious people would “put down the sword of political ideology” where climate change is concerned and “just think about and celebrate the principles and values of stewardship, which are so beautifully articulated in Mormon doctrine. And really get serious about living up to the responsibilities that are spelled out in our scriptures.”

Mormonism, he says, is actually a treasure trove of concern for the environment, which is something he hopes more Latter-day Saints will take seriously. “We either neglect a lot of those teachings or we actually dismiss them. In the name of a political set of loyalties we think that environmental concerns are things we should be dismissive or distrustful of.”


April 30, 2018

'Catholics Are Still In' campaign recommits support for Paris climate pact

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

As federal steps to curb climate change wane in the United States, a new campaign looks to add a loud and broad Catholic voice to a nationwide reassertion of American commitment to the international pact to address a warming world.
The Catholic Climate Covenant officially launched on April 25 the "Catholics Are Still In" campaign to assemble church institutions behind a united Catholic Climate Declaration advocating for U.S. action on climate change and support for the Paris Agreement despite the Trump administration’s plans to exit the deal.

"As Catholic communities, organizations, and institutions in the United States, we join with state, tribal, and local governments, as well as businesses, financial institutions, and other faith organizations, to declare that we are still in on actions that meet the climate goals outlined in the Paris Agreement," the declaration reads.

It continues: "Climate change is an urgent moral issue because it compromises the future of our common home, threatens human life and human dignity, and adds to the hardships already experienced by the poorest and most vulnerable people both at home and abroad. We teach that governments exist to protect and promote the common good, and that 'the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all,' " referencing a passage from Pope Francis’ 2015 environmental encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

The Paris Agreement, adopted in the French capital in December 2015 at the COP21 United Nations climate summit, committed all nations to take steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions — the primary driver of climate change — toward the goal of holding average global temperature rise "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) or as low as 1.5 C (2.7 F).

That threshold is the point scientists predict the effects of climate change, among them increased droughts, wildfires, intense flooding and extreme weather events, will become most extreme and likely irreversible. A study released April 25 funded by the U.S. military concluded that more than 1,000 low-lying islands could become "inhabitable" by midcentury or sooner due to rising sea levels.

The Catholics Are Still In campaign is coordinated by Catholic Climate Covenant and its partner members, which include the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The campaign seeks to gather through June 11 thousands of signatures from the nation's dioceses, parishes, congregations and offices of Catholic organizations. The Catholic Climate Covenant will then announce the final count around June 18, the third anniversary the release of Laudato Si'.

"We are strongly calling for nonpartisan dialogue and approaches to climate change. To really ending the partisanship about this, because it is about care for creation, care for our future, care for our common home, care for the most vulnerable," Jose Aguto, Catholic Climate Covenant associate director, told NCR.

The Catholics Are Still In campaign aligns with the broader "We Are Still In" coalition that formed among cities, states and a multitude of organizations and businesses in the wake of President Donald Trump's announcement last June that he would withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement at the earliest opportunity.
Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, a nation cannot formally announce its intention to leave the agreement until three years after its ratification date, Nov. 4, 2016, with the withdrawal process taking effect a year later. That timeline places the earliest date for a U.S. exit at Nov. 4, 2020 — the day after the 2020 presidential election.

Should the U.S. formally leave the Paris Agreement, it would stand as the only nation outside the deal, originally signed by 195 nations and so far ratified by 175.

Since the launch of We Are Still In, more than 2,700 governors, mayors, university presidents, and business and faith leaders, representing 158.8 million Americans, have signed onto that declaration. As part of Earth Day celebrations, the We Are Still In coalition launched a "We Are Taking Action" campaign to drive efforts to address climate change ahead of the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco in September.

Plans are underway for a Catholic and faith-based event during the summit to highlight steps taken by religious communities.

After the June announcement, Catholic Climate Covenant will turn attention to asking the signatories to pledge steps toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions in their own institutions. Its Catholic Energies program has already begun working with dioceses and parishes in exploring ways to reduce their energy use and reliance of emissions-producing fossil fuels.

"We hope that the Catholic community will also make those tangible commitments as part of this effort," Aguto said.

For now, though, the focus is on gathering Catholic groups in solidarity.

In mid-April, three bishops — Archbishop Timothy Broglio, chair of bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace; Bishop Frank Dewane, chair of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; and Bishop Richard Pates, episcopal liaison to the Catholic Climate Covenant — wrote a letter to all bishops asking them to sign their dioceses to the declaration, and to promote the campaign among Catholic organizations and ministries in their dioceses.

Already, numerous bishops have taken up the invite, including the archdioceses of Atlanta, Indianapolis, Miami and Newark, New Jersey, along with the dioceses of Duluth, Minnesota, and Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana.

In addition, Pates wrote a separate letter mailed to each of the 28,000-plus Catholic organizations listed in the Official Catholic Directory asking for their support.

"This declaration is a distinct Catholic expression in support of the We Are Still In campaign. The Catholic Climate Declaration expresses the moral imperative to protect and promote human life and human dignity, the poorest and most vulnerable peoples, and our common home," wrote Pates, retired bishop of Des Moines, Iowa.
He also cited the U.S. bishops' 2001 document "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good," where they stated, "At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both 'the human environment' and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us."

The launch of the Catholics Are Still In campaign came the same day that French President Emmanuel Macron in an address to a joint session of Congress expressed his belief that, "one day, the United States will come back and join the Paris Agreement."

"By polluting the oceans, not mitigating CO2 emissions and destroying our biodiversity, we are killing our planet. Let us face it: There is no Planet B," he said. "On this issue, it may happen we have a disagreement between the United States and France. It may happen, like in all families. But that is, for me, a short-term disagreement. In the long run, we will have to face the same realities. We are citizens of the same planet.

"We have to face it. Beyond some short-term disagreements, we have to work together," Macron said.

On April 30, climate talks are set to open in Bonn, Germany, in preparation for COP24, the annual United Nations climate summit, to be held this year in Katowice, Poland. There, nations will conduct the first global stock-take to gauge progress in meeting their voluntary, self-established climate action plans set in Paris — which, if fully implemented, would hold warming only to 3°C by century's end — and then ratchet up their commitments.

While still holding climate change is a global problem requiring a global solution, the parallel purposes of the We Are Still In and Catholics Are Still In campaigns intend to show that the non-state community isn't willing to wait.

"Our future rests not upon our politics or economics but the degree to which all of us meet the moral call to our neighbors, children, God's creation and our common future," Aguto said.


May 1, 2018

Reading the Quran Connects Me to Nature

By Jai Hamid Bashir
Sierra Club
Before I take the sacred text out of my backpack, I dip my hands in the cool rush of the creek that runs into the city below. Doing so, I connect myself to the inhabitants of the valley and all beings on this planet that this water may have cycled through. I'm in Big Cottonwood Canyon, a watershed that supplies drinking water to Utah's Wasatch Front. Two hydroelectric plants are nestled among the conifers. I push my hands into the water to feel the slipperiness of rocks soft as the underbellies of fish. I am connected to the sea by the perfume of algae and brought closer to the scent of whales.

I've brought the Quran with me. Precious care is given to the Quran as the most sacred of texts. Tradition forbids the book to touch the ground, and it must always be held with clean hands. I unfurl the book from my mother's scarf, in which I'd wrapped it for safekeeping, and take a seat amid a landscape brushed by dark greens and the gray of oncoming winter.

I carry my traditions with me in a backpack, into wide-open spaces, to tie the threads of sacred goodness and common divinity. My family is Muslim but culturally connected to Hinduism, and through the landscapes of Utah, I am blazing my own spiritual trails. Being an American who is part of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora, I often feel that I do not belong to either human-designated pole, so the more-than-human world is my refuge. Among these spaces—the wide, black-eyed communities of aspen and the cool seats in amphitheaters of redrock—my identity is planetary citizen. I am a citizen of Earth in the silence and soil of the canyon, in the shadow of oblong hoodoos. I am an earthling today, sitting, trying to read the Quran in English, to cast my net further into the waters of past and present.

After the Prophet was born, he was sent to live with a Bedouin family, because culture and custom held that the desert landscape, away from the noise and pollution of civilization, nourished growing bodies and minds. The young Prophet spent his childhood in a land of rippling and coiling sand, similar to this redrock country. He talked to camels in markets, holding their oblong faces that dip down due to the gravity of their heavy necks, soothing them and instructing people not to idle on their backs.

Once, when I was in Big Cottonwood Canyon, I saw a moose. Her stance paralleled mine, and our eyes met in a shared moment of mammalian intimacy. I realized that our eyes were the same color. In that moment, in my distance and respect, I considered how both our bodies and our lands are mistreated. We held each other in one another's gaze, the same color as the soil and sand that has shaped the world.

The sun sets, and I curl up with a blanket stitched by my grandmother, my Nani, and sleep for an hour under the Dog Star. I dream not of Utah's January smog but of clean air wafting through my lungs like a long, cold drink of water, rivers without end that transform into vibrant oceans. I hold my ear to the shell of the past and present and listen to the voices that come through. In my galaxy of private epiphanies in Utah's mountains and deserts, I have found a way to create an interconnected mesh of my heritage and my fierce love of this planet, grounding and consolidating all my various identities into one based in empathy, kindness, and connectedness—teachings I have found time and time again in the Quran. I tuck away the book and find sleep under a gnarled lattice of pines that goes on and on among the unknown reefs of eternity.
Religious leaders mobilize to protect indigenous people and forests

By Willie Shubert
Mongabay

- Religious leaders joined forces with indigenous peoples from Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Meso-America and Peru at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo in 2017 to launch the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI).
- The IRI plans to mobilize high profile religious leaders to intervene in policy forums and advocate for forests and indigenous people with support from UN Environment.
- It has been estimated that one third of climate change mitigation is from tropical rainforests and securing land rights for indigenous peoples is an effective and low-cost method of reducing carbon emissions.

What if the moral and spiritual influence of the world’s religious communities and their leaders were directed towards protecting rainforests and their indigenous guardians? Is this an appropriate role for religious and faith-based communities to take on? The coalition of religious and indigenous leaders behind the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative believe it is.

Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Taoist religious leaders joined forces with indigenous peoples from Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Meso-America and Peru at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo in 2017 to launch the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) and are committed to mobilizing billions of people of faith to stand up for rainforests and their protectors. The IRI global steering committee reconvened at the UN Headquarters in New York on April 19, 2018 to give a briefing on this initiative and to receive consultation.

“We are here tonight at this stage to listen,” said Reverend Fletcher Harper a writer, preacher and executive director of Green Faith as he addressed the diverse group of indigenous leaders and other attendees in New York. “There is a great deal of historical inertia from which we must overcome and much blindness from which we must repent and for which we will need your help,” said Rev. Harper. “We are here to listen. We are in your debt. We hope to be worthy of your partnership.”

Faith leaders as eminent as Pope Francis and faith communities have made contributions to environmental efforts in the past. The creation of The Paris Agreement was aided by people of faith who organized, engaged in civil disobedience, and mobilized millions to sign petitions. Harper says faith communities and organizations including The Parliament of the World’s
Religions, Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, The World Council of Churches, Religions for Peace, the Real Network and Green Faith are committed to bringing that same level of commitment to protecting forests and indigenous peoples.

This protection cannot come soon enough. In 2016, nearly 4 people were murdered per week defending land from industries like mining, logging, and agribusiness — *40% of these deaths* were indigenous people. For most indigenous people, land serves as the center of their spirituality, livelihood, and survival. And in the case of tropical forests much more is at stake—the health of the entire planet.

It has been estimated that *one third of climate change mitigation* is from tropical rainforests and securing land rights for indigenous peoples is an effective and low-cost method of reducing carbon emissions. According to the World Resource Institute, securing these rights in Brazil, Colombia, and Bolivia, for example, would be the equivalent of removing between 9 and 12 million cars from the road for one year. In areas of the Amazon where indigenous people have land rights, deforestation is *2 to 3 times lower*. However, *less than 10%* of indigenous people hold formal land rights to the forests they protect and inhabit, making it difficult to take any legal actions against those who would illegally or unethically exploit resources.

Worldwide, IRI plans to mobilize high profile religious leaders to intervene in policy forums and advocate for forests and indigenous people with implementation support by UN Environment. IRI will also launch early programs in five high risk, high priority countries: Brazil, Colombia, Peru, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Indonesia. These programs will support the development of faith-based networks with diverse advisory councils which include local indigenous people.

“Protecting tropical forests is not only a matter of the protection of nature but also about the protection of the cultures, languages, livelihoods and human diversity that thrive within these ecosystems,” said Reverend Harper. “The protection of forests is only done well when it is integrally connected to the protection of indigenous peoples and we wish to reaffirm our recognition of this as fundamental to what this initiative is about.”

IRI steering committee member and Ambassador of Norway Mae Ellen Steiner acknowledged that governmental partners have a long way to go and have lots of inconsistencies, but, at least in the case of Norway, they are trying. Norway has invested heavily in IRI and has devoted almost US$3 billion over the past decade to support developing countries to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, and has committed to continuing substantial investments.

During the question and comment portion of the New York briefing, indigenous leaders in the room echoed a shared ethos surrounding the sanctity of the forests, their centrality to their lives and expressed enthusiasm about working with IRI and its mission. However, concerns were raised about dealing with unsupportive governments, local industries and businesses.

Leaders and representative of NGOs and advocacy groups (such as the Water Culture Institute and Rainforest Alliance) were eager to learn how they, as secular organizations, could help. The steering committee members were clear that atheists, humanists, and any person of ethical
convictions had a place in dialogue and coalition building. The IRI members were also reminded and encouraged to include the voices of youth and women in the process.

“I have heard from many indigenous people that our religions need to re-indigenize,” said Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, IRI steering committee member and Professor Emerita of Religious Studies at St. Francis College, New York, who has been part of the global interfaith movement for over thirty years.

“What does this mean?” Dr. Pederson asked. “Within the philosophies, worldviews, and ethics – the deepest values and visions of the world’s religions – there are those elements that correspond to the indigenous spiritual traditions. The Pope’s encyclical *Laudato Si* states that all living beings have dignity, not merely human beings. Father Thomas Berry famously said the universe is not a collection of objects but a communion of subjects. All beings have a spirit, personhood and are worthy of respect. So, our traditions need to draw out from within themselves these elements, hold them up, and make them as strong as possible to help us to be effective in the work we are doing, in solidarity. This is the task before us in order to move hearts and minds. It is not always easy, but we must never give up.”

A recording of the IRI Briefing and Consultation in its entirety is available here.

View more features in Mongabay’s ongoing series on conservation and religion here.


May 9, 2018

Deal on Murray Darling Basin Plan could make history for Indigenous water rights

By Sue Jackson
The Conversation

On Monday night the Labor Party agreed to a federal government policy package intended to ensure the survival of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The proposed amendments to the plan, and the complex technical details of water allocation, have been heavily scrutinised as a politically intriguing development in the long-standing contest between allocating water for the environment or for irrigation.

What is less appreciated is that, if implemented, the bipartisan commitment may do more to advance the water rights of Aboriginal peoples in the Murray-Darling Basin than any other government initiative in the history of the region.
Long-overdue measures

Traditional owners of the Murray-Darling Basin have been told for too long that there is no water left for their needs. Our research estimated that Indigenous-specific water entitlements comprise much less than 1% of Australian water allocations.

The agreed measures include A$40 million for Aboriginal communities to invest in water entitlements for both economic and cultural purposes, a A$20 million economic development fund to benefit Aboriginal groups most affected by the basin plan, and A$1.5 million to support Aboriginal waterway assessments.

State water resource plans in the northern basin will be expected to provide water entitlements for Aboriginal groups. Environmental water programs will be open to Aboriginal participation, address Aboriginal values, and offer job opportunities in restoration projects.

Additionally, more support will be provided for the two representative Aboriginal water alliances, the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations. They have been struggling to have their claims for water rights heard amid the more influential concerns of the irrigation, environmental and scientific sectors.

These social justice measures are long overdue. Aboriginal rights are a blind spot in the country’s water governance arrangements and in its broader relationship with Indigenous peoples.

A history of dispossession

Australia’s pattern of inequitable distribution been entrenched at each juncture of water law reform: when rights to the use and control of water were vested in the Crown in the late 1800s, and again in the 1990s when Australian governments moved to establish a water market, without considering the implications for Indigenous peoples.

National water policy didn’t recognise Indigenous water rights until 2004 – a full decade after the Mabo High Court decision and the Native Title Act 1993.

The National Water Initiative requires that Indigenous water needs are addressed, but the reality falls short. Until now little serious attention has been given to securing Indigenous access to commercially valuable water entitlements.

As a result, Indigenous people have been largely excluded from the benefits of government agreements that have created tradable entitlements and environmental allocations. A combination of narrow interpretations of customary rights to water, long delays around native title claims, discretionary terminology in the national policy, and the contentious nature of allocating water to “new” water users in the stressed Murray Darling Basin has precluded Indigenous access.
With many parts of the basin fully allocated to water users with a history of access and entitlement, Indigenous communities in these regions remain greatly constrained in their ability to shape the use and management of water.

Since 2004, numerous government reviews and reports have noted that water plans, among other shortcomings, are failing to achieve Indigenous objectives. A 2017 Productivity Commission review referred to the needs of Indigenous peoples as the “unfinished business” of water reform. It shied away from recommending strong reallocation measures, however, on the premise that water for Indigenous commercial purposes “is separate from the provision of water for cultural purposes and is not addressed in the NWI”.

Indigenous Australians see clear connections between the past and present in accounting for the skewed distribution of entitlements and for the lack of control they are able to assert over water management.

Throughout the recent reform era Indigenous organisations and academics have recommended reallocation measures, such as a water trust facility, buy-backs or special purpose licences, but these have not occurred on any meaningful scale.

For example, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council put forward a proposal for a water trust when NSW reformed its water law in 2000. This would have allowed Aboriginal people to participate in the water market and allocate water to meet self-determined objectives. The proposal included a small levy on water trades to support costs, but it was not supported.

According to Indigenous lawyer Tony McAvoy, the government considered expenditure of this magnitude to be “reckless”. The water market was still developing and thought to be too volatile.

Environmental degradation has also eroded the capacity of the basin’s river systems to meet the needs of Indigenous people. Although many, including traditional owner groups, are gravely concerned about the environmental consequences of the bipartisan agreement, if implemented in full, it will represent a significant step towards water rights restitution in the Murray-Darling Basin.

It is hoped that the experience of restoring some measure of water justice to the many Aboriginal nations of the basin will inspire Australian parliaments to pursue similar reforms for the benefit of Indigenous communities in the rest of the country.

https://theconversation.com/deal-on-murray-darling-basin-plan-could-make-history-for-indigenous-water-rights-96264

May 10, 2018

Indigenous and Child Environmental Activists Receive WWF Award
"We depend on a healthy environment and a surrounding that is alive," Nina Gualinga said during the award ceremony.

Two Latin American women received the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International President’s Youth award, given to people under 30 who have made significant contributions to nature conservation.

Nina Gualinga, a 24-year-old woman leader of the Indigenous Kichwa community of Sarayaku in the Ecuadorean Amazon, received the award Tuesday for her active participation in Indigenous resistance to defend their territory from the state and transnational extractive companies.

In 2012, Gualinga participated in the international hearing at the Inter-American Court on Human Rights in Costa Rica, where the Sarayaku community won a landmark case against the Ecuadorean government. In 1998 the government granted Sarayaku territory to an oil company without consulting the community.

Today she works with other communities across the Ecuadorean Amazon on international campaigns to protect and defend the territories and to advocate for a fossil fuel free economy.

The other recipient, 12-year-old Madison Pearl Edwards of Belize effectively advocated for the protection of the Belize Barrier Reef by mobilizing public support against offshore oil exploration in Belize. Her campaign led to the adoption of a permanent moratorium on all extractive activities in Belize waters in December 2017.

Edwards issued a call to children around the world to protect the planet. “I feel proud that Belize has taken such an important step forward and that we helped make it happen but there is so much more we all can—and need to—do. Destroying our natural resources with selfish and short-sighted interests is not OK. I’d like to encourage children around the world to stand up for our planet,” Edwards said.

Meanwhile Gualinga highlighted the importance of Indigenous people as protectors of nature. “As indigenous people we depend on a healthy environment and a surrounding that is alive. We call it The Living Forest. We need clean rivers, because we drink the water directly from them, we need healthy soil, because we grow our own food, we need the animals, the birds and the fish and they need the forest. Our whole survival as a people depends on the future of the Amazon,” Nina said during the award ceremony.


May 10, 2018
World Vision launches sermon guide on WASH

By Gifty Amofa
Ghana News Agency

Accra - The World Vision International, Ghana, a Christian humanitarian organization, has launched a sermon guide on Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) with a call on Christians to rise up to promote human transformation.

The guide is to ensure that Christian leaders understand WASH issues to help cause attitudinal and behavioural change through the engagement of other Christians.

Mr Dickens Thunde, the Director of the Organisation, who made the call, said, Christians in Africa were not living up to expectation and it was high time they lived their lives holistically by making lives better for the needy.

This was during the opening session of a two-day National Partnership Forum on Transformational Development being held in Accra.

It is a collaborative effort with faith-based organisations to help identify the most vulnerable and how to meet their needs.

Mr Thunde explained that World Vision’s mission was to follow Jesus in working with the poor and oppressed, and to promote human transformation, seek justice and be witnesses to God’s Kingdom, all to put smiles on the faces of children and their families.

Mr Thunde mentioned five new strategies adopted by the group in line with the SDGs to effectively carry out their mandate as; deepening their commitment to the most vulnerable, focus on Ministry for greater results, collaborating and advocating for broader impact, delivering high quality service and living out faith and calling with boldness.

The Sermon guide developed by World Vision was as a result of the fact that Ghana achieved eight percent in sanitation, 15 percent living without toilet facilities, 19 percent defecate openly, about 60 percent share latrines while 58 per cent indiscriminately disposing waste, as released by Water Resource Commission.

Also, more than 3.5 million people have no access to safe water.

He said in term of religion, Christians were the majority with 71.2 percent out of the total population, so the Organisation decided to bring in faith leaders to help engage Christians on the challenges of the menace and for change behaviour.
Its themes were developed by experts, backed by the Scriptures, reviewed by the Ghana Integrated WASH Programme for Technology, among various Christian leaders.

The Sermon guide, he revealed included importance of WASH, personal hygiene, hand washing at critical times, food hygiene, water safety at point of use, and child health.

Sanitation; human excreta disposal, care for the environment, sustainability; community ownership and management were the other topics treated in the guide and are all backed with Biblical quotations.

The Reverend Godwin Ahlijah, the Executive Director of Meaningful Life International, an NGO, said, the Gospel was holistic, therefore Christians should not only be Heavenly minded, but of “a little earthly use,” thus, the guide should be made to work.

He advised that the Sermon guide would not be theoretically launched but be infused in the course outline of Bible schools, used as Sunday school study material and added to morning devotional manuals.

Rev Ahlijah suggested that the book be introduced in the educational curriculum as it would change and save the country.

The media should also promote it by provoking discussions, among other programmes to make the content known to all and sundry, he appealed.

Rev Nii Armah Ashitey, the Chairman for the occasion, called on all Christian leaders, to commit to the promotion of WASH ideals.

http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/world-vision-launches-sermon-guide-on-wash-132454

May 11, 2018

Cemetery's green project aims to 'protect God's magnificent creation'

By Richard Szczepanowski, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Washington — Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington blessed a newly completed green infrastructure project at a Catholic cemetery May 7, saying it "is part of our effort to keep God's creation as beautiful as when he created it."
The Archdiocese of Washington teamed with the Nature Conservancy, a national organization working on land and water conservation, to create the natural infrastructure that will reduce pollutants from water runoff in Mount Olivet Cemetery in Northeast Washington.

The bioretention rain garden, Wuerl said, "would protect God's magnificent creation ... so that future generations can enjoy it."

Mount Olivet's new garden project replaces or retrofits impervious surfaces with waterretaining green infrastructures such as, grass, flowerbeds, shrubs and trees.

An impervious surface is one through which rainfall or surface water cannot flow. Such surfaces include asphalt, concrete, buildings and other covered areas, patios, tennis courts, driveways, swimming pools, parking lots and the like.

When storm water hits impervious surfaces, it collects pollutants such as oil, sediment or trash before flowing into sewers and eventually waterways. The storm water flowing off Mount Olivet Cemetery drains directly into Hickey Run, one of the Anacostia River's tributaries. The cemetery's new water-retaining green infrastructure already has significantly reduced its impervious surface area, cemetery officials said.

Mark Tercek, president and CEO of the Nature Conservancy, praised the cemetery's rain garden bioretention effort, saying "it will reduce storm water pollution and increase the quality of life for D.C. residents."

"This (rain garden) stands to prevent billions of gallons of urban storm water from reaching the Anacostia River and eventually the Chesapeake Bay. It is a big deal," he added.

Tommy Wells, a former member of the District of Columbia's City Council who is now director of the district's Department of Energy and Environment, noted that the Anacostia River "is one of the 10 most environmentally compromised rivers in the United States."

John Spalding, president and chief executive officer of Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Washington, called the project one that would "improve our environmental footprint" as part of Catholic cemeteries "being fully committed to serving families" of those buried there.

Wuerl said that it was appropriate that this unique rain garden should be installed at Mount Olivet because "our cemeteries serve a significant and real purpose."

"This is sacred ground where we bury our dead," he said, adding that the cemeteries are also maintained "for family members to come and visit, reflect and remember."

Cheryl Tyiska, manager of Mount Olivet Cemetery, called the bioretention effort "a work that directly benefits people and nature."
Tercek, who noted that he was raised Catholic, praised the church "for its history of caring for people and the earth." He also praised Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical on the environment, "Laudato Si'."

"The pope has pushed Catholics and others to remember their responsibility to care for the environment," Tercek said. "We need to bring people together to get things done. It is what the pope has called us to do, and we are doing it here today."

Wuerl also referred to the papal document and noted that the pope is calling everyone to have a renewed commitment to care for the environment.

"We are called not only to care for our common home, this beautiful creation, but we must sustain it and pass it on to future generations, the cardinal said.

Prior to blessing the storm water retention gardens, Wuerl reminded those at the gathering that God is "the source and origin of every blessing and He has placed His children on the earth to be good stewards of these tremendous gifts … so that in all things we might honor the demands of charity."

In addition to reducing rainwater runoff, the project is generating storm water retention credits. This allows private developers to meet a portion of their requirements for storm water retention through projects that retain storm water elsewhere in the city. Referring to the storm water retention credit, Wells said this "is the first place in America where this is being done."

The project was financed through a joint venture called District Stormwater LLC, founded by the Nature Conservancy's NatureVest conservation investing unit and Encourage Capital, an asset management firm based in New York, and impact capital from Prudential Financial.

Mount Olivet Cemetery, which this year marks its 160th anniversary, also will be the site of two future collaborations between the archdiocese and the Nature Conservancy. More than 150 new trees are being planted at the cemetery and works are underway for a native pollinator garden that will provide habitat for wildlife, and water filtration benefits.

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Szczepanowski is on the staff of the Catholic Standard, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Washington.


May 14, 2018

Amid Haiti's challenges, congregation continues serving those living in poverty
"Come, let's cheer the Word of God. It is a word of life. It is a word of love and peace."

At once joyous, inspiring and hopeful, the acclamation, sung in French at a service of perpetual profession, came on a sunny, mild day with no clouds, no winds and no seeming threats.

It was a day that belonged to God.

But it was also a day that belonged to Haiti's Little Sisters of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, a Haiti-based congregation that has faced and withstood numerous challenges in its seven-decade history but is looking toward the future with optimism, hope and a distinct sense of mission.

"We believe in God, and we put our faith in God, in the providence of God; God never leaves us," said Sr. Denise Desil, 66, the congregation's mother general, said in an interview in September before three Haitian novitiates took their perpetual vows.

Founded by Fr. Louis Farnese and the Rev. Mother Carmella Lohler in 1948, the congregation had the specific mission, according to a congregational history, of "giving relief to people in the poorest and most remote areas."

"This was a revolutionary concept at the time, akin to liberation theology," the history notes.

Today, a small portrait of the martyred Salvadoran bishop Óscar Romero hangs in the congregation's mission house in the southern community of Baradères, and Desil's face brightens at the mention of Romero.

"Somebody gave us that portrait. We liked the way Óscar Romero talked and took the position for the poor people," she said. He was martyred for his advocacy of those living in poverty, she added. "He talked about justice."

Romero also talked about the hope in faith, something that resonates deeply with Desil. One reason for that is that the congregation has nearly 175 members, and younger women continue to join the congregation. In addition to the three women who recently took vows, there are currently three postulants and two novices, and more half of the congregation's sisters are under 50 years old, she said.

The three women taking their vows in September, Carmelle Desrosiers, 44, Joselène Mahotiere, 37, and Célina Dalmacy, 37, all came to the congregation from earlier careers: nursing for Desrosiers and teaching for Mahotiere and Dalmacy.

The three are from regions of rural Haiti where the congregation works in the areas of health, agriculture and education. All said the work of the congregation as advocates for Haitians living in poverty made a deep impression on them.
"I appreciated the work of the sisters among the peasant people," said Mahotiere, who is from Baudin, the locale of the first congregational mission.

"We pay special attention to the peasant people. This is our mission," said Dalmacy, who is from the Artibonite department, or province, in northwestern Haiti.

Desrosiers, who is also from Artibonite, said she knew sisters from other congregations before she met sisters from the Little Sisters of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. She said their work proved to be a motivation and the congregation's charism was "what I had been looking for," melding both service and spiritual grounding.

The women say they have had good models and mentors among the older sisters, including Sr. Zulmy Leon, 83, who is from a rural family in southern Haiti and whose accomplishments include organizing 24 farmers groups into a federation for farmer advocacy and education, and helping train 2,000 rural Haitians in agronomy.

Haiti, with a population of about 10 million, is becoming increasingly urban: About 2 out of 10 Haitians now live in the capital metropolis of Port-au-Prince. But a majority of Haitians still live in rural areas, according to the World Bank, and many of those now living in cities come from rural family backgrounds.

Many of the challenges Haitians face are the challenges of rural areas: drought or other climate extremes, like hurricanes; the effects of climate change; and the continued need for finding new water sources and access to wells for safe drinking water.

"There is a constant problem with water in Haiti," Leon said.

Leon and the three younger women spoke to Global Sisters Report in a large common area of the congregation's motherhouse in Rivière-Froide, a suburb of Port-au-Prince, a place that promotes a "feeling of family," Desil said.

It is here the congregation has consolidated work in recent years following several tragedies stemming from Haiti's 2010 7.0-magnitude earthquake. Three sisters and a driver working for the congregation died when the congregation's small house in Port-au-Prince collapsed; a fourth sister died elsewhere. And 122 students perished when a congregation-run school in the western city of Carrefour collapsed during the quake.

It has taken years for the congregation to emerge from those events, and Desil acknowledges that they still sting.

"I was near the school the day of the earthquake, and it was terrible," she said. "I thought it was the end of the world."

But the tragedies also showed the need for the congregation to continue its work, and in places that are hard to access.
"We do something unique. We go to places where the others don't go," she said. "We have a very poor country, the poorest in the western hemisphere, and we have a lot of challenges in order to survive. We need to support people who count on us."

One locale that counts on the Little Sisters of St. Thérèse is Baradères, located in the Haitian department of Nippes, 130 miles west of Port-au-Prince.

Getting to Baradères requires an all-day drive along poorly paved mountain roads and switchbacks. But during the autumn rainy season, Baradères is heavily affected by rain, something all too evident in October 2016, when Hurricane Matthew hit large areas of southern Haiti, including Nippes.

"This may look like paradise, but after the hurricane, it was like hell," said Little Sisters of St. Thérèse Sr. Marie Judith Prophete, who works as a nurse in a sister-run clinic in Baradères.

Matthew dumped 3 feet of water on some areas, and it took the sisters based at the clinic about a week to clean up from flooding. Almost two dozen volunteers helped the sisters with cleanup, a tribute to the sisters' work but also an example of the sisters' need to rely on the community's goodwill.

In the past, the sisters' mission received regular assistance from a prominent humanitarian group, but the shipments of medical supplies that helped stock the clinic stopped because of poor road conditions, Prophete said, and the sisters are looking for other groups to fill the gaps. However, partnerships with other groups continue, including the Rockland, Massachusetts-based Medicines for Humanity, which named Little Sisters of St. Thérèse Sr. Jeanne Martha Pantal its 2017 Humanitarian of the Year for her training of other sisters in the areas of maternal and child health.

In Baradères, the clinic personnel, which includes Prophete and Dr. Rene Wyson, see about 100 patients a week in the 12-bed clinic and hospital. Among the constants in the area are malaria and typhoid; immediately after the hurricane, they also included cholera, diarrhea and water-borne diseases.

Those threats have not fully abated, Wyson said: "We are still facing a lot of sickness."

Those are not the only challenges facing the sisters. A small congregational house in Port-au-Prince used for mission work in the capital was lost in the earthquake, and the sisters would like to rebuild the structure. Meanwhile, repairs to 10 mission sites affected by Hurricane Matthew continue, Desil said, with the congregation still trying to raise funds for repairs and rehabilitation.

"We're not finished with Matthew yet," she said.

Also needed are repairs and expansion to the motherhouse, which was originally built to accommodate a far smaller group of sisters. And in an April email, Desil said the congregation is hobbled by a lack of vehicles for their ministry.
"We have a big problem with transportation," she said. "We need a car for the [mother] house and an ambulance for the sisters" and their mission work.

Desil rattles off the challenges with concern but also with a sense of enduring hope.

"We face the challenges because this is our country; we were born and raised in it, and we have great faith and hope in God. We enjoy our life here. It's hard, but we enjoy it." She paused, contemplating the gift of a quiet moment and a gentle breeze on a fall afternoon.

"God shows us a way to survive," she said. "We are Haitian."

At the Sept. 14 service of perpetual vows, the spirit of those words came alive when, at the end of the ceremony, families, friends and fellow sisters sang out in Haitian Creole and with firm affirmation and deep feeling a celebratory closing hymn:

"God has sent us to go on his mission. God asked us to announce his word. God has sent us to all his children. Our brothers, sisters, give us the good news."

[Chris Herlinger is GSR international correspondent. His email address is cherlinger@ncronline.org.]


May 15, 2018

Huda Alkaff on Wisconsin Green Muslims' Quest for Environmental Justice

By Anna M. Gade
Edge Effects

On May 7, in the days before the beginning of the Islamic month of Ramadan, I spoke with Huda Alkaff, a trained ecologist and environmental educator. Alkaff is founder and director of Wisconsin Green Muslims, a state-wide environmental justice group based in Milwaukee that has received national recognition for its leadership, from Wisconsin to the White House.

We discussed two featured projects of Wisconsin Green Muslims: promoting access to solar energy with the “Faith & Solar” initiative, and water resource conservation and management with “Faithful Rainwater Harvesting.” Alkaff also explained the popularity of the current Greening Ramadan initiative, which extends to communities across the country. Alkaff reflected on engagement with various mosques, diverse non-Muslim faith-based organizations as well as the process of building bridges with non-religious environmental groups overall. Religious commitments such as to “stand for justice” (Q. 4:135) energize Wisconsin Green Muslims to
“stand up for environmental and climate justice,” as Alkaff explained, with activism that strives for inclusion and equity for marginalized communities.

Stream or download our conversation here.

Interview highlights:

*This transcript has been edited for length and clarity.*

Anna Gade: Islam and environmental justice are both very broad fields. How did you choose the areas to put your energy into?

Huda Alkaff: We started in 2005 and we wanted to work on everything. We still do. We divide the year into themes and each month is a different theme. But water and solar energy have touched our hearts. We’re leading the Wisconsin Faith & Solar Initiative, which brings people of faith and spirituality together to care for Earth while reinvesting their saved money into their missions and building stronger communities. We also have the Faithful Rainwater Harvesting Initiative. The abbreviation is FaRaH, which means “joy” in Arabic.

Both initiatives have three components. First, a social and educational component, where we’re building a peer learning circle of those who have built solar or green infrastructure and those aspiring to do so. Secondly, we have the financial component, where we provide free and discounted remote and on-site solar assessments and consultations. We love spreading the good news, telling people “Your site is a solar-promising site.” Thirdly is the spiritual component. We see sunlight and water as the commons. No one owns them, and everyone should have access to them. Both sunlight and water are sacred gifts and sacred trusts. We need to appreciate them and welcome them responsibly into our homes, congregations, and lives.

We believe that people of faith have a great responsibility to stand up for environmental and climate justice.

In our work, we are tapping into the unifying power of solar energy and water. We found through several polls in 2016 and 2017 that solar energy has high approval ratings among people from diverse political, social, geographical, and educational backgrounds—nationally and in Wisconsin.

AG: You recently gave a webinar for a multiyear initiative with the Islamic Society of North America about Greening Ramadan. Can you speak a little bit about that program?

HA: Our Greening Ramadan campaign was one of our first initiatives. It’s not only continuing strong, but it has also spread to many Muslim communities nationally. During Ramadan, the Islamic holy month which begins in a few days, we encourage daily acts, such as carpooling, walking, biking, or using public transit to the mosque; using reusable water bottles, washable dishes, cups, and utensils; eating less meat; planting a tree; performing eco-ablution, as Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, did by using two handfuls of water for ablution before prayer; reading the 1,500 verses in the Qur’an that have environmental or nature-oriented messages;
power down, pray outside, grow food, waste less, purchase gifts responsibility, etc. They are all posted on our website.

In 2015, the Islamic Society of North America established a green masjid, now called Green Initiative Taskforce, which I’m a member of. We ask mosques to do food and water conservation, energy efficiency, reusable/biodegradable items, recycling and waste reduction, and giving a green khutbah (or lecture) during the month of Ramadan.

AG: What has the response been in communities and different masjids in North America?

HA: It’s a process. That’s why we call it Greening Ramadan. There are Greening Ramadan campaigns in over 20 states now and more than 90 mosques.

AG: How does being faith-based affect the message, outreach, and activism of your organization?

HA: We believe that people of faith have a great responsibility to stand up for environmental and climate justice, and to address the concerns and calamities of the poor and marginalized communities. They have the lowest ecological footprints, yet they are most impacted by natural and unnatural disasters. It is a moral issue. The Muslim voice and the interfaith voice standing united for environmental justice and care of Earth is instrumental for mobilizing the faithful for the common good.

AG: You are an ecologist and you have degrees in conservation ecology, sustainable development, and environmental education. How did you come to this work?

HA: Believe it or not, I have been an environmentalist since I was a child. I remember being asked the famous question “What do you want to be when you grow up?” To everyone’s surprise, my answer was: an ecologist, an environmentalist. I was and still am fascinated by nature and all its inhabitants, and I wanted to learn more about them and the connections between them. I earned degrees in chemistry and biology but was yearning for a more interdisciplinary field of study. Ecology is the study of interconnections and interdependence among everything, in space and time.

The continuous attempt at establishing connections and gaining holistic network insights is the driving force for my ongoing work to build strong and sustainable bridges between the environmental teachings in Islam (and other faiths and spiritualities) and my university environmental training.

AG: Is there anything else that you wish that listeners of this podcast would know?

HA: I want to uplift the basic principles of environmental justice that guide our work, which are to ensure public involvement of low-income and minority groups in decision-making, preventing disproportionately high adverse impacts of decisions on low-income and minority groups, and ensuring low-income and minority groups receive a proportionate share of benefits.
Huda Alkaff is the founder and director of Wisconsin Green Muslims, an environmental justice organization formed in 2005, connecting faith, environmental justice, and sustainability through education and service. She also serves as a co-chair of the U.S. Climate Action Network 100% Renewable Energy user group. She holds degrees in conservation ecology, sustainable development, and environmental education from the University of Georgia, and has taught environmental studies courses at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh. In 2015, Wisconsin Green Muslims received national awards and recognition for their water and climate change-related work from both GreenFaith and the Interfaith Power and Light. Alkaff received the 2015 White House Champions of Change for Faith Climate Justice Leaders recognition, was named the 2016 Sierra Club Great Waters group Environmental Hero of the Year, and was recognized nationally last year by Environment America as one of the Voices for 100% Renewable Energy. She has just received the 2018 Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education Eco-Justice Award. Contact.

Anna M. Gade is a Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of Environmental Studies in the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she teaches core courses in environmental humanities. She has been a faculty affiliate of the Center for Culture, History and Environment (CHE) for many years. With a Ph.D. in the History of Religions specializing in Islam from the University of Chicago and a long list of publications on the Qur’an, Gade researches global Muslim responses to environmental change. Her forthcoming book from Columbia University Press is titled Muslim Environmentalisms. Her most recent contribution to Edge Effects was “Praying for Forgiveness: Religious Ethics of Sustainability in Muslim Indonesia” (April 2015). Website. Contact.

http://edgeeffects.net/huda-alkaff-environmental-justice/

May 19, 2018

'Gardens of Al-Andalus' expo, a lesson in coexistence and ecology

Gulf Times

Doha - The 'Gardens of Al-Andalus' exhibition, brought to Doha by Qatar Foundation (QF) through the Qur'anic Botanic Garden together with Islamic Culture Foundation (Funci) of Madrid and held under the patronage of QF vice-chairperson and CEO HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, takes visitors during the month of Ramadan on a journey of peace and ecological awareness inspired by the values of Islam.
The exhibition can be visited until May 31 at Hamad Bin Khalifa University’s College of Islamic Studies. It is open every day from 9am until the evening, accompanying the Isha and Tarawih prayers.

The Islamic Culture Foundation, creator of the exhibition, chose the Hispano-Arabic garden as a symbol of understanding and a place for peace and dialogue. During the exhibition’s inauguration in April, Funci president Dr Cherif Abderrahman Jah said: "The message of peace, which is intrinsic to this exhibition, is the same message spread by Islam from the Arabian Peninsula, uniting hearts without prejudice or borders, and to which today the Islamic Culture Foundation wishes to appeal here in Doha."

A visit to the 'Gardens of Al-Andalus' during Ramadan can be seen as a "trip back in time", thanks to the objects on display and the accompanying texts. The quadripartite Islamic garden and, therefore, the gardens of Al-Andalus, are a metaphor for the garden to which every good Muslim aspires, Jannah. Its flowerbeds, separated by four channels, representing the four rivers of Paradise, are planted with some of the species mentioned in the Qur'an: pomegranates, fig trees, olive trees, palm trees, jujube and so on.

The sound of water, the refreshing shade and the fragrances of the flowers invite reflection and recollection. Following its journey through various countries in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, this emblematic exhibition shows a civilisation that loved and respected nature.

According to Dr Jah, the 'Gardens of Al-Andalus' "records one of the brightest periods in the history of humanity and a civilisation that can provide answers to the environmental challenges that future generations will have to face".

The QBG is a member of the Funci conservation platform, 'Med-O-Med, Cultural Landscapes of the Mediterranean and the Middle East', which covers 23 countries in the region.

The botanical and scientific development of Muslim Spain from the eighth to the 15th century led to what specialists have called an authentic 'green revolution' that would eventually transform the fields of medicine, pharmacopoeia, gastronomy and economics.

"Thus, the green spaces of the time, besides being places of rest and spiritual calm, would become gardens of botanical acclimatisation, in which hundreds of new plant species were introduced," a press statement noted. "As a result, for Funci, the 'Gardens of Al-Andalus' reminds us of the values that Islam teaches us in relation to nature, as an example of divine generosity and the development of civilisations."


May 19, 2018

Wuerl brings 'Laudato Si' to life with unique cemetery project
Washington Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl tours the completed green infrastructure project at Mount Olivet Cemetery May 7 with Kahlil Kettering, urban program director for the Nature Conservancy, John Spalding, president and CEO of Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Washington and Mark Tercek, president and CEO of the Nature Conservancy. (Credit: CNS.)

Three years after the release of Pope Francis’s encyclical calling for greater concern for the environment, one archdiocese has teamed up with civic officials to give practical application of the pope’s challenge in what some may view as the most unlikely of places: a cemetery.

Yet, according to Cardinal Donald Wuerl of the archdiocese of Washington, cemeteries are for both the dead and the living - which is why he’s chosen to partner with the Nature Conservancy and the D.C. Department of Energy and the Environment in installation of a green infrastructure project to address the problem of urban stormwater pollution.

Through a new installation which has replaced unused roads with a green garden, the initiative captures stormwater and prevents it from flowing off cemetery roads into one of the tributaries of the Anacostia River.

The effort is meant to lead to a substantial reduction of the more than 3-billion gallons of run-off and sewage that flows into the surrounding rivers and bodies of water - making it one of the fastest-growing sources of water pollution in the world.

And, in that way, the grounds of the cemetery have become a physical means of both honoring the dead and also giving new life.

“Our cemeteries are considered sacred ground because it is here that we bury our dead in the hope of the resurrection,” said Wuerl, after touring the installation earlier this month at the Mount Olivet Cemetery in the nation’s capital.

“But cemeteries also serve the living,” he said. “We take particular care of the grounds, so that those who come to visit, to remember and to pray for their dead do so in beautiful, peaceful, serene surroundings.”

The Nature Conservancy, a national water and land conservation organization, has been one of the key partners with the archdiocese, and at the unveiling of the initiative its President and CEO, Mark Tercek, said it would improve the quality of life for D.C. area residents.

Wuerl used the occasion to cite Francis’s 2015 encyclical Laudato Si’ and the responsibility of Catholics to work together on the “care of our common home.”

The encyclical, Wuerl said, “includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development.”
In addition to reducing pollution, the site will generate Stormwater Retention Credits (SRCs) that are being sold on the District of Columbia’s SRC credit market, which was established, by the D.C. Department of Energy and the Environment.

Tommy Wells, director of the D.C. Department of Energy and the Environment, told *Crux* that he hopes this project marks the first of many future partnerships between religious institutions and the city for the sake of sustainability.

“Some of the largest parcels of land in the District are owned by faith-based institutions, and this project is just the first of what I hope is many - not just in terms of meeting stormwater management goals, but also for generating solar energy.”

He also cited *Laudato si’* and noted that it requires “a commitment by faithful members of the community to work toward solutions.”

The innovative project at the 85-acre cemetery is thought to be the first collaboration between an environmental conservation organization and the Catholic Church to address urban stormwater pollution and related challenges.

In an interview with *Crux*, Wuerl said that the initiative is yet another example of the Church’s engagement with the community that likely goes unnoticed by the majority of Catholics in the pews.

“Many, many good and practicing Catholics have no idea of the extent of the Church’s involvement in the community,” he said, adding that once they find out, they’re often pleasantly surprised.

Wuerl said that *Laudato si’* is an important moment in the life of the Church, because it lets the world know that “we want a place at the table” and to “be a part of the discussion” when it comes to caring for creation.

“As bishops, we are pastors of souls, and overseers of local churches, but we’re not just responsible for repeating the Church’s teaching but finding ways of implementing it locally,” he said.

Hence, for Wuerl, this cemetery project was a practical means of giving lived expression to the pope’s challenge for Catholics to engage in environmental leadership - and in a way that has real life consequences.

“We have to be key witnesses,” said Wuerl, “with the words that we proclaim, and with our actions.”

May 21, 2018

A five-village forest journey to water wells in Africa

By Joyce Meyer
Global Sisters Report

"Water is life!" It was exciting to experience the truth of these words in the families dancing for joy at having water for the first time in the forests of Cameroon.

After attending the Confederation of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM) meeting in Yaoundé in January, I began an adventure I had dreamed of for many years: visiting remote Baka villages in eastern Cameroon. I traveled with Kenneth Muko, program director of Medicines for Humanity, and two photographers to five Baka villages that are recipients of clean water for the first time. Two donors generously provided funding for drilling water wells in these villages.

The native Baka peoples of Central and Western Africa are commonly referred to as "Pygmies," a name that had some negative connotations but that some people have reclaimed. I was surprised to learn that they are found not only in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as I had thought, but also in Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. According to Survival International, Baka groups in these various countries are similar in lifestyle but speak different languages, often related to their non-Baka neighbors. All Baka tribes may share a few words, suggesting they shared a language in the past.

Living in the forest may be "simple," but it's not easy. Families forage for food, gathering honey, wild yams, berries and other plants; hunt antelopes, pigs and monkeys for meat; and fish. Although migratory, most groups have developed close ties to local settled villagers.

They sometimes work for them or barter their forest treasures for things like oil, sugar and Western-style clothing. One woman told us she sells wild fruit every Thursday at the local village market. We also met a hunter with several dogs who was hesitant to speak with us. He was probably suspicious that we might report his activities, as selling bush meat (wild game) is usually illegal.

Although the Baka people have some positive relationships with other locals, they are also exploited. We saw huge logging trucks taking beautiful ancient trees out to sell abroad, destroying the forest life that provides sustenance for the Baka. It seemed a clear sign that this forest life was ending. Governments do not always treat the Baka as equal citizens and routinely denies them their rights. They evict families and tribes from what they consider "their land" and then designate the land as national parks or new logging areas.

Missionaries try to help the Baka transition to a settled life so their children can receive an education and have access to regular health care, but it is challenging. A Sister of the Sacred
Heart at the first mission we visited has spent 40 years evangelizing and supporting the Baka. She accompanied us to the village where a well was to be drilled.

The chief proudly showed us the kindergarten class whose teacher had once been a student himself. The small classroom overflowed with excited children who later enchanted us with a delightful dance I watched from a privileged seat in a small hut constructed of branches and leaves, similar to those used by families in migration.

The chief told us they had waited 20 years for water, anticipating its drilling and pump installation in the next week — a dream come true. An added benefit, he noted, was the safety of the children who must collect water for their families. The forest is dangerous as well as beautiful, which we experienced after the dance, following the villagers single-file through the dense forest to the place where children go to collect water. The forest resounded with calling birds and insects, and there were gorgeous butterflies.

We eventually came to an embankment with steps carved out of the earth and secured with rock. At the bottom was a pipe pouring out muddy water into a low cement trough. Children were bathing, women were washing clothes, and others were filling buckets to carry home.

After climbing back to the top, we made our way to the village and continued to four other sites over the next three days. The roads are not easy for travel. We crossed wooden bridges built over numerous dirty-looking rivers and streams. I found this a scary experience, as the bridges were often missing boards, so I decided instead to give attention to people bathing, animals drinking, women washing clothes and children filling buckets to carry back home.

The roads are mostly tracks of dusty soil with huge dips gouged out by humongous logging trucks. We came across several of these turned over and blocking our way as we traveled. It was disconcerting, but not surprising, that our car broke down twice. The first time, we had a flat tire. The second time, we waited on the road in hopes that someone would offer help, which a motorcyclist did eventually. He took one of photographers to get help. In the meantime, a "taxi" came by, and the three of us climbed in, leaving our car behind. At a road-worthy inspection police stop, a common practice in African countries to make sure vehicles are functioning properly, our taxi passed the inspection, but when it would not start again, the police gave us the push we needed to get going. So much for reliable inspections.

In spite of the delay, we arrived at our destination in time to meet village water managers finishing a training session. I was impressed to learn that a diocese trains and monitors community water development. Father Serge, the diocesan coordinator, does an outstanding job of community development that he attributes to the former bishop's ability to delegate and trust in him. We stayed the night and went to Mass for two hours at 6:30 the next morning.

We then visited the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, managers of a well-respected rehab center for people with disabilities. Sr. Marianna Ngugu noted that many of the disabilities are unfortunately and frequently caused by malnutrition. The patients live at the center and attend sessions during the week and return home on weekends.
She excitedly showed us the new well and water tower that will furnish water for the numerous hostels and classrooms. Our little group reorganized and continued deeper into the forest to meet three Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres, who have a clinic and a school. Not surprisingly, few Baka children who enroll persevere in school; they miss their families and free forest life. We stayed the night and early the next morning visited the school and the clinic with its new water pumps shared with the villages.

Electricity was limited in this week of adventure to generators providing a few hours each night. We retired to our rooms early to plug in our electronics.

Leaving those sisters, we continued on to missions staffed by Vincentian priests and Presentation of Mary Sisters. At the Vincentian mission, we found a three-room school built of corrugated metal from shipping containers. Grade 1 had many girls, but as we went on, the number of students decreased by grade. Older Baka girls must stop school to care for smaller siblings and prepare for marriage, often at 13, 14 or 15 years old.

At another site, water drillers were working surrounded by excited villagers. We met with the leaders; one woman sat among the men. Surprisingly, she was the treasurer. I asked the chief later why a woman was chosen as treasurer for water maintenance. He said without guile that only women are trusted with money: Men cannot resist spending the community money for alcoholic drinks. I asked how men feel about not being trusted; they shrugged, laughed and replied: "It is just this way!"

I was also curious about the crowd of women sitting far back from the leaders. When asked to speak, I emphasized the importance of women to water projects to teach hygiene and care for the water. The chief then invited the women to join us, which they did, laughing. As a parting gift, they tied the legs of a female goat and put her in our truck.

Our last stop was the Presentation Sisters, a French foundation. Near the sisters' school is a beautiful clinic close to the new water pump. I was happy to meet these sisters, having heard about them from their sisters in North Dakota, only a few miles from Aberdeen, where I am from.

We returned to the diocesan center for night. And now, without a car, we got a lift to a town a couple of hours away to catch a bus back to Yaoundé.

Visiting all of these forest places was a joyful and awesome experience. The joy that these communities feel having water is indescribable. Water is life, but I want to add, water spawns new life, too, and not just for gardens. Every one of the new water points is a seed for new ventures, whether it is sanitation, jobs, more time with family, entrepreneurial ventures, or better nutrition and health. The list is endless.

I know the sustainable development goal for water is that every household in the world will have easy access to clean water by 2030. These wells are a start, but cleanliness is not a given because of containers used and how it is transported to homes. There is still much to do to reach these goals.
Ecuador's indigenous Waorani launch petition to save the Amazon | Ecuador News

By Kimberley Brown
Al Jazeera

**Nemonpare, Ecuador** - The Amazon rainforest is not an oil block and it is not for sale, says Ecuador's Waorani community in a new petition.

The indigenous community has been living in and fighting for their jungle territory for thousands of years, but they could soon see the entire region auctioned off to the highest bidders in the oil industry.

Responding to the potential auction, 18 Waorani communities launched an international petition on Wednesday, asking the world to sign to demand oil drilling stays out of their territory in the southeast Amazon, one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet.

"We want to teach people why we live here, and all that we have here," Nemonte Nenquimo told Al Jazeera from her home of Nemonpare, a remote Waorani community in the heart of the rainforest.

Nenquimo added that then maybe they would understand what the oil industry is taking away from her community and the area.

Earlier this year, President Lenin Moreno opened the southeast Amazon up for bidding to the oil and natural gas industry in an initiative called the South-East Oil Round (Ronda Petrolera SurOriente).

The aim, according to the government, is to boost Ecuador's floundering oil economy, which has seen major divestment since 2014 when the international price of oil plummeted.

The southeast Amazon region has been divided into 13 blocks in which one area, referred to as block 22, overlaps almost entirely with Waorani territory.

So far, the government has collected dozens of interested signatures from both national and international oil companies, including ExxonMobile and Shell, according to Carlos Perez Garcia, the minister of hydrocarbons.
Contracts will not be finalised until later this year, but the government is expecting to generate up to $800m, according to local media.

The Waorani community, operating with the help Amazon Frontlines, a non-governmental organisation, aims to gather as many signatures on its petition as possible to stop the sale of land in block 22 before it is finalised.

**Mapping the area**

A major part of the international petition includes an interactive map that was researched and designed by the community themselves using GPS systems, wildlife camera traps, and drones supplied by Amazon Frontlines.

They also used an offline mapping programme designed by Digital Democracy, an NGO that helps marginalised communities access technology.

Each of the 18 communities mapped their regions independently, a total of 180,000 hectares. They trudged hours through the thick forest, finding and marking points that are important to them, such as, sacred sites, medicinal plants, rare animal habitats, and areas of ancestral importance. They also included personal stories recounted by the elders of the communities of particular places.

"The only maps that exist of our territory only show communities, rivers and a school, nothing else," Oswando Nenquimo, another resident of Nemopare, told Al Jazeera. "They never really show the territory, what it really contains. So, from the outside it only looks empty," he said, adding that previous maps have been made by people with political or economic interests in the land.

Oil extraction has long been a controversial issue in Ecuador. It has always been an important part of Ecuador's economy, contributing to much of its growth from 2006 to 2014, according to the World Bank.

The income from oil also contributed to lowering the poverty rate in the country by 15 percent during the same time period, due to the socialist policies of then-President Rafel Correa, and investments in education and social programmes.

But it has also generated a lot of anger and resentment among many indigenous communities who have been displaced by oil extraction near their territories.

'It's a lie'

Today, people in Nemonpare say they look at their Waorani neighbours who live in the Yasuni National Park as an example of how the oil industry can destroy the environment and local communities.
Yasuni became famous in 2007, when Correa asked the international community to donate money to Ecuador in order to avoid drilling in the park, famous for its biodiversity. By 2013, the plan had failed and drilling had already begun.

"'There will be change and you're going to live better,' [the oil companies] say. But it's a lie," Nenquimo said. "I see the people in Yasuni, and they are more poor," she said, adding that many Waorani communities there live near open pools of oil, and are subjected to constant smog and increased rates of cancer.

According to the government's own research in 2012, it estimated that the country had fewer than 20 years left of crude oil reserves, and that includes the unexplored southeast blocks. With such low reserves, many have questioned whether Ecuador's continued dependence on oil extraction is a good investment, let alone worth destroying the environment.

Angel Aviles, undersecretary of political and social management in the Ministry of Hydrocarbons, told Al Jazeera on Tuesday that nothing has been decided about block 22 and "it is still in discussion among authorities."

Aviles meeting representatives of the Waorani community who were in Quito.

He did not respond to Al Jazeera's request for additional comment on the Waorani's concerns.


May 24, 2018

Cardinal O’Malley leads group of religious leaders, scientists calling for climate action

By Danny McDonald
Boston Globe

Cardinal Seán P. O’Malley, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Boston, led a group of hundreds of local religious leaders and scientists appealing for action on climate change on Wednesday.

O’Malley was among the 500-plus signatories to endorse an appeal that was released Wednesday calling for the climate crisis to be addressed “with the boldness and urgency it requires, with substantive and immediate action.”

“Climate change is an ecological and moral emergency that impacts all other aspects of our shared lives and requires us to work together to protect our common home,” read the appeal.

The release of the appeal marked the third anniversary of the papal encyclical, Laudato Si’, according to a statement from the archdiocese of Boston. In that letter to the worldwide church,
Pope Francis framed the issue of climate change in terms of its effect on the poor, those most vulnerable to the storms, destruction of ecosystems, and mass migration that could be a consequence.

On Wednesday, O’Malley, speaking at a press conference in Braintree, said the pope’s encyclical drove home the idea that “while the state of the environment is . . . a challenge affecting all of, those most in the greatest of danger are the poor, the vulnerable, those throughout the international community who lack the basic necessities of life.”

“In our local communities we hope that we can make a difference by advocating for responsible policies, educating people of all ages about the importance of environmental awareness and each day making choices that respect and support the sustainability of the world around us,” said O’Malley.

Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, the associate minister for ecological justice at Bethel AME Church, echoed O’Malley’s sentiments, saying, “Those of us in power have a moral responsibility to our most vulnerable citizens.”

“Yes it is scientifically clear that we are facing a crisis of gargantuan proportions,” she said at Wednesday’s press conference.

Philip Duffy, the president of Woods Hole Research Center, said the earth’s warming is “having consequences now.” The challenge of climate change, he said, has economic, political, and moral dimensions. Climate change consequences include increases in extreme weather, sea-level rise, and water and food scarcity, he said.

“Those impacts . . . will certainly get worse in the future as climate change progresses,” he said.


May 25, 2018

How faith, reason and environmental protection go hand in hand

By Veerabhadran Ramanathan
The Hill

This spring, glaciologists released new data which suggested that the massive ice sheets in the Antarctic can melt faster than expected with climate change. We learned that the gulf stream and associated large-scale oceanic circulation which influences weather in the east coast and Europe is slowing down. These data were preceded by a report published by 30 leading scientists, which concluded that unchecked climate change poses existential threat.
As a co-chair of this report I can state that it was excruciating to arrive at the existential threat conclusion. But the massive data we reviewed left us with no other option. The very conditions on which human civilization has depended for the last 12,000 years are threatened by human ideologies, actions and systems that perpetuate climate change.

Unchecked climate change can expose 70 percent of the population to lethal heat stress in addition to record-breaking storms, floods, extreme droughts and fires, exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities, and marginalizing the vulnerable from participation in society.

But, the report left out something crucial that here I would like to address.

It is not that nothing can be done to avert such a global catastrophe; far from it. As shown by numerous reports there are many scalable solutions to reduce the warming almost by half within 30 years and stabilize the warming below dangerous levels. We have about 10 years to deploy these solutions.

If such solutions are available, why are they not already being implemented? Because knowing is never enough! Something beyond knowledge must move the will to take actions. What is that something?

Today, untruth competes with truth to muddy the issue of climate change. The faith community can transcend divisions and bring together people of different perspectives to seek the truth and work for a moral revolution urgently needed for a sustainable relationship with nature: One where humankind challenges notions of domination over nature and sees itself as part of nature.

Science uses rational methodology backed by massive amounts of data to pursue physical truth about the world. Faith, on the other hand, uses experience and belief to pursue metaphysical, existential truth about the meaning of life and how humans should act in the world. Both are important, but each needs the other to understand the truth of reality; in the words of Saint John Paul II, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”

The world’s major religious traditions, even if they interpret God differently, share a commitment to human life and dignity, the poor, and the protection of creation. I witnessed this personally at a meeting convened by Pope Francis with leaders of major faiths including evangelism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

The Catholic Church recognizes that human-forced climate change compromises its faith-based commitments to protect human life and dignity, exercise special concern for the poor, and care for creation.

As a result, the Vatican used the Pontifical Academy of Science (PAS) of which I am a member to convene experts from many other fields thus assisting the pope in writing his 2015 encyclical on ecology, Laudato Si’. Laudato Si’ — consistent with previous papal teachings — identified human-made climate change as “one of the principal challenges facing humanity,” recognized the grave implications for human health and global equity.
The PAS continues to convene political and faith leaders and scientists to discuss climate change and human health, and to search for scalable solutions like an energy system based solely on renewables, financial support to the poor for climate adaptation, and the secession of deforestation.

Climate change is an existential threat that will require unprecedented cooperation between divergent sectors and members of society. As a climate scientist, I know that the faith community is critical to the process. I therefore urge persons of all faiths to prophetically help lead the nation towards a world of climate stability that safeguards the common home we all share.

Veerabhadran Ramanathan is a climate scientist at the University of California San Diego and council member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican.


May 30, 2018

New Program to Connect Judaism, Agriculture

By Marni Folkman
Jewish Exponent

Jewish families in the Philadelphia-area passionate about gardening and sustainability now have an opportunity to participate in agricultural activities that strengthen religious engagement and foster spiritual growth.

The Jewish Farm School, a nonprofit that offers children an alternative, environmental education, launched Side Yard Seedlings, a garden-based early childhood program in West Philadelphia, on May 31.

The program, which is open to children ages 2-6 and runs with support from jkidphilly, was made possible by a $16,000 PJ Library Alliance Spark Engagement Grant. PJ Library, the flagship program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, supports initiatives that strive to create opportunities for families with young, Jewish children to get involved with Jewish programming.

The grant awarded to the Jewish Farm School encourages the further development of educational, Jewish farming programs and shines a light on the importance of using farms as platforms for learning. The spring pilot run will take place at the Jewish Farm School’s garden at 50th Street and Cedar Avenue.
Lori Rubin, the chief program officer at Jewish Learning Ventures, a nonprofit that oversees jkidphilly, explained why jkidphilly wanted to collaborate with the Jewish Farm School and PJ Library on Side Yard Seedlings, noting that geography played a large role in the decision.

“Geographically, jkidphilly knows and has created programs in the greater Philadelphia area. We got involved with Side Yard Seedlings because we believe families in West Philadelphia will be interested in the experiences the program offers,” she said, adding that the program could be a new way to engage Jewish families in an often-underserved area.

Nati Passow, the co-founder and executive director of the Jewish Farm School, is a parent of two young children and believes that in a rapidly developing, highly technological world, “children are increasingly spending less and less time outside in unstructured ways.”

For him, Side Yard Seedlings will “give children the chance to experience the garden with all of their senses and connect with nature in an urban environment.” When children play outside and examine their surroundings in a creative way, they learn how to respect the world around them, he said.

Passow hopes that Side Yard Seedlings makes exploring the agricultural aspects of Judaism through food and farming enjoyable for local Philadelphia families.

The program is comprised of four sessions, two on Sundays and two on Thursdays, that last 90 minutes each. Activities include nature-based crafts, story sessions, songs and games centered around the themes of the Hebrew calendar. The Jewish Farm School’s garden can accommodate approximately 15 children in each session.

Rowan Machalow, who previously ran an in-home preschool, was hired to run the program.

Although this is the first time Jewish Farm School will be working with Philadelphia-area children, it did run a farm-based, Jewish homeschool program for three years at Eden Village Camp in New York’s Hudson Valley.

For more information about the program, visit jewishfarmschool.org/seedlings.

http://jewishexponent.com/2018/05/30/new-program-to-connect-judaism-agriculture/

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May/June 2018

A Radical Alliance of Black and Green Could Save the World

But first the two movements will have to rediscover their shared roots in a fundamental critique of an economy and a society that value things more than lives
By James Gustave Speth and J. Phillip Thompson III

*The Environmental Forum*
Environmental Law Institute

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James Gustave Speth, a former dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, is co-chair of the Democracy Collaborative’s Next System Project.

J. Phillip Thompson III is associate professor of urban planning and politics at MIT.

[Read the article online here.](#)

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**June 1, 2018**

When facts are not enough

By Katharine Hayhoe

Science

Science is based on a shared respect for the scientific method—the principle that, by gathering and analyzing data and information, scientists and others can draw conclusions that are robust and generalizable across cultures and ideologies. Scientists furthermore assume that disagreements can be resolved by more facts. So when people object to the reality of climate change with science-y sounding arguments—“the data is wrong,” or “it’s just a natural cycle,” or even, “we need to study it longer”—the natural response of scientists is simple and direct: People need more data. But this approach often doesn’t work and can even backfire. Why? Because when it comes to climate change, science-y sounding objections are a mere smokescreen to hide the real reasons, which have much more to do with identity and ideology than data and facts.

For years, climate change has been one of the most politically polarized issues in the United States. Today, the best predictor of whether the public agrees with the reality of anthropogenic climate change is not how much scientific information there is. It’s where each person falls on the political spectrum. That’s why the approach of bombarding the unconvinced with more data doesn’t work—people see it as an attack on their identity and an attempt to change their way of life.

I am a climate scientist who has spent a lot of time trying to make climate science more accessible. I’ve authored National Climate Assessments and numerous outreach reports; I host a YouTube show called Global Weirding; I tweet; I’ve even promoted knitting patterns that display rising temperatures. Yet the most important step I’ve taken to make my science communication more effective has nothing to do with the science. As uncomfortable as this is for a scientist in today’s world, the most effective thing I’ve done is to let people know that I am a
Christian. Why? Because it’s essential to connect the impacts of a changing climate directly to what’s already meaningful in one’s life, and for many people, faith is central to who they are.

Scientists can be effective communicators by bonding over a value that they genuinely share with the people with whom they’re speaking. It doesn’t have to be a shared faith. It could be that both are parents, or live in the same place, or are concerned about water resources or national security, or enjoy the same outdoor activities. Instead of beginning with what most divides scientists from others, start the conversation from a place of agreement and mutual respect. Then, scientists can connect the dots: share from their head and heart why they care.

Talking about impacts isn’t enough, though. Sadly, the most dangerous myth that many people have bought into is, “it doesn’t matter to me,” and the second most dangerous myth is, “there’s nothing I can do about it.” If scientists describe the daunting challenge of climate change but can’t offer an engaging solution, then people’s natural defense mechanism is to disassociate from the reality of the problem. That’s why changing minds also requires providing practical, viable, and attractive solutions that someone can get excited about. Concerned homeowner? Mention the amazing benefits of energy conservation. Worried parent? Bring up the practical steps to take to make outdoor play spaces safer for kids, even in the hot summer. Business executive? Talk about the economic benefits of renewables.

We all live on the same planet, and we all want the same things. By connecting our heads to our hearts, we all can talk about—and tackle—the problem of climate change together.

_Katharine Hayhoe is a professor and director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, USA._ [www.katharinehayhoe.com](http://www.katharinehayhoe.com)

June 5, 2018

Religious Leaders Speak Out Against Enbridge Line 3 as Vote Looms this Month

Healing Minnesota Stories (blog)

Curtiss DeYoung, CEO of the Minnesota Council of Churches, stood before a crowd of hundreds of people Monday afternoon at Leif Erickson Park to state the shared belief of many religious leaders that the state should reject the Enbridge Line 3 crude oil pipeline on moral grounds.

“Oftentimes the faith community historically has been on the wrong side, particularly as it relates to indigenous communities and sovereign nations who we are in relationship with.” DeYoung said. “Today we decided to be on the right side.”
The event was organized by the Minnesota Poor People’s Campaign, and Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light (MN IPL), and had the support of the Minnesota Council of Churches. (Star Tribune article here.)

The event, held just west of the state Capitol, included civil rights songs, a Jewish cantor, a brass band, chants, and a Buddhist moment of silence. It included indigenous prayer and truth-telling. It included a number of brief speeches from religious leaders from different traditions. But the event’s main goal was to Stop Line 3. To that end, the group delivered an interfaith letter opposing Line 3 to both Governor Dayton and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Some 540 faith leaders signed.

The interfaith Line 3 letter reads in part:

At its core, this is a moral issue. Many of us signing this letter come from Christian and other traditions that in recent years have taken formal positions acknowledging the role of our faith institutions in the mistreatment and deep trauma done to Indigenous peoples. … We have committed ourselves to seeking ways forward for healing and repair. Our signatures here represent an effort to live out that commitment.

The list of signers from mainline Protestant churches included: Rev. Brian Prior, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota; Rev. Bruce Ough, Bishop of Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church; Elona Street-Stewart, a Ruling Elder and Executive of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies for the Presbyterian Church USA (a multi-state Synod that includes Minnesota); Rev. Sharon Prestamon, Conference Minister and CEO of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ; and Rev. Ann Svennungsen, Bishop of the Minneapolis Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

Leaders from other traditions signed the letter, too, including Rabbi Alexander Davis, Beth El Synagogue and co-chair of the Minnesota Rabbinical Association; Imam Asad Zaman of the Muslim American Society in Minnesota, Sosan Flynn, guiding teacher at Clouds in Water Zen Center in St. Paul; and Nancy Cramblit, president of the board of directors for the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Mankato.

The event started with ceremonies at Leif Erickson Park. A delegation of letter signers then walked to the Capitol to deliver a copy of the letter to Dayton’s office. (Dayton doesn’t have a decision-making role in the pipeline, but pipeline opponents have been urging him to use his bully pulpit to speak out against it.)

Rev. Emily Goldthwaite Fries, associate minister at Mayflower United Church of Christ and a representative of Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, presented the letter to Cathy Polasky, a senior policy advisor to Dayton.

“We stand before you representing a great cloud of witnesses as the Public Utilities Commission consider this month its decision on Line 3,” Goldthwaite Fries said. “We pray that all who serve the State of Minnesota will remember their sacred responsibility to protect the land and water and air for seven generations to come.”
The larger group then walked to downtown St. Paul to the Metro Square building’s third floor, cramming in front of the PUC offices. Prior to delivering a copy of the letter there, Rabbi Arielle Rosenberg of Shir Tikva spoke (and sang):

It is not easy to keep walking when what we do is collide against oppression. It is not easy to find each other and to look in each other’s eyes and say “Hello,” when we have been trained, day after day, to normalize oppression. We have been trained, day by day, by this society, to passively accept looking past each other.

Today we have a challenge. We are in the middle of this walk together. We have the challenge of how it is that we will continue to show up and continue to find each other and to continue to make our work a blessing for each other, in the midst of this long road.

How do we carry the humility to know that we are not the first people to have been walking this road? We walk this road because of, and thanks to, and in honor of or elders and our ancestors who have walked this road and showed us [the way].

The PUC is expected to vote on Line 3 in late June.

Native leaders spoke, too, including Tara Houska, the National Campaigns Director for Honor the Earth, Jim Bear Jacobs, founder of Healing Minnesota Stories, and Rose Whipple, one of the Youth Climate Interveners.

Houska criticized Enbridge’s recent newspaper ad campaign. The ad talked about how Line 3 would help lower prices at the gas pump. That’s not true, she said, the oil is for foreign markets. The ad says Enbridge cares about tribal sovereignty. That’s not true, either, Houska said. “All five impacted nations have said ‘no’ to this pipeline. Consultation is not consent.”

The ad also said that Enbridge cares about wild rice, Houska said. In fact, the pipeline would carry 900,000 barrels a day of dirty tar sands oil through 4,000 acres of sacred wild rice. Wild rice “is at the heart of my people, of Anishinaabe people,” she said. “It is who we are. It is a sacred, sacred grain to us. To destroy that is to destroy our culture.”

Jacobs, who is Mohican and an associate pastor at Church of All Nations in Columbia Heights, said centuries ago, Christian clergy encountered native communities and were motivated by the sole purpose of civilizing the savages. “Today we stand on the dawn of new interactions between clergy and indigenous communities,” he said. Today, clergy are coming to indigenous communities and saying: “Please, show us how to be civilized.”

Whipple (Isanti Dakota and Ho-Chunk) talked about her recent trip to the Vatican with the Indigenous Youth Ceremony and Mentor Society. They met with Papal emissaries to ask them to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. Whipple explained:

The Doctrine of Discovery was created by the Vatican in the 15th Century and it gave Christian explorers the right to claim any land it ‘discovered’ for the Christian monarchs,” she explained. “Any land that was not inhabited by Christians was available to be stolen, claimed, and
exploited… … Millions of my people died because of this Doctrine. My people are now less than 1 percent of the country when we used to be 100 percent of it.

Whipple made the following connection:

We are still affected by this Doctrine to this day. And Enbridge building Line 3 directly through our treaty territories and wild rice beds, and putting their man camps right next to our communities is a fine example of that.

https://healingmnstories.wordpress.com/2018/06/05/religious-leaders-speak-out-against-enbridge-line-3-as-vote-looms-this-month/

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June 5, 2018

Swimming in the Great Lakes is a Sacred Spiritual Experience

By Mat McDermott
Patheos - Samudra

*This is the second part of an interview I did with Christopher Fici — a former ISKCON monk finishing his doctorate at Union Theological Seminary and board member at Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus. Read part one here.* Here, Chris talks about the connections between the Gaudiya Vaishnav tradition and ecology, ecological initiatives at the Bhakti Center in New York City, and more.

**Did you always have a strong connection with nature, growing up in Detroit?**

The best thing about living in Michigan is the Great Lakes. Every summer my family and I — we’re starting to do this again in the past couple of years — we would go to one of our friend’s cottages on the tip of the thumb in Michigan. Being back there last year reminded me of how important those lake are. They speak to you on a spiritual level. It may take you a few decades to understand what you’re hearing on a spiritual level.

Although I grew up in this nondescript suburb of Detroit, we had a freeway running through the middle of our town and that’s pretty much it. It was a nice suburban life but when you go to the lakes that’s when you really step into an experience of nature that’s really unique. There’s nothing like those lakes in the world. I would love to retire to a hermitage up there at some point.

Understanding the theology behind worshiping Ganga and Yamuna, it resonates so much with me when I come back and see these lakes. I would say these are still places of recreation for me and my family, but I see them in a much more sacred sense now. Even just taking a swim out there, I’m swimming in a much more spiritual consciousness than I did before. That comes directly from these different Hindu traditions of seeing sacred water worship.
What’s unique in the Hindu perspective on ecology and the environment?

What’s unique, both in studying scriptures and the personal experience as a Hindu relating to ecology, is this sense of understanding about how interconnected we all are.

You can understand the theory of karma by trying to understanding looking at the flowers, looking at the birds, and at some point in your journey through reality, you have been these creatures. That should manifest within yourself a sense of understanding, respect, and honoring other living beings.

In a couple verse of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says a wise sage sees every living being on the spiritual platform of equality; someone who’s a brahmin, a dog, an elephant, and a dog-eater (an outcast). One element of that teaching is to say within each living being is the soul, is the atman. That’s very different than some elements of traditional Christian theology.

There’s a famous video of Prabhupada having a conversation, an argument, with a famous French Cardinal from the 1960-70s, about whether the soul existed in animal bodies. This Cardinal, who was a very progressive Christian thinker, just couldn’t grasp that a dog or a chicken had a soul like a human being. Prabhupada was very firm on that point [that they do].

This sense, from the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna says I am the taste of water, of animals I am the lion, I’m the shark, he’s the thread of all existing reality. Of all these different manifestations of material reality, of spiritual reality, he is the connecting thread.

Something that I discovered at the Hinduism and Ecology conference at the Govardhan Eco Village in December, talking to David Haberman and reading his book, River of Love in an Age of Pollution, was a beautiful tradition of worshipping the sacred river of the Ganga. At the Eco Village every evening there’s a beautiful Yamuna Arati. There’s a rhythm of the community where it’s designed in such a way to stop what you’re doing and come to this arati and worship this version of the Yamuna River. Reading his book, there’s this beautiful bhakti theology of how Yamuna is a Goddess. She is the liberator of all of her dearest disciples. She protects and benefits everyone who offers her bhakti.

It’s very Jesus-like references sometimes. There’s a lot of resonances with that too with what I’ve seen in Native American traditions, this sense that this tree is not just some collection of chemicals and biology, it’s a living being.

Of course, David’s book goes into very great detail about how Ganga and Yamuna are almost polluted to death at this point. It asks a lot of challenging questions about how you look at certain elements of advaita Vedanta where it’s very world denying. It’s very much about getting out of here and merging with Brahman, basically devaluing the world — how that also hooks up with devaluing the feminine too. But at the same time the reason these rivers are so polluted is because, after independence you have Nehru coming in and saying things like “the dams are our temples now”. The sort of thing Gandhi was completely against. For Gandhi, independence was not becoming the turbo capitalist West.
Particularly through the Gandhian lens, this idea of ecological community, anticipatory community, was something that very much inspired Swami Prabhupada for his ISKCON community, creating these farm communities. He could understand, both by just viewing the world but also on a deeper level of what it means to be attached/detached and live a proper life, this very consumerist lifestyle is not sustainable, not healthy, or sane.

So, what’s the alternative? I’m inspired to say we desperately need an alternative. Gandhi often called it plain living, high thinking. Prabhupada used simple living, high thinking. This sense of living a dharmic life: simplicity, devotion, living as the Eco Village describes it as a symbiotic consciousness, live within your ecosystem, knowing you’re a human being, knowing you’re going to make an impact, but try to minimize the destructive impacts as much as possible. Be a good neighbor to your ecosystem. Live in harmony and that rhythm. That very much jives with a lot of teachings about what it means to be properly devoted.

There’s a teaching in the Isha Upanishad, one of the primary Upanishadic texts that Vaishnavs study, in the first verse it says ‘Everything belongs to God.’ That can change your consciousness, because we’re so conditioned and attached to living in this world saying ‘this belongs to me’. It helps you raise your consciousness to a level that says no all of this is of God and belongs to God.

Then the second part of the teaching is that God then gives you everything you need to live. Prabhupada uses the term quota—he has some anachronistic ways of describing things in English. In the same quote it says Krishna gives you everything you need to flourish.

And you should understand what that means in terms of looking at the components of your daily life. Looking at this with an ecological lens, saying this helps me to flourish spiritually and to also be a good citizen of the planet, this doesn’t and therefore this is something that’s not necessary. Trying to develop a consciousness of simplicity. Both Prabhupada and Gandhi, it’s part of what it means to live dharmically, by living in harmony and simplicity then all kinds of horizons for expanding your consciousness open in your daily life.

How does Gaudiya Vaishnav theology support a more ecologically aware worldview?

To be a devotee, it means Krishna is at the center of everything you try to do, the center of every conscious thought. To be a devotee of Krishna means you’re trying to stop being so attached to this ahāmkara, your false ego, these compulsions in yourself that make you greedy, that make you hateful, that make you want take undue ownership over things. Within Vaishnav teachings it’s this sense that if we are so attached to our ahāmkara, we’re naturally going to be destructive. That manifests both in our own consciousness, but also in the way we interact with each other and with the environment.

When you look at the kind of environmental movement there are a lot of very scientific explanations of why what’s happening is what’s happening, there’s a lot of cultural and sociological components of that. I think what religious folks can provide is a sense of what it actually means to desire, what it means to consider what success is, what is progress.
What Prabhupada was saying is go start farm communities even before there was an Earth Day. It was very close together. Part of his mission in coming here and spreading Vaishnav culture, he didn’t just tack on the environmental part because he saw that was becoming a thing in the late 60s and early 70s. It’s already part of our tradition. You can practice bhakti anywhere. But he would very much encourage anyone who wanted to to go start a farm community. He would say if you have a simple life revolved around Krishna and you try to live simply, eat simply, live in a sustainable ecological way, that is most conducive to practicing devotional consciousness, practicing bhakti.

What are the environmental initiatives now being undertaken at the Bhakti Center?

Radhanathswami asked us last year to start an ecology initiative at the Bhakti Center, wanting to bring some of that consciousness of the Eco Village there. People’s ecological consciousness is deepening. People are really beginning to acknowledge what’s happening in a way that didn’t really exist even ten years ago. We have a pretty hip community at the Bhakti Center. We want people who come to the Bhakti Center to see that we’re making at attempt to be a green temple.

When you come to the Bhakti Center now you see clearly labeled recycling, composting. People are happy to participate — although it is always a challenge to try to get people to buy in at first, trying to get people to understand the importance of it, how it fits into being devotional. We’re also trying to be more conscious about where we get our produce. We have an idea of eventually getting some sort of LEED type of certification for the temple too, so, when you walk in, you see the certification. That makes a big impact.

What we’ve also developed is a Sacred Ecology Forum. We’re doing eco-sanghas once a month. We talk about different elements of the bhakti tradition. This Sunday we’re going to do food. What it means to have a sacred food ethic. We offer food to deity of Krishna, it comes back as prasadam and actually the eating of the prasadam is itself is its own kind of yoga practice or devotional act. But then when you also bring in perspectives from the environmental world, what does it mean to have a food ethic? What the whole point of the eco-sanghas is to say we practice bhakti, but ask what does it mean to practice eco-bhakti?

Then we’re also developing retreats, at Supersoul Farm with our friend Raghunath Cappo as his farm in upstate New York. We’re trying to develop some sacred ecology retreats there. Also Gopal Patel, from the Bhumí Project, and Vineet Chander, the Hindu Life Director at Princeton University, are developing a green Gita workshop, how do you look at the Bhagavad Gita through an ecological lens.

The idea is all of these different components of the Bhakti Center programing is to have a sacred ecology component so that people come, whether they are practicing devotees or new to the tradition, and it’s a community for them to practice their bhakti and encourage the ecology side of it.

To be a devotee means you have to be ecologically conscious, too.
June 5, 2018

Big oil to meet with Vatican officials, Pope Francis

By Brian Roewe and Joshua J. McElwee
National Catholic Reporter

World's leading oil industry executives attending 'energy transition' conference

Rome — Pope Francis and Vatican officials plan to meet with some of the world's leading oil executives this week, in what appears as an effort to lobby the industry to take the dangers of climate change more seriously.

While most details about the encounter are being kept secret in hopes of facilitating frank dialogue among the participants, a weekly Vatican media planning calendar indicates the discussion will likely center on the need to transition the global energy market away from dependence on fossil fuels.

According to the calendar, the conference is being titled "Energy transition and care of our common home," referencing the subtitle for Francis' 2015 environmental encyclical Laudato Si'. It is to be held at the Vatican June 8-9, and is being co-hosted by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the University of Notre Dame.

Vatican officials with knowledge about the planning of the event said it was organized with the idea of persuading the executives that their companies have a role to play in addressing climate change. They also said Francis is expected to take part only briefly in the encounter.

The Associated Press reported that Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the Vatican dicastery on integral human development, is expected to address the meeting at some point.

Leo Burke, director of the Climate Investing Initiative at Notre Dame who is among the organizers, told NCR: "With regard to any energy-related meeting involving the Vatican and Notre Dame, we have consistently stated that it would be a private dialogue among the attendees. Regrettably, I am not free to comment at this time."

The meeting will start 10 days before the third anniversary of the publication of Laudato Si', in which Francis described climate change as "a global problem with grave implications" and "one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day."

Francis has frequently stressed that developing nations and the world's poor and marginalized communities are the ones who stand to suffer the worst impacts of climate change, including
more frequent droughts, floods and extreme weather events, while contributing the least to the problem.

Although scientists express caution about blaming individual climatic events on a warming climate, a Harvard University report last week estimated that more than 4,600 Puerto Ricans died after Hurricane Maria, the 10th-most intense cyclone on record, hit the U.S. island territory in September.

At the annual United Nations climate summit this year, called COP24, the international community will conduct a stocktaking of each nation's self-determined commitments under the Paris Agreement, reached three years ago in France. The summit is being held in December in Katowice, a Polish city situated in the country's coal mining region.

In the Paris Agreement, world leaders agreed to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions — the primary driver of climate change and largely released by humans burning fossil fuels — toward the goal of holding average global temperature rise between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius (2.7 to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

In Laudato Si’, Francis was frank in his assessment of the planet's continued reliance of fossil fuels as its primary source of energy: "We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels — especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas — needs to be progressively replaced without delay."

He added that, "Until greater progress is made in developing widely accessible sources of renewable energy, it is legitimate to choose the less harmful alternative or to find short-term solutions," while going on to criticize the political and business arenas as "slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world."

News of the oil executives' Vatican meeting was first reported June 1 by Axios. According to the news site, attendees will include the CEOs of ExxonMobil and BP, along with former U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and Larry Fink, the chief executive of BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager.

Last year, shareholders of ExxonMobil, including a coalition of religious corporate responsibility advocates, scored a major victory when a nearly two-thirds vote passed a resolution that required the energy giant to provide an annual report on the long-term impacts of global climate policies on its oil and gas reserves.

In addition, nearly 100 Catholic institutions, congregations and dioceses, including the church's humanitarian aid network Caritas Internationalis, have announced they would divest from fossil fuels in recent years as part of a campaign steered by the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

In his encyclical, Francis praised consumer movements as having the ability to change "the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production. When social pressure affects their earnings, businesses clearly have to find ways to produce differently."
He criticized the "principle of the maximization of profits," as giving little concern to whether it comes "at the cost of future resources or the health of the environment."

"Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities," Francis said.

Over the weekend, Reuters reported that 2017 represented a banner year for renewable energy as it saw its largest annual increase to date in renewable power capacity generation and representing 70 percent of net global energy generating capacity. While that production outpaced new capacity from fossil fuels, carbon emissions still rose for the first time in four years.


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June 8, 2018

Ecological crisis caused by 'human interference'

By Filipe Domingues
Crux

ROME - One of the greatest allies of Pope Francis in promoting international initiatives that defend the environment is the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I.

The spiritual leader of the Orthodox Church, Bartholomew has been promoting a Christian theology of the environment for decades.

“Our churches are called to offer alternative models of life based on an approach of the human being in his relationship with God, as a creature longing for eternal life, living in fraternity and love with the other,” Bartholomew said in an exclusive interview with Filipe Domingues for the Brazilian newspaper O São Paulo, which Crux shares with permission.

Francis has developed a close relationship with Bartholomew and acknowledged his influence on his 2015 ecological encyclical Laudato Si’.

Domingues conducted his interview with the patriarch shortly after his visit to Rome in May.

Here is Crux’s exclusive English version of the exchange.

Domingues: Your Holiness, a few days ago, you visited Rome and met Pope Francis. Also you were a keynote speaker at a conference in which your speech was titled “A Common Christian Agenda for the Common Good.” What are the fruits of this visit?
Bartholomew: Every meeting with Pope Francis is another opportunity for us to re-register the good relations between our two churches and our will to continue the path towards unity. It is the encounter of two brothers, the successors of Peter and Andrew the First-Called, and every such event symbolizes our common heritage, but above all the common responsibility we share as pastors for the future of Christianity.

As you see in the title of our speech we come across the word “common” twice. Church itself is the place of the “common” - an event of sharing, of love and openness, a “communion of relations.”

Today humanity is facing a serious crisis, [including] its social outcomes, on a global scale. As we stated in our address, “this worldwide crisis is a ‘crisis of solidarity,’ an ongoing process of ‘desolidarization,’ which puts the very future of humanity at risk. It is our deep conviction, that the future of humanity is related to the resistance against this crisis and the establishment of a culture of solidarity.”

Our churches are called to offer alternative models of life based on an approach of a human being in his relation to God, as a creature longing for eternal life, living in fraternity and love with the other. God, as we mentioned, is present, wherever love and solidarity exist. Our churches resist injustice and all powers that undermine social cohesion by putting forth the social content of the Gospel.

It is Pope Francis’s and our common belief that present ecological problems have to be approached in connection with the contemporary social crisis. It is this spirit that our Common Message with Pope Francis on the ‘World Day of Creation’ (Sept 1st, 2018) expresses.

Concluding our answer, we would like to express our joy for the opportunity we had, once again, to meet with the Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, with whom we associate long-term acquaintance and mutual appreciation. It was a pleasure for us to share our thoughts on various spiritual issues.

Thinking of those who are not so familiar with the Orthodox Church, what are your main concerns today, as patriarch and pastor of such an important church?

Unquestionably, one of our main concerns is that humanity experiences the magnificence of Christianity and the transformation that our Lord Jesus Christ brought upon the universe. A common misconception among our brothers is to think that this magnificence of Christianity refers only to art or culture.

Our brethren often seek the aforementioned magnificence of the Christian faith in Hagia Sophia and in the Chora Monastery in Constantinople, in Ravenna, in Giotto’s paintings, in the modern and marvelous Oscar Niemeyer Cathedral of Brazil and its hovering angels, and in Byzantine music or in Gregorian melodies. But the splendor of Christianity is not merely found here.

Christianity is represented by people’s countless acts of love, kindness, compassion, forgiveness and sacrifice—acts that were motivated by their desire to live as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. A true Christian is someone who gives off his food to a hungry person; someone who offers
water to a brother that is thirsty; someone who shelters a stranger; someone who dresses a naked human being; someone who visits an imprisoned person; someone who takes care of a sick man; someone who has a good thing to say about all people, even those who disagree with him; someone who helps those who hate him; someone who doesn’t judge others; someone who loves his adversaries. Such acts of charity, though difficult to fulfill, are a natural part of the Christian’s being.

Such disciples of Christ are “the salt of the Earth,” as our Lord teaches in the Holy Gospel. The glory of Christianity is the amazing fruit of the faith in Christ, the heart of loving kindness, the love and solidarity for our fellow human beings and the certainty of the eternal destiny of all. If you want an answer about my concerns I would focus on the following fundamental issue, namely, how people can transform the world by becoming disciples of Christ.

What inspires the actions of Orthodox and Catholic Christians on the path to unity?

With the Western Christians we have shared a common path during the first millennium of Christianity’s history. Our churches have tasted the bitter sorrow of separation for many centuries following the schism of 1054. The schism was a painful experience for both sides, regardless of who bears responsibility for it. Everything changed after the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem in 1964, which led to the common lifting of the anathemas between the two churches.

Fifty years after that historic meeting, following our predecessors’ example and commemorating that unique moment for our two churches, we gathered again in 2014 with our brother Pope Francis in Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land. During that meeting we confirmed our firm belief that we need each other’s love and support. The first meeting between the pope and the ecumenical patriarch in 1964 initiated a theological dialogue of truth and love between our two churches; the fiftieth anniversary of this meeting confirmed that our desire for unity requires further acts of charity and love.

Together, you and Pope Francis ask for more respect for Creation, for the environment. Is that a major concern that unites the two of you?

It is an undeniable fact that our planet faces serious problems, largely due to unprecedented human abuse of God’s creation. Such human interference has brought about an ecological crisis.

The atmosphere is being polluted more and more with each passing day; clean water is becoming scarcer since we are polluting our oceans, rivers and lakes. We are destroying thousands of acres of forests each year; meadows grow smaller. Changes in the planet’s climate have led to the loss of many species of our flora and fauna.

We believe that these things have occurred because of our gradual separation and alienation from God. Even we Christians, who often pride ourselves over our faith, have distanced ourselves from God. It is easy to blame others for the destruction of the planet, but we must also ask ourselves whether or not creation is actually safer in the hands of Christians.
The ecological crisis is an issue that affects the natural world, but it stems from a crisis in our hearts. As we seek to advance concrete and fact-based solutions to the problem, we must also focus on the need for personal repentance, which would bring about a “change of thought” and a change in our ways of life. And as we change our lives, we ought to realize that as members of creation we are not the center of the world. We depend on God; God does not depend on us.

**Could Catholics and Orthodox dream that one day we will celebrate Easter on the same date? Are you optimistic about this?**

The subject of a common celebration of Easter is important and complicated. Therefore, the matter needs to be handled delicately in order to avoid scandal among the faithful. Nonetheless, this issue is of great concern to the Orthodox Church.

The idea of a common date of Easter for Orthodox and Catholics was raised in the regular work of the Pan-Orthodox Conference of 1923 in Constantinople and later during the 1930 Preparatory Committee Meeting on Mount Athos. Since then it has been discussed during many inter-Orthodox meetings.

This shows our sincere desire and hope that, as Orthodox Christians, we will celebrate Easter on the same day as other Christian brethren. A common Easter date between Eastern and Western Christians will, among other things, deliver us from many practical difficulties, especially important for the faithful of both churches who reside in lands where Orthodoxy or Catholicism is not the predominant religion.

The truth is, the Orthodox Church will have a difficult time accepting any decision that overlooks what has already been determined on this subject matter by the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (325 AD). We pray, however, and hope that almighty God will guide our steps.

**You were in Egypt with Pope Francis (in April 2017), visiting the Grand Imam of Al Azhar. How would you describe Christian-Muslim dialogue today?**

Our meeting highlighted the role of religion in achieving and maintaining peace in the world. We stressed humanity’s need to embrace faith and to acknowledge the presence of God. We also emphasized the need to respect pluralism and diversity.

To this end, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has initiated a dialogue with Judaism and Islam. It is our responsibility to work with people of diverse backgrounds. We hope that our cooperation with other religious traditions, especially on social issues, will bear great fruit for the entire world. For the Orthodox Church, religious freedom and freedom of conscience is an imperative part of the process; we cannot accept, under any circumstance, the fostering of fanatic sentiments against other religions.

We firmly believe that religious dialogue and, from time to time, meetings between religious leaders, will help people overcome their fears of each other, and move from conflict to rapprochement and peaceful coexistence.
Lastly, neither war nor indifference to the plight of people are consistent with religious teaching. As we have pointed out time and again, war in the name of religion is, in fact, a war against that religion itself.

**How would you express your concern for persecuted Christians in the Middle East, where some of the original Christian communities risk disappearing?**

The persecution of Christians immensely concerns and is the source of great sorrow for us.

Unfortunately, such persecution is not confined to the Middle East. Christians are persecuted also in other corners of the world where exists a so-called “Christianophobia.”

In Europe and in many Western societies, policies of secularization and de-Christianization pose a grave challenge to Christianity. But, unknown to Christianity’s persecutors, it is a fact that faith in Jesus Christ is governed by the spirit of peace, love, forgiveness, and service; we do not seek to exploit and dominate others. The present reality in Europe and in other parts of the world proves that every cultural accomplishment and, most importantly, social achievement, springs from Christian principles.

Thus, the persecution of Christianity actually leads to the persecution of culture and of unique values that beautify our world.

Undoubtedly the situation occurring in the Middle East is alarming. Many Christians are persecuted, while others are forced to flee from their ancient homelands. We have voiced our serious concerns countless times to world leaders; we have reminded them that we have yet to discover the whereabouts of the two abducted Hierarchs, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul and Syriac Bishop John Ibrahim, both of Aleppo. We anxiously wait to receive news from the regional and global authorities and pray for their safe return.

The Orthodox Church, as it has been stated in the Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council, convened on the island of Crete, Greece, in June 2016, “is particularly concerned about the situation facing Christians, and other persecuted ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East. In particular, she addresses an appeal to governments in that region to protect the Christian populations - Orthodox, Ancient Eastern and other Christians - who have survived in the cradle of Christianity. The indigenous Christian and other populations enjoy the inalienable right to remain in their countries as citizens with equal rights.”


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**June 9, 2018**

Pope Tells Oil Executives to Act on Climate: ‘There Is No Time to Lose’
ROME — Three years ago, Pope Francis issued a sweeping letter that highlighted the global crisis posed by climate change and called for swift action to save the environment and the planet.

On Saturday, the pope gathered money managers and titans of the world’s biggest oil companies during a closed-door conference at the Vatican and asked them if they had gotten the message.

“There is no time to lose,” Francis told them on Saturday.

Pressure has been building on oil and gas companies to transition to less polluting forms of energy, with the threat of fossil-fuel divestment sometimes used as a stick.

The pope said oil and gas companies had made commendable progress and were “developing more careful approaches to the assessment of climate risk and adjusting their business practices accordingly.” But those actions were not enough.

“Will we turn the corner in time? No one can answer that with certainty,” the pope said. “But with each month that passes, the challenge of energy transition becomes more pressing.”

He called on the participants “to be the core of a group of leaders who envision the global energy transition in a way that will take into account all the peoples of the earth, as well as future generations and all species and ecosystems.”

In an era when the White House is viewed by many scientists as hostile to the very idea of climate change, with President Trump announcing the United States’ withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, Francis is seen as an influential voice to nudge oil executives to take action on the issue.

Among those summoned to a 16th-century villa in the Vatican gardens were the chairman of Exxon Mobil, the chief executive of the Italian energy giant Eni and the chief executive of BP.

Paul J. Browne, a Notre Dame spokesman, said the university’s president, the Rev. John I. Jenkins, had been inspired by the pope’s 2015 encyclical instructing “all schools and departments of the university to respond to Francis’ evocative appeal on behalf of ‘our sister,’ the Earth.”

Many had complied, he said, including by expediting plans to stop coal burning at the university power plant. Notre Dame’s Mendoza College of Business sponsored the conference.

In his 2015 encyclical, Francis, a vocal supporter of the Paris accord, warned that climate change represented “one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.” He called for a model of energy transition.
On Saturday, the pope reiterated his call for a transition from fossil fuels “to a greater use of energy sources that are highly efficient while producing low levels of pollution.” It was a challenge “of epochal proportions,” he acknowledged, but also one that presented an immense opportunity to “promote the sustainable development of renewable forms of energy.”

He said that though the world is affected by climate change, it was the poor who would “suffer most from the ravages of global warming.” Francis added that the transition “is a duty that we owe towards millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, poorer countries and generations yet to come.”

Last month, a group of investors representing more than $10.4 trillion in assets published a letter in The Financial Times urging the oil and gas industry to “be more transparent and take responsibility for its emissions,” which account for 50 percent of global carbon emissions, according to the Carbon Disclosure Project, an organization based in London.

To date, according to the Global Catholic Climate Movement, dozens of Catholic institutions have divested from fossil fuels, including Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of relief organizations; Catholic banks with more than 7 billion euros, or $8.3 billion, on their balance sheets; archdioceses; religious orders; and lay movements.

On Thursday, Equinor, the Norwegian oil giant formerly called Statoil, released a report saying that the world needed to move faster in adopting renewable energy to achieve the goals of the Paris agreement.

“The climate debate is long on targets, but short on action,” the company said. “We believe it’s possible to achieve climate targets set out in the Paris agreement, but that requires swift, global and coordinated political action to drive changes in consumer behavior and shift investments towards low carbon technologies.”

Other oil companies, including Exxon Mobil, have endorsed the Paris accord and have called for carbon taxes, but the Equinor report appeared to be more explicit in its endorsement of more vigorous climate action. Still, Equinor remains a major producer of oil and gas, and it continues to search for hydrocarbons.

The Rev. Seamus P. Finn, a participant at a conference in 2013 that brought mining companies to the Vatican, said that exercise had been useful for the industry and the Vatican “to better understand each other,” and that follow-up meetings had “deepened the quality of the conversation.”

The Vatican is a “safe place for discussion,” said Father Finn, a Catholic priest and the chairman of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility.

“I think that all can agree that there needs to be a shift from fossil fuels to alternative forms of energy, but the debate is how long is that transition period going to be,” Father Finn said.
“For some, it’s tomorrow. For others who believe that climate change is not so serious, there is plenty of time,” he added.

The pope on Saturday said that the situation was dire. Despite the Paris agreement, carbon dioxide emissions and atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases remained high. He said the search for new fossil fuel reserves was “even more worrying.”

“We received the earth as a garden-home from the Creator,” Francis said. “Let us not pass it on to future generations as a wilderness.”


June 9, 2018

Pope Francis tells oil bosses world must reduce fossil fuel use

The Guardian

Pontiff says clean energy is needed as climate change risks destroying humanity

Pope Francis has told oil company chiefs that the world must switch to clean energy because climate change risks destroying humanity.

“Civilisation requires energy, but energy use must not destroy civilisation,” he said at the end of a two-day conference at the Vatican.

The pontiff said climate change was a challenge of epochal proportions, and that the world needed to come up with an energy mix that combated pollution, eliminated poverty and promoted social justice.

The unprecedented conference, held behind closed doors at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, brought together oil executives, investors and Vatican experts. Like the pope, they back scientific opinion that climate change is caused by human activity and that global warming must be curbed.

“We know that the challenges facing us are interconnected. If we are to eliminate poverty and hunger ... the more than 1 billion people without electricity today need to gain access to it,” Francis told them.

“But that energy should also be clean, by a reduction in the systematic use of fossil fuels. Our desire to ensure energy for all must not lead to the undesired effect of a spiral of extreme climate changes due to a catastrophic rise in global temperatures, harsher environments and increased levels of poverty,” he said.
June 11, 2018

Pope urges oil companies to lead clean energy transition in unprecedented Vatican Conference

By Olivia Rosane
NationofChange

"Civilization requires energy, but energy use must not destroy civilization."

Pope Francis urged the leaders of big oil companies to see the light on climate change at a first-of-its kind conference held at the Vatican with oil executives, investors and Vatican experts, The Guardian reported Saturday.

“Civilization requires energy, but energy use must not destroy civilization,” the pope said during remarks at the end of the conference, according to The Guardian.

The current pope, who has emerged as a leader in the fight against climate change following his groundbreaking 2015 encyclical, urged the companies to lead the transition towards renewable energy and away from fossil fuels.

He said they should strive “to be the core of a group of leaders who envision the global energy transition in a way that will take into account all the peoples of the earth, as well as future generations and all species and ecosystems,” The New York Times reported.

The pope also spoke with a great sense of urgency about the coming crisis. “There is no time to lose,” he said, according to The New York Times.

“Will we turn the corner in time? No one can answer that with certainty,” the pope said. “But with each month that passes, the challenge of energy transition becomes more pressing.”

The meeting, held Saturday behind closed doors at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, included big names in the oil industry like the chairman of Exxon Mobil, the chief executive of BP, the chief executive of the Italian energy company Eni and representatives of Royal Dutch Shell, Norway’s Equinor and Mexico’s Pemex, according to The New York Times and the BBC.

In recent years, oil companies have switched from outright hostility to climate science to taking action on climate change. Exxon Mobil, for example, who funded climate denial think tanks between 1998 and 2005 to the tune of $16 million, has since endorsed the Paris agreement.

But while the pope commended companies for the efforts they are making, he also said those efforts did not go far enough.
Pope Francis also focused on the social justice aspects of climate change, saying it would harm the poor disproportionately, and that clean energy was essential to bringing people out of poverty without disrupting the climate they depend upon.

“Our desire to ensure energy for all must not lead to the undesired effect of a spiral of extreme climate changes due to a catastrophic rise in global temperatures, harsher environments and increased levels of poverty,” he said, according to The Guardian.


June 11, 2018

Religious Leaders’ Symposium on Climate Crisis – A Few Takeaways

By Jim Antal

When the leader of one of the world’s major faith traditions convenes two hundred leaders who have given their lives to combat climate change, an endless flow of creative ideas, perspectives and projects emerges. I offer the following takeaways in the hope that they will be useful to all who share a commitment to restore God’s great gift of creation.

**We have been Given the Opportunity to Amplify our Ambition, Determination and Will**

One of the things that most struck me is that three of the featured presentations all concluded that there is a single factor that is needed to avoid climate catastrophe. We must have the will, the ambition, the commitment to restore creation. Just as climate change is the greatest moral crisis humanity has ever faced, it presents us with the greatest opportunity we have ever been given.

One of those presenters is among the lead climatologists in the world, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber. Another has served for the past many years as the United Nations lead spokesperson on climate change, Christiana Figueres. The third is Figueres’ successor, Patricia Espinosa.

Each of us can readily identify numerous examples that span history and cross cultures of how religion has inspired communities and countries to rise up, how religion has amplified ambition and strengthened both the will and determination of people to seek a more just and compassionate way. Nevertheless, as perhaps the most powerful force on earth, religion has not yet brought its full, transformative force to bear on humanity’s disregard of God’s creation.

A similar point was made by the greatest living Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan John of Pergamon. He reminded us that the heart – not the mind - is where our WILL resides. Thus, if we seek to amplify ambition, we must purify our hearts. He urged us to take a eucharistic approach to creation – to constantly give thanks for the gift of creation – noting that as our gratitude
deepens, so will our capacity to recognize that we have jeopardized the gift, spoiled the blessing, and so will our commitment to do something about it.

**We must reconnect with seeds and with the soil**

Indian scientist and activist, Vandana Shiva, made it clear that unless we undertake a radical transformation, we will pass on to future generations a death sentence. Years ago she abandoned her academic specialty as a quantum physicist and immersed herself in the science of food production when she realized that every element of agriculture is about war. For example, insects are viewed as enemies to be exterminated, in spite of the fact that 1/3 of the food we consume comes from pollinators. Most people don’t realize that virtually all fertilizers are created from fossil fuels, and that you can have at least a 300% increase in food productivity simply by caring properly for the land. In India, in the Punjab region, the rivers are gone and the farmers are committing suicide. Once she shared with us that only 5% of cancer has a genetic basis, and 95% of cancers are caused by toxic creations made by us, it made sense when she asserted that poisoning the world is sin. Nevertheless, 75% of diseases are linked to chemical/corporate farming, and she shared that 40-50% of CO2 comes from chemically grown food and transportation. In addition to providing her people and the world with these motivational facts, through her activism, India has passed a law preventing Monsanto from patenting seeds.

**We can do this!**

This is the rally cry of Christiana Figueres, who served as Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) from 2010-2016 and was the central figure of the Paris Climate Accord. While no one knows more about the challenges of climate change, no one is more convincingly positive in articulating hope.

Her starting point is that if we add up all the things humanity really wants, not only can we fulfill those wants but we can fulfill those wants by doing what we actually need to do build a sustainable world. For example, all people around the world want less pollution. We can accomplish that by closing down all coal plants and transitioning from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles. People want less congestion on the roads. We can accomplish that by having fewer cars and trucks. People want food security. By restoring degraded lands we will reduce the CO2 in the air and provide people with food where they live.

Without being Pollyannaish, she’s quick to point out the achievements since the Paris Climate Accords. 23% of the global energy grid is already renewable. Volvo, BMW and Volkswagen have all committed to build only electric vehicles soon. As of 2030, all vehicles in India will be electric.

Nevertheless, she offers a short, uncompromising list of behavior changes each of us can embrace:

1. Eradicate meat from our diets.
2. Take care of how we transport ourselves. We don’t need 4 wheels for all transport.
3. Those who live in a democracy must vote responsibly.
4. We must leverage the power of capital by divesting from fossil fuel companies and investing in clean, renewable forms of energy.

In her final comments, she charged the faith community to do two things. First, we need to strengthen the arch of faith. Amidst the many ups and downs, it’s up to the faith community to inject confidence that humanity can stand up for our highest purpose. A 1.5-degree Celsius rise is our fundamental moral obligation. Second, we need to expand the art of love. While feeling solidarity with the most vulnerable is easy, it’s also easy to exclude some from the arch of love. We must extend the arch of love to everyone.

**What sort of ancestor do you want to be?**

This question was raised by Raj Patel, Research Professor in the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin. In many ways, it captures the challenging conversations that filled these three days, and provides a good end to this brief reflection.


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**June 11, 2018**

World Religious Leaders Confront Climate Crisis

By Jim Antal

Last week, the religious leaders of a quarter of the world’s population confronted the climate crisis – and I was honored to be part of the conversation.

At the invitation of the head of the Orthodox Church, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 200 leaders from the fields of science, government, public policy, business and religion came together for three days in Greece to examine the most up to date climate science, the threats already posed by climate change, and the most promising strategic responses. Every one of us had committed at least a significant part of our life to address the greatest moral challenge humanity has ever faced, and we were hoping for inspiration. We were not disappointed. ([click here for details on the Symposium and participants](https://www.jimantal.com/news/religious-leaders-symposium-on-climate-crisis-a-few-takeaways))

Among the religious leaders who addressed the group was His Eminence Peter Cardinal Turkson, a Ghanaian Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. It was Cardinal Turkson who worked very closely with Pope Francis in the development of *Laudato Si*.

Jeffrey Sachs, the world-renowned professor of economics, senior UN advisor, bestselling author and former Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia, used his keynote to identify the core components of a moral economy. He noted that for Jesus, justice is the core of a moral economy, and the essence of justice is a preferential option for the poor.
Sachs then stirred the gathering with a blistering critique of corporate capitalism, pointing out that in America, we have no government of the people. We have a government of business within which our Congress walks around acting like it has nothing to do because it’s been paid to do nothing. By making the corporation the essence of the modern economy, we have unleashed the most powerful instinctual human drive: greed. By unleashing greed, we have also freed from moral constraint violence, plunder and a total disregard for the plight of future generations.

In the presence of His Eminence John Cardinal Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Nigeria, Sachs offered the Nigerian delta as “exhibit one” of how corporations act with impunity and how national governments are now subordinate to corporations. The natural beauty and resources of Nigeria have been sacrificed on the altar of profit. Deforestation in service of the fast food industry is another notable illustration.

Sachs concluded by noting the obvious: humanity wants to survive, to be happy and to flourish. But the 500 year “trial run” of corporate capitalism has failed all three desires. He then called upon religion to show a way forward, to bring humanity together in order to confront the challenge of climate change, to offer humanity authentic meaning as we face the Anthropocene, and in God’s name to demand accountability and accept the struggle.

Just as our gathering concluded, Pope Francis took the unprecedented step of summoning both the CEOs of the largest oil and gas companies in the world as well as the money managers of major financial institutions for a meeting. Both Cardinal Turkson and Jeffrey Sachs left our symposium early so that they could join Pope Francis and bring their perspectives to the chairman of Exxon Mobil, the chief executive of BP and others. While the pope acknowledged that we are facing a challenge “of epochal proportions,” he urged the oil executives to embrace this immense opportunity for a rapid transition to renewable forms of energy. He told them that we have a duty “towards millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, poorer countries and generations yet to come.”

The unambiguous message to the world in a week in which the leaders of the Eastern Church and the Western Church confronted the challenges of climate change was this: climate change is the greatest moral challenge the world has ever faced. And not only that: climate change is a religious issue. It now falls to the adherents of those faith traditions – together with all people of faith along with all people of good will – to accelerate the world’s transition to clean, renewable energy as we restore God’s great gift of creation.


June 11, 2018
ISKCON’s Govardhan Eco Village, Mumbai and Sacred Ecology Forum Hosts Global Conference on Sustainability in Manhattan

APN News

New Delhi : The Bhakti Centre (TBC), located in the heart of Manhattan, an educational and cultural centre centered on the Vedic values, recently hosted a unique confluence of academicians, diplomats, researchers, monks and in general enthusiasts concerned with the topic of sustainability according to a release issue here.

“Sustainability from the Inside Out”, as the conference was named, was hosted conjointly by Govardhan Eco Village, Mumbai and the Sacred Ecology Forum at TBC yesterday, to explore the profound connection between the practice of yoga and the sustainability of the Earth and its resources ahead of the International Yoga Day.

The conference began with Gauranga Das, Director, GEV and Vice-President, ISKCON Chowpatty explaining the inspiration and history behind the conception of the event – as a follow up to the conference on “Hinduism and Ecology” which was held last year in GEV, as a unique way to commemorate International Yoga Day, and as an offering to His Holiness Radhanath Swami, who has remained the spiritual powerhouse behind both these projects, GEV and TBC, which started coincidently around the same time, 2003.

The discussion was around the broad theme of the role of spirituality in providing a narrative to the question of sustainability. Mr. Sandeep Chakravorty, the current Consul General of India, stressed the human role and the need of inner change to address the question of climate change. He mentioned about the role of austerity and frugality in abating the blazing fires of consumerism – quoting Gandhi, “There is enough for everybody’s need and not for anybody’s greed.”

The academia was represented by Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Dr. John Grim who are the Co-Directors of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, and Dr. David Haberman who is the Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University. Mary and John stressed the need of shared future for a better future – where religious values can assist science and technology for a sustainable future. They quoted and lauded GEV as an example of a fine “engaged project” – which shows the confluence of spiritual values and a working ground model where the values have been duly applied.

Professor Haberman made his presentation on explaining how practically all aspects of nature, be it stones, trees and rivers are all considered sacred in Vedic fold – focusing much on the example of Govardhan worship. He stressed how Krishna, Himself taught by His example when he advocated the worship of the hill Govardhan.

HH Radhanath Swami explained that the crisis of environment is actually the crisis of human spirit – the state of environment is actually an external manifestation of the ecology of the heart. His Holiness quoted examples from the life of his spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada how he personally cared for Krihsna creation – be it being upset on a severed tree in an ISKCON
property, instructing disciples about a leaking faucet in a farm or shedding tears for a struggling insect on the floor – and these all amidst his busy schedule of translating Shrimad Bhagavatam and preaching worldwide.

Among other dignitaries, Anita Patiala, Agricultural Counselor, US Embassy Costa Rica and Dr. Peter Whitehouse, President, Intergenerational Schools International shared their personal journeys in the field of religion and sustainability. The program was also decorated with a beautiful musical rendition of Srila Rupa Gosvami’s Sri Yamunastakam by Jahnavi Jivana Devi Dasi.


June 13, 2018

Church leaders endorse Season of Creation in rare ecumenical joint letter

Anglican Communion News Service

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has joined leaders of other Christian churches in a joint letter encouraging participation in the Season of Creation. The annual celebration of prayer and action to protect the environment emerged from a proclamation by the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I in 1989. He called on Orthodox Christians to observe 1 September each year as a day of prayer for creation. Many churches across the world from different traditions began celebrating a Season of Creation between that date and 4 October – the feast of St Francis of Assisi.

In 2009, the Anglican Consultative Council called on provinces to “celebrate a liturgical ‘Season of Creation’ as an integral part of the church’s yearly pattern of worship and teaching”; and repeated the call in 2012, when it asked provinces to “consider the inclusion of a season of Creation in the liturgical calendar.” In 2014 Pope Francis designated 1 September as an annual World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation; and in 2015 he called on Catholics to join “together with all Christians” in the Season of Creation.

Now, nine Church leaders have signed a letter encouraging Christians around the world from all traditions to mark the season of prayer.

“As the environmental crisis deepens, we Christians are urgently called to witness to our faith by taking bold action to preserve the gift we share,” they say in their letter. “As the psalmist sings, ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein’ (Psalm 24:1-2).
“During the Season of Creation, we ask ourselves: Do our actions honour the Lord as Creator? Are there ways to deepen our faith by protecting ‘the least of these,’ who are most vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation?

“We invite you to join us on a journey of faith that challenges and rewards us with fresh perspective and deeper bonds of love. United in our sincere wish to protect creation and all those who share it, we join hands across denominations as sisters and brothers in Christ. During this season, we walk together towards greater stewardship of our place in creation.”

The letter has been described as “the first joint statement of support for the season from leading authorities across denominations including the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Anglican Communion” and as “a sign that Christian leaders increasingly see environmental protection as an essential expression of their faith.”

Commenting on the letter, Archbishop Justin Welby said: ‘‘In the beginning, God said. . .’ These words usher in the most extraordinary account of creation: an account of abundance, of multiplicity, of creativity.

“Creation is God’s intricate work of art, and human beings are privileged to be placed within it. In this Season of Creation, we celebrate God the Creator, we thank God for the extraordinary riches of his grace. But we also come in sorrow for the way we have defaced creation and misused it for our own ends. In this Season, let’s find again a true vision of what being made in the image of God, caring for creation can mean, and commit ourselves to action.”

Cardinal Peter Turkson, Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said “As Pope Francis tells us in Laudato Si’, ‘living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience’ (217).

“As caretakers of God’s creation, we must choose between tending to its richness and neglecting it to impoverishment. For the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters, our choices have profound implications. Let us embrace the Season of Creation in all its joy and depth, and fully enter into our role as caretakers of the Earth, our common home.”

Environmentalists from a number of different denominations have created and collated a number of resources, which are available on the Season of Creation website: seasonofcreation.org.

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Letter in support of the Season of Creation

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“‘But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?’” (Job 12:7-9, NRSV)
Once every year, from 1 September to 4 October, members of the Christian family set aside time to deepen our relationship with the Creator, each other, and all of creation. This is the Season of Creation, which began in 1989 with the first recognition of the day of prayer for creation by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church, and which is now embraced by the wider ecumenical family.

During the Season of Creation, we join together to rejoice in the good gift of creation and reflect on how we care for it. This season offers a precious opportunity to pause in the midst of our day-to-day lives and contemplate the fabric of life into which we are woven.

As the environmental crisis deepens, we Christians are urgently called to witness to our faith by taking bold action to preserve the gift we share. As the psalmist sings, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1-2). During the Season of Creation, we ask ourselves: Do our actions honour the Lord as Creator? Are there ways to deepen our faith by protecting “the least of these,” who are most vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation?

We invite you to join us on a journey of faith that challenges and rewards us with fresh perspective and deeper bonds of love. United in our sincere wish to protect creation and all those who share it, we join hands across denominations as sisters and brothers in Christ. During this season, we walk together towards greater stewardship of our place in creation.

“O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent” (Psalm 104:1-2).

With you, we give thanks for the community of believers around the world that is bringing love to creation this season, and we praise the Creator for the gifts we share.

In God’s grace,

Archbishop Job of Telmessos,
Permanent Representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the WCC,
on behalf of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Justin Welby,
Archbishop of Canterbury

Cardinal Peter K A Turkson,
Prefect, Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

The Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit,
General Secretary of World Council of Churches

The Revd Dr Chris Ferguson,
General Secretary, World Communion of Reformed Churches
Bishop Efraim Tendero,
Secretary-General of the World Evangelical Alliance

The Revd Dr Martin Junge,
General Secretary, Lutheran World Federation

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria,
General Secretary, Act Alliance

Father Heikki Huttunen,
General Secretary, Conference of European Churches

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- There is a Season of Creation ecumenical steering committee which brings together the Act Alliance, Anglican Communion Environmental Network, ARocha, Christian Aid, Global Catholic Climate Movement, Lausanne/World Evangelical Alliance Creation Care Network, Lutheran World Federation, and the World Council of Churches. They have produced a number of resources which are available online at seasonofcreation.org.


June 13, 2018

Interfaith gathering celebrates water

By Diana Swift
Anglican Journal

The waves of Lake Ontario lapped a light andante to the prayers, chants and drumbeats of a powerful ceremony—Toronto’s second annual Niigaani-gichigami Gratitude Walk and Festival.

Held June 8 just before dusk in a downtown waterfront park, the interfaith spiritual gathering attracted First Nations and non-First Nations folk alike—some in Indigenous dress, others in African garb, the Muslim hijab or the bright blue habits of the Sisters of St. John the Divine.

Organized by the Niigaani-gichigami Collective, the Urban Native Ministry and the Cathedral Church of St. James, the event was designed to thank, celebrate and protect the life-sustaining integrity of Niigaani-gichigami (Lake Ontario) and its connecting waterways. Its aim is to promote community thinking and action on how we live on the water and build a right relationship with the life-sustaining waters in our region.
The cathedral’s the Rev. Leigh Kern, who helped organize the event along with Pastor Evan Smith of the United Church of Canada (both of Indigenous ancestry), introduced the main speaker, Mi’kmaw elder and educator Wanda Whitebird.

“Water teaches us humility. If we don’t drink water, we die,” Whitebird said, noting that water, an essential gift from the Creator, is central to Indigenous peoples’ spirituality. “Water is the most powerful entity on Earth. It is also our first protector,” she added, referencing the waters that surround the unborn child in the womb.

Whitebird stressed that this legacy of respect for and stewardship of water has been handed down to Indigenous people by their ancestors throughout the generations. “We are taught that everything you do or say has an echo, not only to you but your children and grandchildren and their children and grandchildren,” she said.

As a harbour police boat chugged by and the constables on board looked long and hard at the celebrants, Whitebird explained how if the year were 1950, this ceremonial gathering would be illegal. “If we were standing here, we’d all be arrested. It wasn’t until after 1951 that we were legally allowed to practise our ways, and it didn’t become legal in the United States until 1978. Our spirituality was outlawed,” she said.

Whitebird thanked the Creator and offered prayers for the “amazing, pure, precious lake,” asking for the blessing of its spirit.

Then a native of Quebec stepped up to the mic and recounted how her ancestors, who came to New France in 1650 to be voyageurs in the fur trade, relied on Indigenous people to teach them how to live off the daunting new land and especially how to navigate the waterways to the interior. She led the celebrants in five verses of a lively French song dating back to the days of the coureurs des bois.

A representative from the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network explained how Big Mining, with Canadian companies in the forefront, is polluting waters around the globe, producing environmentally disastrous tailing ponds whose heavy-metal toxicity takes the greatest toll on the poorest and most vulnerable people—the children and the women who wash their clothes in the river and fetch water for cooking.

A representative from the Ashkenazi Jewish community spoke of the importance of water in Jewish cleansing rituals and how water connects her to her ancestors, whose bones lie half a world away. Three members of the city’s Islamic community sang a song of praise.

The event also featured the ancient Indigenous smudging ceremony, with the matchless aroma of burning sage rivalling that of the finest church incense. Attendees also held small pieces of cedar leaves and small cups of water, which they emptied back to the ground in a gesture of respect. The group sang “The Nibi Song,” a paean to water written in Ojibwemowin by Doreen Day and her grandson Mashkooice (Little Elk).
After the water ceremony, drummers led the celebrants in a walk several blocks north to the cathedral for a community barbecue with live music.

https://www.anglicanjournal.com/articles/interfaith-gathering-celebrates-water/

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June 14, 2018

Indonesia combines Islam with environmental activism

By Rizki Nugraha and Ayu Purwaningsih
Deutsche Welle

The Indonesian government and Greenpeace have partnered with Islamic organizations to promote plastic waste reduction. Can including religion make environmental campaigns more effective?

Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), together with Greenpeace and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry and Environment are cooperating on an awareness campaign during Ramadan to solve the problem of plastic waste in Indonesia.

Together, they have a mission to promote the use of reusable bags to cut plastic bag use in Indonesia. The Indonesian government and clerics from the country's largest Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are seeking to influence the consumer behavior of the groups' combined 100 million followers.

NU and Muhammadiyah, together with the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry and Environment, announced the Plastic Waste Reduction Movement in Jakarta on June 6.

According to Rosa Vivien Ratnawati, the waste management director at the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the amount of plastic garbage in Indonesia is continuing to increase significantly.

"We want to encourage citizens to start from small things like carrying a tumbler, instead of disposable plastic bottles, or using non-plastic shopping bags," she said.

**A plastic-free Ramadan**

During the 2018 Ramadan, the Indonesian ministry of environment and environmental organizations are busy inviting religious leaders to popularize breaking Ramadan fasts without plastic.

Greenpeace Indonesia said it wants to use the influence of religion through the MUI to spread the message of environmental conservation and invite Muslims to stop using disposable plastic.
Greenpeace launched its #PantangPlastik (#AntiPlastic) campaign by holding a gathering dubbed "eco-iftar" in South Jakarta, last week. Iftar is the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset.

Muharram Atha Rasyadi, a Greenpeace urban campaigner said Indonesians tend to consume more during Ramadan. For example, many people gather to break fast at restaurants or order take-away food. As a result, the amount of trash increases.

"In mosques, for instance, at the end of the day during Ramadan, people break fast together by using many disposable plastic food containers," Rasyadi told DW, adding that Greenpeace recognized the need to include Islamic religious organizations to reach ordinary people.

He explained it is important to invite imams to campaign together for the environment.

"In contrast to urban populations, people in rural areas tend to obey what clerics say."

Rasaydi expects that the "eco-iftar" event would inspire Muslims to consume less single-use plastic in their daily activities.

Indonesia is currently listed as one of the largest sources of waste pollutants in the world. Every year, the average Indonesian dumps 17 kilograms (37 pounds) of plastic waste in various forms. As a result, 187.2 million annual tons of plastic waste from Indonesia ends up in the ocean.

**Is religion effective for activism?**

Religion has previously been used as a vehicle for conservation in Indonesia. In 2014, MUI issued a fatwa (Islamic legal opinion) that forbid poaching of endangered species. And the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, also brought in Indonesian schools to campaign for the so-called School4Trees program.

According to Media Zainul Bahri, a professor of religious studies, at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta, Islam has many messages about environmental preservation.

"There are many threats in the Quran regarding environmental issues. God blames people if they cause environmental damage," he told DW.

According to Bahri, these messages tend to be forgotten because many think there were "no environmental problems" when compared with today.

"The teaching themes of the 1950s to the present are more about theologically centered issues of humanity," he said.

**Religious conservation around the world**

Religion has played a role in saving the environment in other countries. In 2008, the secular ideological conservation group The Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC) launched an
environmental project by engaging local religious leaders to invite fishermen to stop using explosives for fishing on the island of Pemba, Tanzania.

"This conservation idea isn't from the West," said a fisherman who took part in a conservation program in an interview by The Christian Science Monitor. "It's from the Quran."

While religion can play an important role in raising awareness, the involvement of conservation organizations is necessary for religious leaders to deal with technical issues.

"Many imams do not have a sufficient understanding of how nature works and how to take care of the ecosystem," said Bahri.

"The point is we want to invite people to realize that this commitment is also something Islamic," the waste bank director of the NU's Disaster Mitigation and Climate Change Agency (LPBI NU), Fitria Ariayani, told Indonesian media.


June 18, 2018

Nearly 600 institutions back Catholic Climate Declaration

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Close to 600 Catholic institutions have signed the Catholic Climate Declaration, which renews Catholic support for continuing U.S. actions to address climate change despite backpedaling by the Trump administration.

The announcement June 18 of the signing coincided with the third anniversary of the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

Dan Misleh, executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, which organized the declaration, called it "an unprecedented effort by the U.S. Catholic community to step into the void left by President [Donald] Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement" in June 2017.

"The Catholic Climate Declaration is grounded in Catholic social teaching, and it is a significant step in consolidating and galvanizing the U.S. Catholic Church's effort to care for our common home and address climate change and to join other U.S. institutions in supporting the Paris Agreement," he told reporters during a call June 18.
Among the signers are 37 dioceses, close to 200 religious communities, more than 100 parishes, 61 Catholic universities, and more than a dozen Catholic health care organizations, including the Catholic Health Association.

"As Catholic communities, organizations, and institutions in the United States, we join with other institutions from across American society to ensure that the United States remains a global leader in reducing emissions. We call for the Administration to join the global community and return to the Paris Agreement," the declaration reads.

"God's creation is in peril by our own actions," Sr. Sharlet Wagner, president-elect of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, said on the press call. "If we know creation is a gift for us to enjoy, to safeguard and to protect for future generations, climate change presents us with a moral crisis and a moral question. We must each ask ourselves what our response will be."

Bishop Richard Pates, episcopal liaison to Catholic Climate Covenant, said in a statement: "The immorality of inaction on climate change has been clear for a long time. With ever increasing temperatures fueling super hurricanes as well as extending and deepening droughts, we are seeing the tragedies of inaction up close and personal."

Rachelle Wenger, director of public policy and community advocacy for San Francisco-based Dignity Health, told reporters that climate change isn't a political or partisan issue, but "a public health issue." She cited a report from the World Health Organization that estimated that between 2030 and 2050, climate change will cause 250,000 additional deaths annually through increases in malnutrition, malaria, heat stress and other preventable conditions.

The covenant said the declaration affirms the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change — reducing greenhouse gas emissions to hold average global temperature rise to no more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and as low as 1.5 Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels — and reiterates the disappointment of the U.S. bishops following Trump's announcement of the Paris exit, which can occur no sooner than November 2020.

"We found the decision of President Trump deeply troubling. And our hope would be that he would reverse that," said Pates, who is bishop of Des Moines, Iowa.

"Time is of the essence," Pates stressed, calling individuals to press for government action while taking steps to reduce emissions in their daily lives.

The influence of Pope Francis

In Laudato Si’, Francis affirmed the scientific consensus that climate change is occurring and is primarily the result of human activity. He called upon the global community to together take action to avert the harshest impacts of a warming planet that impact poor and marginalized communities often first and most severely.

"Laudato Si’ was a high-water mark for the church's decadeslong engagement in the climate issue," Misleh said. "This declaration builds on a flurry of action this past year and helps to
consolidate and expand on the numerous activities already happening in the U.S. Catholic community."

The actions by Catholic institutions have come as the Trump administration has taken steps to roll back environmental regulations and boost coal and other emissions-heavy fuel sources.

The covenant's Climate Energies program has lined up nearly $10 million in projects to help dioceses, parishes and Catholic organizations install energy-efficient and renewable energy projects. Jesuit Fr. Daniel Hendrickson, president of Creighton University, told reporters June 18 that the Omaha, Nebraska-based school has decreased its greenhouse gas emissions from electricity by nearly 25 percent, a savings of $2 million, and remains committed to its goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

Wagner said she limited herself to highlighting on the June 18 call a few of the "hundreds of examples of concrete climate actions women religious have taken."

Those included separate shareholder resolutions by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the School Sisters of Notre Dame to commit two Midwest electricity firms to publish a climate risk assessment and continue dialoguing with investors on climate change. A third shareholder resolution, brought by Mercy Investment Services, committed Continental Resources to end the polluting practice of flaring in the burning of natural gas.

In terms of lowering their own carbon footprints, Wagner said the Sisters of Holy Cross have established a fund where they offset their carbon footprints through activities like air travel by donating to projects that have planted trees in Uganda and installed solar panels at schools and convents in Bangladesh and India. The Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, have committed to lowering their collective carbon footprint by 2 million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions by June 2019, while the 130-acre campus of the Adrian Dominican Sisters' motherhouse in Adrian, Michigan, now runs on 100 percent renewable energy.

Other signers to the declaration include:

- The archdioceses of Atlanta; Chicago; Indianapolis; Los Angeles; Louisville, Kentucky; Miami; Newark, New Jersey; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Washington, D.C.; as well as the entirety of Alaska: the Anchorage Archdiocese, Fairbanks Diocese and Juneau Diocese;
- The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the National Federation of Priests' Councils;
- The University of Notre Dame, Georgetown University, Santa Clara University, the University of Dayton and Villanova University, as well as the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities;
- Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life and Pax Christi USA.

In late April, Catholic Climate Covenant issued the declaration as part of the Catholics Are Still In campaign. That effort aligns Catholics with a similar, broader push by the We Are Still In
coalition of 2,800 governors, mayors, business and university leaders, and other organizations; the coalition aims to fortify U.S. commitment to the Paris Agreement no matter what steps the federal government takes.

The Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco in September will showcase climate actions underway within those segments of society. It will also push for new, more ambitious commitments ahead of the next United Nations climate conference, COP24, to be held in early December in Poland.

Religious communities, including Catholics, are planning to take part in the summit. Catholic Climate Covenant said it plans to share its declaration at the event and will continue to gather signatures throughout the summer.

Bringing the US bishops on board

At the spring assembly of the U.S. bishops, Pates addressed his fellow bishops early in the proceedings to urge them to sign their individual dioceses to the declaration "in the exercise of our moral leadership" and for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as a whole to do the same.

On that end, he announced that Bishop Frank Dewane, chairman of the bishops' Committee for Domestic Justice and Human Development, said he would begin the process of having the bishops’ conference sign the Catholic Climate Declaration. He said they hoped to bring it back to the bishops at their November meeting.

"Our episcopal leadership can exercise a significant positive impact across the board," Pates said at the Florida gathering last week.

In addition to providing each bishop in attendance with a declaration sign-up sheet, Pates also made sure to put in their hands Francis' speech from days earlier to a meeting of top oil executives and CEOs at the Vatican. Offering a summary of the talk, Pates told the bishops that Francis classified protecting the environment and helping the poor as "two great needs of the world."

He also quoted Francis: "Progress has indeed been made, but is it enough? Will we turn the corner in time? No one can answer that with certainty but with the passing of each month, the challenge of energy transition becomes more pressing."

Pates added that Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have all spoken of the importance of addressing a warming planet, "illustrating the strong continuity on this question of climate change."

John Paul II and Benedict called for an ecological conversation, with Benedict writing about the beauty of creation, Pates told NCR after his speech. Francis has continued that call while strongly stating it's time to act.
"He's calling for action. And I think we have to hear him," Pates said. "He's not just wanting us to say, 'Well it's a good idea' or that sort of thing. He's calling for action."


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**June 19, 2018**

Pope Francis took the climate crisis to those who can fix it: oil and gas execs

By Veerabhadran Ramanathan, Daniel J. Miseleh, and Daniel R. DiLeo

The Hill

Pope Francis recently convened oil and gas corporation executives and investors to share some hard truths about fossil fuels and catastrophic climate change. In doing so, the Holy Father extended the Christian tradition of witnessing challenging truths to the public and influential members of society.

Despite the difficulty of his message, the pope knows that these leaders can help — or obstruct — the world’s collective efforts to shape a new energy future and hopes they will serve the common good.

Four days after the meeting, an international scientific team announced west Antarctica is melting three times as fast now compared to 15 years ago and has lost 2.7 trillion tons of ice during that period. Together, we echo Pope Francis’s urgent plea that these leaders, as well as their colleagues and elected officials, rapidly embrace the changes that science indicates are necessary to avoid climate catastrophe.

Climate scientists agree climate change is mostly due to human activities and warn that humanity has a rapidly-closing window to avoid runaway and potentially irreversible climate impacts with dire humanitarian consequences. These include rising sea levels that are already displacing communities, as well as prolonged droughts, intense floods and extreme heat causing food and water stresses. With unchecked consumption of fossil fuels, such climate changes can worsen significantly within a few decades, exposing our children and grandchildren to unpredictable outcomes and an uncertain future.

Under such impending stresses, it is not hard to imagine violent conflict over scarce resources, especially food and water. However, the good news is we still have time to do something about climate change; but not much time to waste.

In response to climate change, Pope Francis — building on the teachings of Saint John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI that climate change is a moral issue — has encouraged and lived his commitment to personal encounter as a means of social transformation. Academic
researchers identify social transformation as the second most important solution cluster for solving climate change.

Yet, while Pope Francis has met with physical and social scientists, theologians, and policy makers from city mayors to the United Nations Secretary-General, the June 8–9 Vatican climate conference was distinct because it facilitated an encounter with those uniquely able to support or prevent science-based solutions to climate change: fossil fuel corporation executives and financial investors.

During his remarks, the Holy Father emphasized — quite sensibly — that “energy use must not destroy civilization!” He also repeated the theme from Laudato Si’ that social, political, environmental and poverty-related challenges are all “interconnected” and will require integrated, holistic solutions.

In the face of climate change, the poor need greater access to energy — but as Pope Francis emphasized, “That energy should also be clean…Our desire to ensure energy for all must not lead to the undesired effect of a spiral of extreme climate changes due to a catastrophic rise in global temperatures, harsher environments and increased levels of poverty.”

The Holy Father lamented “the continued search for new fossil fuel reserves, whereas the Paris Agreement clearly urged keeping most fossil fuels underground.”

Pope Francis noted that “unlimited faith in markets and technology…will be [in]sufficient to remedy the current ecological and social imbalances.” Instead, Pope Francis stressed the need for wise “political decisions, social responsibility on the part of the business community and criteria governing investments” all informed by commitments to “the long-term common good and concrete solidarity between generations.”

In the United States, many faith traditions — like countless secular groups — are taking advantage of extraordinary opportunities to reduce energy costs through efficiencies and renewables. For example, many Catholic institutions are using Catholic Energies from Catholic Climate Covenant. These local efforts send important signals to energy providers and investors, and complement advocacy for crucial public policies like the Paris Agreement.

Without appropriate responses from fossil fuel corporation executives, financial investors and elected officials, however, these efforts will not adequately transform society in line with climate science.

For the sake of our common home, we urge the oil and gas executives and financial investors whom Pope Francis recently addressed — as well as their colleagues and elected officials — to use their economic power and political influence to help shape a sustainable, truly clean energy future. Climate change is indeed “a challenge of epochal proportions,” as the Holy Father observed.

At this critical time in history, oil and gas executives and financial investors, along with elected officials, will help determine whether humanity avoids or careens into climate catastrophe that
The week that was: world religious leaders confront climate disruption

By Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas
Reviving Creation

Leaders of the Eastern Church and the Western Church, representing billions of people worldwide, spoke with one voice this month about the moral urgency of confronting the climate crisis.

“A civilization is defined and judged by our respect for the dignity of humanity and the integrity of nature,” declared the head of the Orthodox Church, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in his keynote address for a three-day international symposium held in Greece. “Toward a Green Attica: Preserving the Planet and Protecting Its People” was the ninth international, inter-disciplinary, and inter-religious symposium that Patriarch Bartholomew has convened since 1991 to highlight the spiritual basis of ecological care and to strengthen collaboration across disciplines in our quest to build a just and habitable world.

I accepted an invitation to attend the symposium, along with 200 leaders in a variety of fields — science, economics, theology, public policy, journalism, business, and social activism. Gathering in Athens and visiting the islands of Spetses and Hydra, we studied climate science, explored strategic actions toward sustainability and resilience, and renewed our commitment to push for the economic and societal changes that must take place if we are to avert social and ecological chaos and widespread suffering. (For the program and a list of participants, visit here.)

The Bishop of Salisbury, the Rt. Rev. Nicholas Holtam, represented the Archbishop of Canterbury and affirmed the commitment of the Anglican Consultative Council to address the climate crisis (see, for example, Resolution 16.08: Response to Global Climate Change). As the
Church of England states on its Website, “We believe that responding to climate change is an essential part of our responsibility to safeguard God’s creation.” (I note that from September 1 to October 4, Anglicans will unite with Christians around the world to care for God’s creation in a “Season of Creation.” Excellent materials for “Creation Season” worship, study, and prayer are available from the Anglican Communion Environmental Network and other sources here, and a complete guide to celebrating a 2018 “Season of Creation” is available here.)

Peter Cardinal Turkson, a Ghanaian Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church who worked closely with Pope Francis in developing the papal encyclical, Laudato Si, represented the Pope at the symposium. Cardinal Turkson read a statement from Pope Francis that included these lines: “It is not just the homes of vulnerable people around the world that are crumbling, as can be seen in the world’s growing exodus of climate migrants and environmental refugees. As I sought to point out in my Encyclical Laudato Si’, we may well be condemning future generations to a common home left in ruins. Today we must honestly ask ourselves a basic question: ‘What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?’” (The entire statement can be found here.)

One of the most powerful, disturbing and illuminating lectures was given by Jeffrey Sachs, a world-renowned professor of economics and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. Sachs gave a one-hour overview of the history of economics that included a blistering critique of corporate capitalism and its veneration of greed, by which “Nature is utterly sacrificed for profit.” (A professional videographer recorded his speech, but until that video becomes available, you can watch a more basic recording here).

Other speakers at the symposium included such luminaries as award-winning scientist and activist Vandana Shiva, who argued that modern industrial agriculture has become “an act of war” against human health and the health of the Earth. She noted that the chemicals used to kill insects are the same chemicals that were used in Hitler’s concentration camps. Members of Hitler’s “poison cartel” were tried at Nuremberg for their crimes, she said, “but those crimes continue in the name of feeding the world.” Asserting that only 5% of cancers have a genetic basis, she maintained that the recent merger of corporate giants Monsanto and Bayer created a “cancer train”: one part of the company makes carcinogenic chemicals, and the other part makes the medicine used to treat cancer. She also contended: “Climate change is the destruction of the metabolic system of the planet to regulate her climate.”

Professor Hans Joachim Schellnuber, Director of Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact, gave a hair-raising presentation on the precarious health of “the vital organs of the planet,” such as the Gulf Stream, coral reefs, Alpine glaciers, the Amazon rainforest, and West Antarctic Ice Sheet (a recent study shows that Antarctica’s ice loss has tripled in a decade; if that continues, we are in serious trouble). Citing a 2017 article in the journal Science, “A roadmap for rapid decarbonization,” Schellnuber asserted that we could halve carbon emissions every decade – “but we have to want to do it.”

Other speakers likewise underscored the urgent need to galvanize humanity’s vision, will, and moral courage as we confront the climate crisis, which poses an existential threat to civilization. Writer and activist Raj Patel urged us to consider the question, “What sort of ancestor do you
want to be?” When asked about the role of civil disobedience, he replied, “Now and yesterday is a good day to put our bodies on the lever of the machine.”

Award-winning human rights advocate Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp spoke movingly about the power of compassion, based on his own experience as a three-month-old infant who was protected from the Nazis by a Roman Catholic family, and spared from death by an SS guard who took pity on him. “We are wood plucked out of the fire,” he cried. “How can I ever despair? We are able to plant the future into the present…We desperately need each other…A decade is rising before us, a decade where miracles can happen. Can we declare this decade a sacred time? We are one human family, one Earth community with a common destiny. Is this not a moment of kairos?… We are men and women of radical hope.”

Speaking of hope – Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 2010-2016, gave one of the most impassioned appeals to active hope that I’ve ever heard. Figueres was a key player in the successful delivery of the Paris Climate Accord, an agreement that she deemed “fundamentally necessary” yet also “insufficient.” Figueres is a small, vigorous woman; her concentrated focus and fierce tenacity reminded me of a diminutive songbird with the astonishing capacity to migrate thousands of miles. Like the Rabbi, she, too, spoke of kairos, which she defined – citing Patriarch Bartholomew – as “the intersection of conviction and commitment.” In response to the urgent question, “What can we do?” she exhorted everyone: 1) to eradicate meat from our diets; 2) to be careful in our methods of transportation; 3) if we live in a democracy, to vote responsibly (to do otherwise is “collusion with a crime against humanity”); and 4) to leverage the power of capital by divesting from fossil fuel companies and investing in clean renewables.

Figueres went further: she challenged communities of faith to “strengthen the arc of faith” – that is, to “inject confidence” in the process of transformation that has started and that must accelerate. After all, limiting global average temperatures to a 1.5º rise – the aspirational goal of the Paris Climate Accord – gives only a 66% guarantee of saving small island states. How many of us would board an airplane that had only a 66% chance of landing safely? She also challenged faith communities to “expand the arc of love,” so that no one is excluded.

Both Jeffrey Sachs and Cardinal Turkson left the symposium early to travel to Rome. Pope Francis had taken the unprecedented step of inviting the world’s top fossil fuel executives – including the chairman of Exxon Mobil, the chief executive of the Italian energy giant Eni, and the chief executive of BP – along with money managers of major financial institutions, to meet with him in a two-day, closed-door conference at the Vatican. Sachs and Turkson joined the meeting to add their perspectives.

“There is no time to lose,” the Pope told the participants. He appealed to them “to be the core of a group of leaders who envision the global energy transition in a way that will take into account all the peoples of the earth, as well as future generations and all species and ecosystems.”

Thus, in one extraordinary week, Christian Churches, both East and West, called for robust action to address climate disruption.
The Rt. Rev. Marc Andrus, Bishop of California and leader of the Presiding Bishop’s delegation to UN Climate Summits, commented: “The moment is dire, and also is our (humanity’s) moment of greatest possibility. St. Irenaeus called a human fully alive the glory of God. Now, 1,300 years later we may understand that for humanity to act as one for the good of the Earth is yet a greater expression of God’s glory.”

Looking back on the symposium, Bishop Marc was thankful for its “great spirit of respect and mutuality… Rather than lobbying to enlist people to each cause, there was a celebration of what each person is doing to heal the Earth, and a seeking to support each person on their path, to make connections. A good example of this to me was the tremendous joy we all felt as the Ecumenical Patriarch released two kestrels that had been nursed back to health by an Athenian woman whose ministry is protecting and healing endangered birds.”

Another Episcopal participant, Dr. Sheila Moore Andrus, a biologist and an active climate champion from Diocese of CA, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet new climate activists and connect with individuals she has respected for many years – including the Rev. Fletcher Harper, who, she said, “is currently working on a project similar to one I am working on for the Diocese of CA: a web-based tool that can help people decrease their carbon footprint and aggregate those choices by church and diocesan Community. The conference gave Fletcher, Marc and me a chance to explore ways to promote such a tool among interfaith groups, and all this in settings filled with inspiring talks and sacred indoor/outdoor spaces.”

The Rev. Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of GreenFaith, concluded: “The fact that it was searingly hot during the symposium made the point about the need for action as powerfully as any of the speakers. This September, the multi-faith service at Grace Cathedral gives everyone a chance – whether in person or on the live-stream – to commit to living the change in our own diet, transportation and home energy use that’s needed for a non-scorned, sustainable future.”

http://revivingcreation.org/the-week-that-was-world-religious-leaders-confront-climate-disruption/

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**June 21, 2018**

How Islam can represent a model for environmental stewardship

United Nations Environment Program

The world, not just the UN, is waking up to the power of faith-based organizations (FBOs). How can Islam, and other faiths, contribute to solutions to sustainability and mitigate climate change risks?

Odeh Al-Jayyousi, Professor and head of innovation at Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain, scholar in sustainable innovation and a member of UN Global Scientific Advisory Panel, for UN
Environment’s Global Environment Outlook 6 (GEO6), argues that Islamic worldview represents a unique model for a transition to sustainable development by focusing on justice, degrowth and harmony between human and nature.

He commented that Islam views the environmental challenges as an indicator for a moral and ethical crisis. Looking at the creation of human, Earth, and cosmos as signs of the Creator (Kitab Manthoor) is a key in Islamic values.

Prof. Al-Jayyousi elaborated that Islamic worldview defines a good life (Hayat Tayebah) living lightly on Earth (Zohd) and caring for both people and nature. Islamic discourse offers a sense of hope and optimism about the possibility of attaining harmony between human and nature. Earth will find a balance if humans rethink their lifestyles and mindsets as stated in the Quran:

Corruption has appeared in both land and sea
Because of what people’s own hands have brought
So that they may taste something of what they have done
So that hopefully they will turn back
Qur’an 30: 41

Professor Al-Jayyousi calls to revive the holistic view of Islam which is founded on the notion of harmony and “natural state” (fitra) and in respecting balance (mizan) and proportion (mikdar) in the systems of the universe. These notions provide an ethical dimension and a mandate for all humans to respect nature and all forms of life.

Hence, the overcoming environmental crisis and mitigating the impact of climate change, from an Islamic perspective is underpinned by defining the role of humans as trustees and stewards (khalifah). This balance has been disturbed because to human choices which result in overconsumption, overexploitation and overuse of resources.

Islamic values call to save integrity and to protect the diversity of all forms of life. Professor Al-Jayyousi commented that the ecological crisis is linked to human ethics and values. Human actions are responsible for the global ecological crisis. “Reflecting on the main environmental problems, such as the destruction of natural habitats, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and erosion of soil, we see that all are triggered by human greed and ignorance. Human responsibility is to save and protect livelihood and ecosystem services to ensure a sustainable civilization learning from and reflecting on the fate of past civilizations”, said Professor Al-Jayyousi.

He cited a verse from the Holy Book, Quran, “Every living thing is in a state of worship”. He commented that when one hurts a bird or a plant, he/she is silencing a community of worshippers. To celebrate the symphony of life, all humans need to celebrate and protect biological and cultural diversity.

Islamic worldview calls to make a transition to a sustainable society and economy by adopting responsible development and respecting sustainability principles. This change requires a shift in norms and practices. Religion can become a powerful part of the solution if humans embody a holistic spiritual view towards mankind, earth and cosmos.
In 2015 in Istanbul, the Muslim world in its Islamic declaration for climate change set the framework for an ethical code of conduct to build a low-emission climate resilient future.

Al-Jayyousi aspires to see a new Islamic discourse that emphasizes and links faith, reason and empathy to ensure an ecological insight (*Baseera*). He calls to rethink educational systems that neglected the beauty and majesty of nature and the cosmos.

“The extinction of species around us which are simply communities like us (*Ummam Amthalokom*) may extend to humankind unless we change our worldviews and development models”, warns Prof. Al-Jayyousi. He calls to revive the concept of Green Endowment Fund (*Waqf*) to support a transition to sustainable economy by promoting innovation (*ijtihad*) inspired by nature and culture.

He proposed a conceptual model with three domains to address climate change and sustainability:

- Green activism (Jihad)
- Green innovation (Ijtihad)
- Green lifestyle (Zohd).

He refers to this as a Green JIZ model, which represents an Islamic response to climate change embodying the concept of de-growth.

“Conflict and poor governance are putting the Middle East and North Africa at jeopardy” points out Prof. Al-Jayyousi. He calls for a sustainable region that is founded on human and environmental justice. An optimist, Prof. Al-Jayyousi is inspired by prophet Mohammed saying “*If it is the Last day of life and you have a small plant, make sure you plant it*”.

**About the Author:**
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**June 22, 2018**

Buddhism and ecologically-sustainable living

By Paul Grogan

Tibet Sun
The Earth is undoubtedly facing a global environmental crisis. Human activities are changing the climate, melting the glaciers, clearing the forest, exterminating many species, creating antibiotic resistance, polluting our water sources, and moving species into new locations where their success becomes a problem.

Most people are concerned about this crisis but are struggling to find effective solutions, and are greatly overwhelmed by the sheer scale and complexity of the individual problems.

As a research scientist studying ecology in Europe and North America over the past 30 years, I perhaps understand these problems more than most. And I have come to learn recently through reading and hearing teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama that Tibetan Buddhism in particular provides a very powerful over-arching framework to address this crisis and achieve more sustainable living for our society. Why do I believe this?

Tibetan Buddhist philosophy highlights the importance and significance of interconnections — not just among peoples but also between people and their environment. We are profoundly connected to, and dependent on, the animals, plants, microbes, as well as water, soil, and rocks around us. Understanding and sustaining this complex web of interconnections and interdependencies is the basis for much ecological science research, and it is also one of the fundamental bases of Buddhist philosophy.

Secondly, the central concept of impermanence in Buddhism is demonstrated very clearly in ecology. Genes change over evolutionary time, species evolve according to changes in habitats, and new biologically-driven and physical disturbance events are frequently occurring in all the world’s ecosystems. Understanding and managing these changes and their impacts is at the heart of ecological sustainability.

Thirdly, Buddhism is the most outwardly compassionate of the world’s religions. We cannot live sustainably unless we are living in a way that is compassionate to each other — that promotes and respects human rights, individual dignity, and social justice. And that is compassionate to the other species in our environment.

An additional perspective promoting environmentally-sustainable living is that we cannot live sustainably unless we are compassionate to the future humans that will live on Earth. In other words, if we are mindful of the negative impacts that our current environmentally-destructive activities will have on future generations, then we are likely to live in a more environmentally-benign way.

Western society has reached its current state of ‘progress’ by focussing primarily on the ‘parts’ rather than the ‘whole’. Extraordinary technological developments have been achieved, but they focus primarily on benefiting individuals rather than society as a whole. Consequently, we tend now to approach each environmental problem separately (for example, developing the use of renewable solar and wind energy to replace fossil fuels).

These individual initiatives are good, but they do not directly address the one fundamental issue that underlies all global environmental issues: human behaviour. How ought we to live in order
to achieve an environmental and socially-sustainable existence for our civilisation? The very common Buddhist mantra ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ can be interpreted as ‘May Compassion and Wisdom arise within me’. Compassionate and wise living — truly aware and mindful of the impacts of each and all of our activities on each other, on the biotic and abiotic environment, and on future generations — would result in much slower, gentler, and therefore more mature lifestyles.

This is what the Earth needs, and we can rise to the task by suppressing our base genetically-driven traits for competition, greed, and population growth. Tibetan Buddhist philosophy provides a distinctive and extremely valuable perspective on how to live that matches the principles of ecologically-sustainable living. Therefore, Tibetan Buddhists should be very proud of this heritage. And the rest of the world needs to wake up to Buddhism’s enormous potential to help humanity acknowledge and address the fundamental root cause of the global environmental crisis.

References:

About the author
Paul Grogan is a professor of terrestrial ecosystem ecology at the Department of Biology, Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada. He and his students have published more than 60 ecological science papers on their research in the Arctic as well as in temperate and tropical habitats. He has become particularly keen on communicating science perspectives to the general public that will help to move our society toward more sustainable living.


June 26, 2018

Climate change is a top spiritual priority for these religious leaders

By Juliet Eilperin
Washington Post

ABOARD THE SHIP MORE SPACIOUS THAN THE HEAVENS — Off the island of Spetses, the leader of 300 million Christians worldwide told a group of nearly 200 religious leaders, academics and activists that they needed to move beyond intellectualism when it came to the environment.
“What remains for us is to preach what we practice,” said Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. “Now we must begin the long and difficult way from the mind to the heart . . . May God guide you in your service to his people and the care of his creation.”

The environment has defined 78-year-old Bartholomew’s tenure for more than a quarter-century: The gathering at sea this month was the ninth he has organized since the mid-1990s. This one focused on Attica, the peninsula surrounding Athens that juts out into the Aegean Sea, and Bartholomew brought together scientists and clergy to examine the state of bodies of water including the Danube and Amazon rivers, the Baltic and Adriatic seas, and the Arctic Ocean.

In November 1997, he had delivered an address in Santa Barbara, Calif., where he officially classified crimes against the natural world as sins.

“For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands; for humans to injure other humans with disease, for humans to contaminate the Earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life, with poisonous substances,” he told a crowd that included then-Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. “These are sins.”

Pope Francis has likewise drawn global attention to environmental activism: On the same day Bartholomew was concluding his conference in Greece, the pope brought the leaders of multinational energy and investment firms to the Vatican to discuss the path forward on climate change.

At a time when some political leaders have become more cautious about — or have outright rejected — policies aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions, several major faith leaders are making environmental care a top spiritual priority.

But they have also struggled to inspire some of their congregants to action.

“Even when there’s a will, there is not always a willingness to act,” said Nigerian Cardinal John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, one of two cardinals who traveled to the patriarch’s conference. “The spirit is willing, but very often, the flesh is weak.”

Still, Onaiyekan and others who had journeyed to Greece for the three-day “Green Attica” conference emphasized that they would persist in raising the moral and ethical dimensions of climate change.

In Nigeria, Onaiyekan said in an interview that “there is a kind of ambiguity about climate change” because it is “a nation largely dependent on oil revenue.” But those living on the Niger Delta have experienced the damage associated with oil production firsthand, he said. It would be naive, he said, to expect oil companies and governments to shift their practices on their own.
“If you are waiting for them to change, you will wait till Jesus comes back again,” he said. “We feel the only area where we can actually make an impact is to constantly keep challenging our leaders to stop killing us. Stop killing your people.”

Francis — who issued the first papal encyclical focused solely on the environment, “Laudato Si,” in 2015 — pressed this message during his private audience this month with executives from ExxonMobil, Eni, BP, Royal Dutch Shell, Equinor and Pemex.

Calling climate change “a challenge of epochal proportions,” the pope said that the private sector had taken modest steps toward incorporating climate risks into its business models and funding renewable energy.

“Progress has indeed been made,” he told the group as he wrapped up the two-day session. “But is it enough?”

Former energy secretary Ernest Moniz, who attended the meeting, said in an interview that participants discussed “the moral and ethical dimensions” of climate change, as well as ways to shift to a low-carbon path.

“Everybody was there trying to find a way to go forward,” Moniz said.

The patriarch, who resides in Istanbul, has spent years bringing together unlikely allies while also seeking to reorient the Orthodox Church. In 1989, his predecessor, Patriarch Dimitrios I, designated Sept. 1 as a day of prayer for the welfare of all creation, and Bartholomew has expanded upon this initiative.

Jane Lubchenco, who headed the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration during Barack Obama’s administration and served as the scientific co-chair of most of these conferences, said the patriarch had worked to “position the Orthodox Church as a very stewardship-focused religion.”

Back in 1995, she recalled, he convened a meeting on the meaning of the apocalypse in the modern world, to commemorate the 1,900th anniversary of the Book of Revelation. In that context, Lubchenco said, Bartholomew warned that the apocalypse could be underway if humans did not reassess their impact on the Earth.

This month’s gathering — which included stops on the islands of Spetses and Hydra — included similarly dire warnings from researchers. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, who directs the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, described the current changes arising from fossil-fuel burning as “disruption on a global scale.”

Without a sharp reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, Schellnhuber told the audience, large swaths of Nigeria, the Philippines and elsewhere “will become uninhabitable” because they will be too hot for humans to live in.
Some of the most fiery rhetoric came from Columbia University Earth Institute director Jeffrey Sachs, who spoke to the group in Greece before departing for the Vatican to participate in the papal climate conference. In an impassioned speech, Sachs charted the historic development of the global capitalist economy, arguing that its foundation upon the idea of “limited liability” has meant that corporations will not take responsibility for the economic damage they have caused.

“What we’ve proved is greed unleashed has no boundaries at all,” Sachs said. “That is the modern economy: Unleash the greed.”

The patriarch, who sat in the front row for the entirety of the conference, opened and closed the proceedings. Speaking in English, he framed conservation as a cause inextricably linked to both his faith and the broader cause of social justice.

“Any kind of alienation between human beings and nature is a distortion of Christian theology and anthropology,” he said.

Even small details of Bartholomew’s itinerary carried symbolic significance. His top environmental adviser, the Rev. John Chryssavgis, asked the conference hotels to avoid plastic straws and nixed a planned blessing for Hydra’s fishing fleet that was sponsored by an oil company.

With his free-flowing white beard and braided ponytail — high-ranking Orthodox officials eschew haircuts on the grounds that the practice smacks of vanity — the patriarch stirred an outpouring of affection as he visited two small islands during his tour. Church bells pealed as his yacht came into the islands’ harbors, and local residents thronged him as he made his way into town.

But it is unclear whether that reverence has translated into an embrace of his environmental mission, especially in the United States. The Rev. Terence Baz, an Orthodox priest in Clifton, N.J., said his parishioners are “blue-collar workers, mostly Republican.”

He added that many conservatives from the Episcopal Church and other Protestant sects have recently switched to the Orthodox Church in search of a more tradition-bound faith, “So there is a resistance against recognizing the reality of what is going to come.”

Chryssavgis said the patriarch has plans to “reach out to parishes in a more systematic fashion” on environmental issues through the church hierarchy but added that “it’s a real struggle.”

American religious conservatives such as E. Calvin Beisner, founder of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, wrote in an email that “many Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants” share his skepticism of the idea that burning fossil fuels will cause major environmental damage.

“The abundant, affordable, reliable energy generated from fossil fuels has been indispensable to lifting and keeping whole societies out of poverty,” he said, adding that these benefits “far
outweigh their costs, whether to individuals, to specific nations or regions, or to the entire world.”

But as the hydrofoil cruised toward Athens, the bishop of Salisbury, Nick Holtam, said leaders such as Bartholomew and Francis can bolster policymakers’ convictions.

“Churches don’t look like campaigning organizations,” Holtam said, but when it comes to politicians, “they do need the legitimacy of people who will support them in doing hard things.”

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June 29, 2018

Pope Francis challenges fossil fuel execs to act now

'There is no time to lose'

By Tony Magliano
National Catholic Reporter

Challenging world oil executives to recognize the urgent environmental need to quickly transition from fossil fuel extraction and burning to clean energy production, Pope Francis called them to take to heart that "civilization requires energy, but energy must not destroy civilization."

Gathering the heads of some of the world's largest oil and gas corporations — including ExxonMobil, BP, and Royal Dutch Shell — to the recent "Energy Transition and Care for our Common Home" Vatican conference, the pope told the CEOs that meeting the energy needs of everyone, especially the more than 1 billion people without electricity, must urgently be undertaken, but in ways "that avoid creating environmental imbalances resulting in deterioration and pollution gravely harmful to our human family, both now and in the future."

The pontiff appealed to the energy executives to see the necessary moral interconnectedness of the elimination of poverty and hunger — including providing "energy for all" — with "sustainable development of renewable forms of energy" to replace dirty fossil fuels that are greatly contributing to a dangerous rise in global temperatures and thus leading to harsher environments and, not surprisingly, increased poverty.

"Temperatures over the planet as a whole continue the rapid warming trend we've seen over the last 40 years," said NASA scientist Gavin Schmidt.
According to NASA, during the past century the Earth's average surface temperature has risen about 2 degrees Fahrenheit — largely due to increased human-made global warming emissions like carbon dioxide.

And the past four years are the hottest years on record — since 1880.

"Our common home," as Francis likes to call our planet, is indisputably warming up, causing more frequent, more intense, hurricanes, wildfires, floods, droughts and heat waves.

The Holy Father reminded corporate oil executives that the 2015 Paris climate agreement signed by 196 nations to make the necessary changes to limit global warming was not on track, and that there is real concern that carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases still remain dangerously high.

Here it is important to note that President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the Paris climate agreement, despite the fact that historically the U.S. has put more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than any country, and is currently the world's second largest emitter of heat-trapping gases.

And the world's poor nations, which have generated the least amount of global warming gases, are the countries that are, and will, suffer the most. Here Francis laments:

It is the poor who suffer most from the ravages of global warming, with increasing disruption in the agricultural sector, water insecurity, and exposure to severe weather events. …

The transition to accessible and clean energy is a duty that we owe towards millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, poorer countries and generations yet to come. …

There can be no renewal with our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself.

In a heartfelt appeal to oil and gas corporate leaders, the Holy Father asked them to put their skills and privileged positions to "the service of two great needs in today's world: the care of the poor and the environment."

And with urgent warning to all of us Francis concluded: "There is no time to lose: We received the earth as a garden-home from the Creator; let us not pass it on to future generations as a wilderness."

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net.]

 Leading Economist Champions Pope Francis’ ‘Laudato Si’

By Christopher White
The Tablet

ROME – Jeffrey Sachs – one of the world’s best-known economists – is also arguably one of the world’s biggest cheerleaders of Pope Francis and believes him to be the most important moral leader in the world today.

Sachs, who is not Catholic, has advised the Vatican on papal documents for over 25 years now. Despite having notable disagreements with the Church on issues such as contraception and population control, he’s accepted the call of the last three popes for people of “goodwill” to dialogue with the Church and seek common understanding.

Through his work with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Sachs was a critical player in helping craft “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical calling for greater care for creation, and today he’s a leading champion of the document on the global stage.

Sachs was recently in Rome for meetings of the Pontifical Academy and spoke with The Tablet on the third anniversary of the encyclical’s release, which he believes remains a clarion call for change from policymakers and powerbrokers all the way down to everyday Catholics in the pews.

The Tablet: You’ve consulted on a number of papal documents, both under St. Pope John Paul II and now Francis. How was the process for “Laudato Si’” different than previous experiences?

Each time that I’ve participated, it’s been a very serious and impressive process. In “Centesimus Annus” [Pope John Paul II’s 1991 encyclical on Catholic social teaching] advisory preparation they called in many economists from around the world for input and a very considered process with a long discussion with Pope John Paul II.

In the case of “Laudato si’,” there was an absolutely remarkable period of lead-up bringing the world’s top scientists, climatologists, engineers, as well as many other communities of engagement – politicians, judges, mayors, and others to the Vatican so that this issue could be explored in tremendous depth.

I regard the Pontifical Academy of Sciences as a unique institution in the world because it’s the cutting edge and the highest level of scientific engagement, combined with the faith of the Church. There are no counterparts that I know of with the convening power where the world’s leading experts came, made inputs, contributed, and then we all sat back and watched this beautiful encyclical emerge.
The Tablet: By some accounts, “Laudato Si’” is the most quoted papal document in history in just three years’ time. How do you account for that?

It’s magnificent – absolutely magnificent. You read it and it’s breathtaking. I often say that I can assign it to first year graduate students in earth sciences, biology, theology, diplomacy, or political science. It’s so compellingly holistic that it can be read from all these crucial points of view, so therefore it inspires in its profundity, and it speaks to our urgent needs in a very direct way. The language is also very clear, and I think it brings the full emotional response to all of the knowledge that is deeply interwoven in the document.

The Tablet: Pope Francis recently met with leading oil industry executives and urged them to reduce their use of fossil fuels. Do you believe they’ll take this to heart?

I think it was a very significant gathering, and I was privileged to be part of it. These were oil industry executives who have accepted the basics of climate change. They know that this is real and that they have an important measure of responsibility.

However, I don’t think that the industry is taking as a group the decisive clarity of action – the strength and urgency of action necessary in light of the science. Pope Francis spoke to them extremely directly and said you have the responsibility of the Paris Climate Agreement and a lot of that involves leaving oil and gas under the ground because if we try to take all of the oil and the gas that we economically and profitably can, we will wreck the planet. Pope Francis was very direct, and I know that in such settings everyone listens in rapt attention, so I’m sure that it has a big effect.

The Tablet: What’s been your experience with U.S. leaders over the past three years since the release of the encyclical – both in terms of embrace of, and resistance to, the document?

I’ve been to many university gatherings since Laudato si’ was issued, and of course, I love universities and believe they are centers of learning and knowledge, reflection and contemplation and are unique in our society. “Laudato Si’” has been deeply received by scholars in the United States and these are universities holding powerful meetings engaging faculties across many disciplines, engaging students, and engaging the public.

On the other hand, some time you see parts of the American Catholic community that are resistant and even misunderstanding completely the process because they say, ‘Who is the pope to speak about these issues? He’s not a climatologist.’ They seem not to be aware of the commitment of the Church to get the best knowledge and the most rigorous science in the world as preparation for a document like this. They simply seem not to be aware of how it really works and how this is a Church that is committed to scientific evidence and rigor, as well as to the morality, the ethics, and the social teachings and theology.

There are definitely parts of conservative Catholic America that have been resistant to this, but I think they really misunderstood when they glibly say ‘the pope shouldn’t get into this.’ The pope is into this, of course, because it’s at the core of our moral need, but he doesn’t do it lightly. He
does it on the basis of the most careful, multi-year examination of this issue, which is thoroughly embedded in “Laudato Si’.”

*The Tablet:* Some of your critics complain that because you’re at odds with the Church on certain issues that you shouldn’t be involved in consulting on Church documents. What’s your response to them, and in the process of being involved, are there areas where you’ve come to sympathize more with Church teaching?

I love the Church’s social teaching, and I love the leadership the Church shows in goodwill to humanity. Pope Francis has said repeatedly that his encyclicals are a call to all of humanity and they touch me very deeply. I find Pope Francis to be our greatest moral leader in the world.

When I had the profound honor to work with Pope John Paul II, I found similarly the power of this Church to promote the common good in ways that no other institution can. I came here in 1999 when Pope John Paul II was propounding the Jubilee Year and the call to debt relief. I’m one of the world’s authorities on sovereign debt crises, and what Pope John Paul II said on that occasion was not only accurate, which I’ve come to expect, but profoundly important in moving the U.S. Congress and moving international institutions.

I came here in 1991, around “Centesimus Annus,” and I was then Poland’s leading external economic advisor, and obviously, Pope John Paul II was deeply interested in interrogating me closely about Poland’s economic reforms that I was very involved in. Of course, this Church played a huge role in making those reforms successful in helping keep the moral spirit and the morale of the Polish people. So, when the Church calls, we listen and we find it compelling. We also respond to the profound ethics of this Church and our ears, and heads, and hearts are open.

*The Tablet:* Much of “Laudato Si’” is engaged in calling on broad, structural changes in our world. How would you respond to the average Catholic who says, ‘Give me a tangible way in which I can live it out practically in my own life’?

I hope that their parishes have solar panels on their roofs, and I hope that they’re speaking with their congressmen who very often take contributions from oil companies, and therefore, don’t speak about the urgency of climate change, and tell them that ‘we are your real constituency – not the oil company. You are to look after us, and we hear Pope Francis’ call and agree with it, and we want our representatives to represent the public, the common good, and future generations.’

I hope similarly that within the Church, Catholics will tell their bishops who are big voices in our nation and our world to please follow Pope Francis in his plan for our common home. Each person has a role to play in being a responsible steward of their own homes and a responsible citizen. They may be business people, they may be students, they may be academics, they may be community leaders or politicians – everybody has a role to play to pitch in for the common good, and “Laudato Si’” is a magnificent and inspiring guide for us.

I think people should reflect on their multiple roles in our households, as consumers, and producers, within the multiple sectors of society, to answer that question by thinking carefully
what indeed they can do, what Pope Francis calls on all us to do, which is to play our role for the common good.

https://thetablet.org/leading-economist-champions-pope-francis-laudato-si/

July 2, 2018
Major new research institute at Campion Hall
Jesuits in Britain

The Jesuits in Britain are pleased to announce that a new research institute called the Laudato Si’ Institute (LSI) is being established at Campion Hall, the Jesuit permanent private hall of the University of Oxford. The LSI will be established during the academic year 2018-2019 and will formally open in September 2019.

The aim of the Laudato Si’ Institute is to foster interdisciplinary research arising out of the intellectual challenges presented most vividly in Pope Francis’ encyclical letter Laudato Si’, while being faithful to Ignatian traditions and reflective practice.

The premise of Laudato Si’ is that the crumbling of the earth’s fabric, largely through human activity, is ultimately devastating for humanity and other creatures, particularly the poorest communities on earth.

In contemporary Western thought, academic disciplines are often treated by specialists in isolation, so that the interrelationships between different social, ecological, technological, political, economic, philosophical and religious issues are obscured. The Laudato Si’ Institute will comprise:

(1) An ambitious research programme using a dialogical method that enlists philosophical, ethical and theological insights as well as scholarly research in the natural and social sciences.

(2) A global network of allied activities inspired by Laudato Si’ in order to foster international collaboration and link scholarship across different global cultures and contexts.

The Laudato Si’ Institute will be informed by and act as a resource for allied educational initiatives of the Jesuits in Britain and elsewhere. It will also engage with scholars in other faith traditions as relevant to its research themes.

Its overall mission is to contribute to the intellectual basis for individual and structural transformation towards an ecological conversion at the levels of individuals, communities, public policy and governance.
Professor Celia Deane-Drummond, currently Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Theology, Science and Human Flourishing at the University of Notre Dame, USA, will be the inaugural Director of the Institute.

Fr Damian Howard SJ, Jesuit provincial, welcomed the announcement, saying “As Jesuits, we are dutybound to seek out new intellectual frontiers and to bring to them the light of the Gospel. I am delighted that Professor Deane-Drummond has agreed to take on the role of Director of the new Laudato Si’ Institute. The intellectual and spiritual exploration of Pope Francis’ teaching in Laudato Si’ is vitally important work for the future of humanity. I look forward with great excitement to seeing how the work of the Institute unfolds.”

"When Pope Francis released his encyclical Laudato Si’ in June of 2015, I knew a fresh, invigorating wind of change was blowing through the Church" said Professor Celia Deane-Drummond. "For the first time in the Church's history, environmental scientists, conservationists and anthropologists, whether they were believers or not, woke up and listened’.

She further commented: "The challenge for those of us who have been working at the boundary of ecology, philosophy and theology for the last quarter century is to discern how to implement and work out with intellectual rigor the message of Laudato Si’, and use that as a basis for deeper individual and societal ecological conversion….I consider it a great privilege and honour to have been given the opportunity to direct this new initiative.”

Professor Deane-Drummond, currently Director of the Center for Theology, Science and Human Flourishing at the University of Notre Dame, USA, is a theologian who has professional experience in academic science and has two doctorates in plant physiology and systematic theology. She has a well-established track record in publishing in science, theology, environmental ethics and at the intersection between theology and the natural sciences. Professor Deane-Drummond has also served as Chair of the European Forum for the Study of Religion and Environment from 2011-2018. Her most recent books include A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth (2017) and Theology and Ecology Across the Disciplines: On Care for Our Common Home (2018).

https://www.jesuit.org.uk/major-new-research-institute-campion-hall

July 4, 2018

Al Gore: Pope Francis a ‘moral force’ for solving climate crisis

By Alessandro Gisotti
Vatican News

Nobel Peace Prize Winner and former U.S. Vice President, Al Gore, is one of the world’s most vocal defenders of the environment. His 2007 documentary film, “An Inconvenient Truth”, won an Oscar and his Climate Reality Project recently hosted an important summit in Berlin. In this
exclusive interview with Vatican News, Al Gore praises Pope Francis’ encyclical, “Laudato si’”, and calls for a “Sustainability Revolution”.

You are one the strongest voices in the world calling for environmental protection. Why are you so passionately involved in this “green battle” for our planet?

I believe that the purpose of life is to glorify God — and if we heap contempt and destruction on God’s creation, that is grotesquely inconsistent with the way we are supposed to be living our lives. Moreover, the climate crisis is now the biggest existential challenge humanity has ever faced. And it is not only humanity that is at risk; according to the world’s biologists, up to half of all the living species with which we share this Earth are in danger of extinction during this century. When Noah was instructed to gather two of every species in his ark in order to “keep them alive with thee,” I believe that instruction is also meant for us.

At present, we are using the thin shell of atmosphere surrounding our planet as an open sewer for 110 million tons of heat-trapping manmade global warming pollution every day. The accumulated total is now trapping as much extra heat energy as would be released by 400,000 Hiroshima-class uncle bombs exploding every 24 hours. The consequences of that extra heat energy are clear: Stronger storms, bigger downpours, more destructive floods and mudslides, deeper and longer droughts, crop failures, water scarcity in many regions, strengthening wildfires, spreading disease, melting ice, and sea level rise — along with the acidification of the world ocean, and more.

So, there is really no choice here. We have to solve the climate crisis. As Pope Francis has said, “if we destroy creation, creation will destroy us.”

I have been fortunate to be able to pour every ounce of energy I have into efforts to contribute to the solution to his crisis. And I am so inspired by the millions of activists and leaders around the world who are driving clean energy development in the Sustainability Revolution. The real passion and energy are coming from these activists and leaders.

In a recent interview you said that climate change is not a political issue, “it is a moral and spiritual issue”. How do you see the importance of a spiritual leader like Pope Francis in sharing this commitment to safeguard the environment?

Pope Francis’s leadership has been an inspiration to all of us across the world, particularly when it comes to his strong and repeated emphasis on solving the climate crisis. I am grateful for and in awe of the clarity of the moral force he embodies. He also speaks in the most powerful way about the most vulnerable among us — the poor — and helps all who listen to understand how they are uniquely affected by the climate crisis. In particular, his papal encyclical, Laudato si’, marked a crucial step for the Catholic church in leading the world to commit to addressing the climate crisis ahead of the Paris Agreement.

In these and many other ways, the Pope has been at the forefront in leading the world toward constructive climate action. Virtually all of my Catholic colleagues and friends are thrilled to the marrow of their bones that he is providing this kind of spiritual leadership. As am I.
More generally, spiritual teaching obviously plays a crucial role in communities around the world. The Pope is a model for leaders of other faith traditions to communicate the dangers posed by the climate crisis and our duty as stewards of God’s creation to solve it.

In his Encyclical letter Laudato si, on care for our common home, Pope Francis affirms that climate change and poverty are deeply interrelated in many regions of the world. How do you see that issue?

As Pope Francis has emphasized, those living in poverty are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, which is detrimentally impacting access to necessary resources and threatening human health. For example, Puerto Rico, where more than 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, is still trying to recover from the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which decimated the country’s electrical grid and mobile phone networks, and flooded entire neighborhoods.

Moreover, the co-pollution (along with CO2) from spewing carbon emissions into the atmosphere is making people sick. It is well known that allowing more air pollution into our cities and smaller communities is making even more people sick. According to the principles of Environmental Justice, we know that the plumes of this pollution are more likely to go into communities that have been deprived of the political and economic power necessary to defend themselves. So, that is where the first damage is done.

And it isn’t just those living in poverty who are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. The list includes the mentally ill, those with pre-existing medical conditions, the elderly, infants and children, the homeless and minority communities. For example, in the United States, African American children are three-times more likely than the overall population to suffer from diseases related to air pollution, are twice as likely to have asthma and ten times more likely to die from asthma than are children from the majority community.

Recently Pope Francis urged top oil executives to commit to efforts for producing clean fuel. What is needed to achieve this “dream”?

I was very happy to see Pope Francis convene top energy and investment executives to agree upon the importance of a price on carbon emissions. To achieve this, there first needs to be a viable alternative to burning and putting pollutants into the air. Fortunately, there is. Renewable energy and other solutions to the climate crisis are now competing economically with fossil fuels. As a result, the big fossil fuel companies are being forced to re-examine their business models. Once the economic question is taken out of the equation then I am hopeful that the moral choice will become starkly clear to many more people and will prevail.

We are in the beginning stages of a global “Sustainability Revolution,” that has the scale and impact of the Industrial Revolution, but the speed of the Digital Revolution. Facilitated by the emergence of new technologies and increasingly informed consumers, sustainable business practices have spread rapidly in the past few years.
As a result of growing social and political pressure — and the rising cost of carbon pollution — governments all around the world are passing legislation to reduce their emissions. At the end of 2017, China established a carbon market, joining the European Union and other countries such as Chile and Colombia who have also now put a price on carbon.

Pope Francis’ conference at the Vatican with oil company executives is an extremely encouraging sign that this transition to a sustainable future may quickly becoming a reality rather than a dream. But, we need to move even faster to ensure this transition occurs in time to prevent the worst effects of the climate crisis.

*Your Climate Reality Project held its 38th activist training seminar in Berlin from June 26-28. What do you hope will come out of this meeting?*

In Berlin, 700 trainees from 50 countries and from all walks of life joined together for three days of intensive training with renowned climate scientists and communicators to learn how they can inspire and lead their communities in taking action to solve the climate crisis. The training included a wide range of open sessions (and many breakout sessions on particular aspects of the crisis and its solutions) all exploring how to raise public awareness of the climate crisis, build support for the practical solutions available to us today, and pressure our representatives to act.

We conducted this training in Berlin at a time when Germany and the EU are particularly experiencing the effects of the climate crisis. Without concerted action by government leaders, such effects are predicted to worsen significantly in coming years. Germany, for example, is in the process of effectively implementing an energy transition away from coal and in doing so, will hopefully serve as a beacon for other nations in the EU to reexamine their own climate action policies.

Climate Reality has trained more than 15,000 activists working in 141 countries. Our previous training was held in Mexico City this past March, and in August we will be hosting another in Los Angeles, CA.


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**July 5, 2018**

‘Laudato Si’ Three Years Later: The US Response

By Judy Roberts
National Catholic Register

Diocesan action plans provide tips on how to better live out Pope Francis’ call for better care of our common home.
In the three years since Pope Francis issued his environmental epistle *Laudato Si* (Care for Our Common Home), many Catholics have responded in a way that may be unparalleled for a papal encyclical.

Across the country, dioceses from Boston to San Francisco are developing *Laudato Si* “action plans,” some modeled after one the Archdiocese of Atlanta developed with the help of environmental scientists at the University of Georgia. The Diocese of Burlington, Vermont, devoted 2017 to the message of *Laudato Si* through a “Year of Creation” with activities that included an ecological justice conference, liturgies with creation themes and an ecological awareness and action project for Catholic schools in the state.

In 2016 and 2017, hundreds of priests and deacons received specialized training in implementing the message of the encyclical through a “*Laudato Si* in the Parish” program of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic Climate Covenant, which was formed by the USCCB in 2006 to implement Catholic social teaching on ecology. Elsewhere, “green” and “creation care” teams are springing up in parishes, and religious communities are responding with resources like Healing Earth, a free, online environmental science e-textbook developed by the Society of Jesus.

Daniel Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, said with the release of *Laudato Si*, his organization counted about 120 statements, articles and homilies from bishops around the country. “I think that’s pretty unprecedented for an encyclical, and, since then, it’s been gathering momentum.”

Misleh attributes the robust response to the high level of interest among those engaged with environmental issues, as well as to the popularity of Pope Francis. “He’s a pope that really is admired and is attractive to Catholics and non-Catholics. I think because it came from him, and because of his charisma, it has had this impact.”

USCCB environmental policy adviser Ricardo Simmonds, who tracked the encyclical’s reception when it was released, said, “I can’t remember a time when a papal encyclical received so much attention.” Simmonds added that perhaps the only other encyclical that had such wide appeal was Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* (Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty) in 1963.

**Addressing the Skepticism**

Of course, not all Catholics have welcomed *Laudato Si*. Writing in *The Federalist*, Catholic Maureen Mullarkey reflected the concerns some have expressed about the encyclical when she called it “a malignant jumble of dubious science, policy prescriptions, [and] doomsday rhetoric.”

Indeed, the encyclical’s full embrace of the science of climate change has put off some who might otherwise support its underlying and Scripture-based admonition to use the Earth’s goods responsibly. According to such critics, the encyclical overreached in endorsing the science so unequivocally and in pushing for Catholics to embrace international mechanisms intended to reduce man-made climate change.
Hal Mann of Perrysburg, Ohio, in the Diocese of Toledo, learned that not all Catholics shared his enthusiasm about *Laudato Si* when he mentioned the encyclical to a fellow parishioner who retorted, “Oh, Pope Francis went off the rails. This thing about climate change and global warming is just not right.”

Undaunted, Mann, a former business owner who is a master gardener and Ohio-certified volunteer naturalist, contacted his diocese to see what was being done in response to the encyclical, only to learn that Bishop Daniel Thomas was two steps ahead of him in commissioning a “*Laudato Si* Task Force.”

Mann, who now is a member of the task force, said that like his fellow parishioner, he had been skeptical about climate change before undergoing what he calls his “ecological conversion.”

“I used to think this environmental stuff got in the way of prosperity and jobs and really was a bunch of malarkey.”

His transformation came through an interest in native plants and the information he began gleaning from naturalists and conservationists about the importance of ecosystems for sustaining life. “You can’t destroy the environment that enables life and still say that you’re pro-life,” said Mann, a daily Massgoer who is pro-life. “You can’t destroy the systems that make the air, produce food and give us the clean drinking water that we have to have to live. … To be against the environment seems to be against life.”

Still, although Mann believes strongly in the science behind climate change, he does think disagreement about it should not keep people from protecting and nurturing God-given ecosystems. “The very fact that God made all of this means we shouldn’t plunder it and disrespect all of creation just because of controversy about the scientific aspects.”

**Toledo’s Approach**

Given the polarized nature of the topic of climate change, the Toledo Diocese’s *Laudato Si* Task Force has chosen to remain focused on the encyclical and its teachings without getting mired in its political components, said Rodney Schuster, executive director of Catholic Charities in the diocese. “We knew it would just be a death knell, as politicized as the nation is.”

The task force’s activities so far have concentrated on helping parishes form creation-care teams, making sure diocesan schools are recycling and reducing waste, and partnering with the [National Wildlife Federation’s “Sacred Grounds” program](https://www.nwf.org/SacredGrounds), which helps religious groups create rain and pollinator gardens and other sites as “Certified Wildlife Habitat” spaces and engage their members about environmental stewardship. Toledo’s task force also asked the Catholic Climate Covenant’s “Catholic Energies” program to conduct an energy audit of the diocesan pastoral center, cathedral and bishop’s residence.

The task force did, however, vote to sign the Catholic Climate Covenant’s [declaration](https://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org) affirming the “Paris Climate Agreement” and opposing U.S. withdrawal from it. Nearly 600 Catholic institutions, including 37 archdioceses and dioceses, religious communities, health care systems,
universities, parishes and schools, have signed the declaration, which is in line with the position of the U.S. bishops.

Bishop Thomas Tobin of the Diocese of Providence, R.I., which did not sign the declaration, drew a distinction between it and the message of *Laudato Si* in a June 15 tweet. “… One can support the faith-filled vision of ‘Laudato Si’ without necessarily endorsing the Paris Climate Accord,” Bishop Tobin wrote. “The first is a comprehensive statement of faith; the second a political agreement. Let’s set partisan politics aside and protect our common home.”

Although the Catholic Climate Covenant’s Misleh thinks the science of climate change is clear, he does believe Catholics with differing views can come together to clean up the planet and that most can agree on the need to do so. “I do think the climate issue is still a little bit neuralgic for people. They see it more as a political issue than a moral issue. I wouldn’t pretend that it’s uniform across the board, that people are engaged, but we can bring people together, particularly when they think about how it impacts them or will impact their children in the future.”

**Practical Tips**

Indeed, action plans like the one adopted in the Atlanta Archdiocese offer practical things anyone can do regardless of his or her views on the science of climate change, although Atlanta’s does contain a political action section that suggests lobbying elected officials and supporting candidates who support the environment.

The Atlanta plan, which has been adapted for use in the Archdioceses of New Orleans, Boston and San Francisco and the Diocese of Savannah, Georgia, lists “easy,” “moderate” and “advanced” ideas for parishes, parishioners, homes and families in the areas of energy conservation and efficiency, purchasing and recycling, transportation, water conservation, buying and sharing food, creating sustainable landscapes and assisting climate-vulnerable populations. The plan also contains a section on *Laudato Si* and young people and has been incorporated into the science and religion curriculum in all Catholic schools in the archdiocese.

Additionally, as part of the plan, many parishes are establishing creation-care green teams, and an annual “Green Mass” is celebrated in the archdiocese for those who volunteer or work in “green jobs” or environmental sustainability and “for all who love planet Earth.”

The archdiocese also has attempted to respond to what *Laudato Si* said about population growth and the environment by offering a workshop for clergy on giving spiritual guidance to help couples understand human ecology and natural family planning according to Church teaching. Although limiting population growth is a popular tenet of the secular environmental movement, *Laudato Si* said, “To blame population growth, instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues.” The encyclical goes on to say that failure to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a human embryo, for example, makes it difficult to hear the cry of nature itself, because everything is connected.

Paula Gwynn Grant, archdiocesan spokesman, said in offering multiple options, the Atlanta plan is a place where everyone can come together, no matter what side of the political aisle they are
on. “We can all agree there’s something you can do to make the community and the world better, in terms of taking care of the environment.”

_Judy Roberts_ writes from Graytown, Ohio.

Other dioceses and archdioceses that have responded to _Laudato Si_ include:

- Chicago, which has started a “[Care for Creation Ministry](#)” and is tracking energy consumption in its 2,700 buildings.
- Cincinnati, which has a “[Climate Change Task Force](#)”.
- Monterey, California, which has partnered with the Romero Institute’s Greenpower program to set up teams to decrease electricity usage and increase the use of renewable energy.
- San Diego, which recently held a “[teach-in](#) on _Laudato Si_ and climate change” featuring environmentalist Tom English and leaders from parishes with creation-care teams.

http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/laudato-si-three-years-later-the-us-response

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**July 6, 2018**

The world needs a change of heart on environmental issues, pope says

By Hannah Brockhaus
Catholic News Agency

Vatican City ([CNA/EWTN News](#)) - Christians have an important role to play in helping people have a change of heart and mind regarding responsible protection of the earth, Pope Francis said Friday.

Actions which support the future of the planet “presuppose a transformation on a deeper level, namely a change of hearts and minds,” the pope said July 6. “The religions, and the Christian Churches in particular, have a key role to play.”

Quoting a Jan. 17, 2001 catechesis from St. Pope John Paul II, he said: “We must encourage and support an ‘ecological conversion.’”

Pope Francis spoke to around 300 participants in a July 5-6 international conference called “Saving our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth,” held for the third anniversary of the publication of Pope Francis’ environmental encyclical, _Laudato Si_.

Pointing to St. Francis of Assisi as an inspiration and guide, he prayed using words from _Laudato Si_, that “our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.”

“After all, that hope is based on our faith in the power of our heavenly Father,” he said.
“We can think back,” he continued, “on the call that Francis of Assisi received from the Lord in the little church of San Damiano: ‘Go and repair my house, which, as you can see, lies in ruins.’ Today, the ‘common home’ of our planet also needs urgently to be repaired and secured for a sustainable future.”

Francis said the subjects of the two upcoming synods – young people and indigenous people, especially those from the Amazon region – should be at the forefront of a Catholic’s commitment to the common home.

Young people will “face the consequences of the current environmental and climate crisis,” he said, and “consequently, 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’ (Laudato Si 159).”

Catholics can learn a lot from indigenous people and their love for the land, the pope said, noting his grief at seeing the lands of indigenous people taken “and their cultures trampled on by predatory schemes and by new forms of colonialism, fueled by the culture of waste and consumerism.”

He explained that indigenous communities treat the land like a gift from God and their ancestors, rather than like a commodity, and that this is something everyone can learn from.

He also expressed hope that states, local authorities, civil society, and economic and religious institutions will “promote the culture and practice of an integral ecology,” voicing his support for initiatives such as the upcoming COP24 Summit, which will be held in Poland in December 2018.

Referencing the 2015 Paris Agreement, which the United States controversially withdrew from last year, Francis stated that governments “should strive to honor the commitments” made in the agreement and to avoid creating worse consequences, especially those countries which are “more powerful and pollute the most.”

Quoting Laudato Si, the pope said that God, “who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way.”

“He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him!”


July 1, 2018
D&R Greenway Offers Unique Bus Excursion to Regional Premier Performance of Sam Guarnaccia’s Emergent Universe Oratorio, Villanova University

New Jersey Stage

(PRINCETON, NJ) -- D&R Greenway Land Trust invites the public to a unique bus excursion to the regional premier performance of Sam Guarnaccia’s Emergent Universe Oratorio. Performed by the Main Line Symphony Orchestra, with choral singers from Pennsylvania and Vermont, it will take place at Villanova University Church, on Saturday, July 28 at 7:30pm. The bus will depart at 5:30pm from D&R Greenway Land Trust’s Johnson Education Center, returning by 11:30pm. Wine and hors d’oeuvres will be provided.

At the post-party after the Villanova performance, participants will meet with composer Sam Guarnaccia and Symphony director Don Liuzzi. Tickets for the bus journey and the Emergent Universe Oratorio are $125. This includes bus trip, wine, hors d’oeuvres, performance and post-party. Space is limited; RSVP by Thursday, July 19: Most convenient payment: www.drgreenway.org, DONATE, and specify BUS TRIP. On July 28 at 5:30pm, the bus will leave One Preservation Place, off Rosedale Road, Princeton. A portion of the fee supports D&R Greenway’s preservation of New Jersey’s segment of the universe.

Sam Guarnaccia’s Emergent Universe Oratorio inspired the dynamic paintings by award-winning environmental artist Cameron (Cami) Davis, currently in D&R Greenway’s galleries: Cosmophilia may be seen through July 25 in D&R Greenway’s Johnson Education Center, 1 Preservation Place, Princeton 08540. Gallery hours Monday-Friday 10:00am-5:00pm. Call to be sure galleries not rented at the time of prospective visit.

Our regional premiere of the Emergent Universe Oratorio will be performed in the majestic setting of the Villanova University Church on July 28. D&R Greenway President Linda Mead attended the Ohio premiere in Cleveland, observing, “This oratorio soars, inspired by, and composed to inspire conservation of, the Earth. It is a beautiful melding of music, poetry and philosophies—some familiar, some eye-opening!” Both the artist and the composer drew significant influences from the 2011 Emmy-winning documentary Journey of the Universe, by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Brian Swimme of Yale.

Sam Guarnaccia addresses questions about the impact of stars, tectonic plates, even sea life of hundreds of millions of years ago upon today’s humans. He weaves in words and thoughts of Rainer Maria Rilke, Wendell Berry, John Elder, among others, carrying audiences to the “beginning of time.” Guarnaccia explains, “The motivation for this oratorio was to add weight and depth to our awareness of what we are doing to the planet.” Cultural historian, geologist and teacher Thomas Berry also impacted Guarnaccia during this composition: “A new revelatory experience is needed, an experience wherein human consciousness awakens to the grandeur and sacred quality of the Earth process. This awakening is our human participation in the dream of the Earth…”

The oratorio is related to opera in that it features recitatives and music. It differs from opera in
that it contains no performance. This oratorio interacts with the 2011 Emmy-winning documentary *Journey of the Universe*, by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Brian Swimme, which dramatizes interconnectedness and universal energy from the moment of the Big Bang, forward.

Don Liuzzi, director of the Main Line Symphony Orchestra and principal timpanist with the Philadelphia Orchestra, describes his experience of the oratorio: “The more we talk about [the perils to our planet] this as a society, the less chance we have of ruining this planet.” “Science links everyone on the planet,” Guarnaccia adds. D&R Greenway’s Linda Mead asserts, “It is the melding of science, music and new thinking that makes this work so inspiring. This magical, unforgettable evening can transform how you view your place in the world and the actions you yourself need to take for the sake of the planet.”

D&R Greenway Land Trust is in its 29th year of preserving and protecting natural lands, farmlands and open spaces throughout central and southern New Jersey. Through continuous preservation and stewardship -- caring for land and easements to ensure they remain protected and ecologically healthy in perpetuity -- D&R Greenway nurtures a healthier and more diverse environment for people and wild species in seven counties. Accredited by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission, D&R Greenway’s mission is to preserve and care for land and inspire a conservation ethic, now and for the future. Since its founding in 1989, D&R Greenway has permanently preserved more than 20,000 acres, an area 20 times the size of New York City’s Central Park, including 30 miles of trails open to the public. The Johnson Education Center, a circa 1900 restored barn at One Preservation Place, Princeton, is D&R Greenway’s home.

Through programs, art exhibits and related lectures, D&R Greenway inspires greater public commitment to safeguarding land.


**July 10, 2018**

Sisters mark anniversary of cornfield chapel symbolizing pipeline protest

By Catholic News Service

Global Sisters Report

The Adorers of the Blood of Christ held a prayer service and reflection July 8 to mark the first anniversary of the opening of a chapel in a cornfield that symbolizes their opposition to the building of a natural gas pipeline on their property in Lancaster County.

It also marked the first anniversary of the religious sisters' federal lawsuit challenging construction of the pipeline.
The chapel was built right along the proposed path of the pipeline by Lancaster Against Pipelines, a community group dedicated to opposing its construction. Made of four posts and several cross boards, the simple chapel is located just outside of the pipeline right of way. Several benches are available for people to sit, pray, reflect and talk.

The Adorers hope that the chapel will draw people of all faiths to prayer and reflection about how land and other natural resources ought to be used.

In addition to building the chapel, the Adorers have sued Williams/Transco, the company that would lay the pipeline, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which approved the company's request to do so. The religious order said approval of the pipeline violated the sisters' right to practice their faith under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and they asked that it be rerouted.

The Adorers argue that the presence of a fossil fuel pipeline on their property against their will would violate their deeply held religious convictions about the sanctity of the earth. In an October 2005 Land Ethic, the Adorers state that they honor the sacred nature of earth and all creation, seek to reduce fossil fuel reliance, and oppose environmentally destructive practices, such as hydraulic fracking.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, about two-thirds of natural gas production in the United States comes from fracking.

Last year, a U.S. District Court judge dismissed the lawsuit, citing a lack of jurisdiction. The Adorers appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit, located in Philadelphia, which heard arguments for the case in January. The Court of Appeals has not yet issued a decision. If it rules in favor of the Adorers, the case will be remanded to the District Court.

The 183-mile pipeline, which is being built by Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Williams Partners, will carry gas from the Marcellus Shale in northeastern Pennsylvania to markets in the mid-Atlantic region.

Williams maintains that, although the company respects people's right to protest, it wants to complete the project "in a safe, efficient manner."


July 13, 2018

Conservatives Must Join the Climate Change Conversation

By Mitch Hescox and Alex Flint
Christian Post

I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.
On the third anniversary of his encyclical on climate change, Pope Francis stated, "There is a real danger that we will leave future generations only rubble, deserts, and refuse." The Pope is not alone in his concern.

Evangelical Christian leaders, both here in the United States and worldwide, have also called for action to overcome climate change. In 2006, hundreds of evangelical leaders signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative, which called for a market-based approach to reducing climate pollution. In 2011, the Lausanne Movement, which was founded by eminent evangelical statesmen Billy Graham and John Scott, added a prominent voice with the Cape Town Commitment. Finally, the National Association of Evangelicals joined the chorus in October 2015.

We accept the challenge of the Pope and these evangelical leaders. It's time for a fundamental reconsideration of the application of conservative values to the issue of climate change.

Across our nation's history, conservatives have been great protectors of the environment. Teddy Roosevelt, a staunch conservationist, stated, "Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us."

Richard Nixon enacted the 1970 Clean Air Act. Ronald Reagan was instrumental in the ratification of the 1987 Montreal Protocol—the first binding international agreement that reduced atmospheric pollutants, specifically ozone-depleting chemicals, and highly potent man-made greenhouse gases. George H. W. Bush negotiated and signed the 1990 Clean Air Act, the last major environmental legislation passed by Congress, which included a market-based approach that significantly reduced the cost of compliance.

Despite our history of Republican leadership on environmental issues, today many Republican politicians have lost touch with core conservative values when it comes to the environment—values that cause us to believe we should protect the natural beauty of God's creation, be wise stewards of its resources, defend our children from pollution, and reduce the risk from rising oceans and increasingly violent storms.

Our frustration is compounded by the fact that, because conservative politicians have largely not participated in discussions about how to address climate change, the solutions proposed have been liberal in nature, and we know there are better, conservative solutions that should be pursued.

We don't need policies that increase big government, but ones that correct market failures and ensure that pollution's threat to our children's health and future is eliminated. We believe a conservative approach guided by straightforward science and economics works best, and the most efficient means to do so is a revenue-neutral carbon tax.

We're conservatives, so we generally do not like taxes, but most economists agree a carbon tax is more efficient than regulations. In fact, a recent analysis shows a tax would cost the economy
half the costs of comparable regulations. In this case, we think the proper application of core conservative values, especially being responsible, is to recognize the problem and then propose the most effective, least expensive solution.

Pope Francis called for "a conversation which includes everyone," a welcome and timely invitation. We believe conservatives must not only join the climate conversation but lead it with a responsible and economically efficient proposal—a revenue-neutral carbon tax.

The Reverend Mitchell Hescox is President and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network.

Alex Flint, Executive Director of Alliance for Market Solutions, previously served as Republican staff director of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and as senior vice president of government affairs at the Nuclear Energy Institute.


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**July 17, 2018**

Vatican's former legal chief says canon law should include care of creation

By Elise Harris
Catholic News Agency

Rome, Italy - The Vatican's former top advisor on canon law has made a public call to insert legal obligations for the care of creation into the Church’s universal canon law - making it a legal duty for Catholics not only “not to harm” the environment, but to improve it.

According to veteran Vatican watcher Andrea Tornielli, Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio, former head of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, made the proposal during a July 12 event in Rome titled “Dialogue on Catholic Investments for the Energy Transition.”

During the closed-door discussion, representatives from the Vatican and Catholic organizations spoke about how to invest responsibly towards a transition to renewable energies.

In an interview with Vatican Insider, Coccopalmerio discussed canons 208-221 of the Church’s Code of Canon Law, which enumerate “Obligations and rights of all the faithful.”

This section “outlines an ‘identikit’ of the faithful and of their life as a Christian,” the cardinal said, but noted that nothing is mentioned “about one of the most serious duties: that of protecting and promoting the natural environment in which the faithful live.”

The proposal he outlined, which he suggested could be submitted to the pope but considered by his former department, would be to ask for a new canon to be added to the obligations of the all faithful, specifically treating environmental responsibility.

Coccopalmerio, whose resignation was accepted by Pope Francis in April this year, went on to give his own ideas of how it might be worded: “Every faithful Christian, mindful that creation is
the common house, has the grave duty not only not to damage, but also to improve, both through everyday behavior, and through specific initiatives, the natural environment in which each person is called to live.”

The canons Coccopalmerio referenced address general obligations for Catholics relating to the practice of the faith and maintaining communion with the Church. They do not address specific moral obligations or particular doctrinal teachings. Those canons do not, for example, include the Church’s prohibition of artificial contraception or the obligation to observe just labor practices.

Drawing inspiration from *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment, participants at the event agreed on the Catholic Program of Disinvestment, sponsored by the Catholic Climate Movement, which urges ecclesial institutions to make a public commitment to move away from financial investments in fossil fuels.

Participants also highlighted the importance of pursuing ethical investment strategies in line with the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, according to Tornielli.

Pope Francis has often expressed his environmental concerns and, in his message on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation in 2016, he said maintaining our common home ought to be considered a work of mercy.

“We usually think of the works of mercy individually and in relation to a specific initiative: hospitals for the sick, soup kitchens for the hungry, shelters for the homeless, schools for those to be educated, the confessional and spiritual direction for those needing counsel and forgiveness,” the pope said in that message.

Looking at the concept of works of mercy, “we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces,” he said. Francis proposed caring for creation as “a complement” to the two traditional sets of seven corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

“May the works of mercy also include care for our common home,” he said, explaining that as a spiritual work, care for creation “calls for a grateful contemplation of God’s world which allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us.”

In a conference held earlier this month to mark the third anniversary of the publication of *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis said a change of heart is needed when it comes to issues related to the environment.

Future actions which promote the care of creation, “presuppose a transformation on a deeper level, namely a change of hearts and minds,” he said, adding that while this obligation binds all religious communities, Christians have a special role to play.


**July 19, 2018**

Climate change: The moral case for Christian action
By Joseph Sapati Moeono-Kolio

Christian Today

Joseph Sapati Moeono-Kolio is from Samoa and is currently living in Aotearoa, New Zealand. He is a member of the Pacific Climate Warriors, a group of Pacific Islanders who refuse to have their homes, communities and cultures ceded to the effects of climate change. In partnership with CAFOD, they recently toured Europe, training young climate advocates in Poland and Belgium, visiting schools and meeting with political leaders in the United Kingdom and sharing their experiences and best practice insights at the Laudato Si’ Conference at the Vatican, where they met with Pope Francis last week. Here, Joe shares a reflection on the state of our common home and our duty as Christians to protect it.

In his 2009 encyclical Caritas in Veritate, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote: 'The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.'

His words expressed the Church's long-held view that our relationship with creation extended further than just being purely extractive and exploitative. It is an integral relationship, one where the dignity of any part of creation is intertwined with that of the other. It is one that is underscored by recognising that every corner of creation, of which humanity is but a part, is imprinted with the fingerprint of its Creator, testifying to the words of the Psalmist that 'The earth is the LORD's' (Psalm 24:1-2).

Understanding, therefore, that the very basis of our existence is both provisional and contingent upon the Creator, the natural inclination is to then ponder what humanity's role is as a part of this creation. From the very beginning, the Bible makes this abundantly clear: 'The LORD God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it’ (Genesis 2:15). Here, we see a clear illustration of humanity's intended relationship with creation. In being placed in the garden, we are both gifted the beauty and fruits of creation to enjoy but also charged with its upkeep and the health of the common home we all share with the rest of creation.

So how are we doing?

It's at this stage that views radically diverge. In the West, the answer to this has unfortunately varied according to ideological lines. While all are in agreement that for the most part, we have severely damaged the health of the planet, not all are ready to be convinced as to the scale of the damage offered up by the scientific community.

This is most evident in the debate on climate change. Despite the evidence that our habits of human consumption, usage of fossil fuels, over-production and waste is impacting the climate, not all have been convinced, for a variety of different reasons. Responses to the climate crisis range from apathy to complete denialism. What should be an issue that causes us to reflect more urgently on our status as stewards of the earth is now relegated to one that is used to fuel the growing rate of polarisation in the West.
The situation in frontline communities, however, paints a very different picture. Far from being just a matter for political debates, climate change is having very real human impacts all across the globe. For us on the front lines, climate change is neither a distant nor abstract concept. It is real, and it is now our lived reality.

Let me be clear – we have no interest in the ideological culture wars of the West, where the science of climate change is refuted more by politicians and pundits than actual scientists. We have no vested interest in the incendiary rhetoric of this debate, where toxic arguments from ideology distract from addressing the toxic environment which is our reality. We have no dog in that fight. What concerns us is that which is playing out before our very eyes – the erosion of our islands and with it, the inheritance of our future generations. What concerns us is the lack of focus and, thereby, the lack of urgency.

There are obviously many sides to this issue and the different approaches and narratives that colour it. It is more than cold data and even colder economic models – it is a human issue first and foremost. Climate change is Cyclones Winston and Gita flattening Fiji and Tonga, and destroying the infrastructure of our island nations on an almost annual basis. Climate change is the washing away of the graveyards of our ancestors and the erosion of the futures of our children. It is wildfires in California, droughts in Pakistan and Syria, more hurricanes like Irma and flooding in Florida.

Climate change changes more than just the climate. The stress caused to our common home fractures our communities and displaces our families. We must remember that in the noise of political arguments and ideological narratives, we do not forget nor become desensitised to the suffering of human beings at the centre of this crisis. At a deeper level, climate change is the manifestation of our failure to protect the garden we were tasked with keeping.

'Francis, rebuild my house for it has fallen into disrepair,' St Francis of Assisi was told.

Yet even as our home falls into disrepair, our resolve to fix it must not fail. Our faith now summons us to rise to the occasion, to stand by all in our home who are vulnerable and to begin again the task of rebuilding it. S. Francis of Assisi was given this great task 800 years ago.

Now, in the gathering clouds of uncertainty, we are once again called – this time by another Francis – to have the courage to stand. In his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reminds us that care for the environment is infinitely tied to concern for the poor. It is also a matter of intergenerational justice, for when we 'start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realise that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others' (*Laudato Si*, 159). This must now be at the centre of our outlook on the current crisis – the human face of climate change and what that means for future generations.

The upkeep of our common home is our collective duty. Last week's *Laudato Si* conference in Rome brought together the world's leading climate scientists, civic, faith and business leaders as well as representatives from indigenous communities on the front lines of climate change. The voices of remarkable young people from around the world resounded the call for more ambitious
action, a reminder that it is our generation and the ones still to come that will inherit the fruits of our actions here and now. The Pacific Climate Warriors – Pacific Islanders connected by our common purpose to protect our island homes – is one such group rising to the challenge, building the groundswell of grassroots community-led climate action in order to influence the decisions that will ultimately shape our future.

Among the campaigns that the warriors have spearheaded is the '1.5 to stay alive' campaign that gave voice to our perilous reality during the 2015 COP21 negotiations and has subsequently become embedded in the climate action vernacular. 1.5 to stay alive encapsulates the simple fact that a rise in the earth's average annual temperature to anything more than 1.5°C would spell disaster for many of our island communities. It is more than just a slogan, it is the truth upon which our ability to exist hangs in the balance.

We travelled to Europe for almost three days in order to press the urgency of the situation and the need for our elders – to whom we traditionally look to for guidance and leadership – to steer our collective canoe away from its current trajectory, to chart a new course towards a more sustainable future.

This spirit must now be carried forward into the upcoming Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, a city named after St Francis of Assisi, later this year. This is our next opportunity to mobilise the different spheres of climate action, which must be sustained ahead of the G20 Summit in Argentina and COP24 in Poland. These gatherings in populous Christian nations present us with the chance to put our faith and these principles into action and to fulfil our moral duty as stewards of creation. Beyond these high-level meetings, the grass roots mobilisations of people of faith, young people, indigenous communities and climate action groups around the world must continue to energise the march towards environmental justice.

'The one who has hope, lives differently,' said Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

Courage, dear friends. Above all else, we must not be disheartened or give way to cynicism but be resolute in our commitment to fighting the injustice of climate change. Although the road is long and the work difficult, we cannot lose our hope – we are after all, people of faith. 'For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you' (Isaiah 41:13). Our faith in Christ both compels us to action and comforts us in the many moments of doubt and frustration. As we reflect therefore on our role as stewards, let us think of those who stand at the front lines of the current crisis, resolve to committing ourselves more fervently to fighting this threat and be comforted in the knowledge that our cause is just.

Finally, we ask that you remember us – the human faces of climate change. See us. Partner with us. Rise with us. On September 8, 2018, the Pacific will rise again once more to join the global fight that is threatening our homes, our cultures and our very way of life. Across the globe, we are calling on people to add their voices to the global chorus for real climate action. For that is the true calling of those of us who profess to follow Christ: to rise up against injustice and to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable.
We in the Pacific are more than just cyclones, king tides and the current threat of climate change. We have always been more. We are families. We are communities. We are the memories of our ancestors and we are the saltwater that runs through our veins. My friends, let it be well understood – we fight not only for the future of our homes, but for the future of yours as well. The inheritance of our children and grandchildren is cause for our inner conversion, to re-examine ourselves and to stand together, for that is the true meaning of solidarity.

We are more than drowning islands, we are voices from the peripheries calling out to you in the West to remember your role as stewards of God's creation – calling on you to have the courage to act.

'..For the land is mine. And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land' (Leviticus 25:23-24).


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**July 19, 2018**

Ireland adopts 100-percent fossil fuel divestment strategy

By Sarah Mac Donald
National Catholic Reporter

Second-worst performing EU member on climate change used cross-party collaboration, church inspiration

**Dublin** — Ireland made history July 12 when it became the first country in the world to pass a bill committing the country to the divestment of all of its holdings in fossil fuel companies.

The passing of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill has been hailed by climate action campaigners as a boon to their efforts to pressure other countries to sell off their fossil fuel investments — industries which have been a major contributor to climate change.

The landmark divestment bill is a first among the 195 nations that signed on to the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015. It requires the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund to divest all public money from peat, coal, oil and gas companies nationally and internationally "as soon as is practicable." Over 300 million euros is believed to be at stake.

The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund is worth about 8 billion euros, which may seem small compared to a country like Norway with a state fund of 1 trillion euros. But the significant difference is that Ireland has pledged to divest 100 percent from fossil fuels, whereas Norway has committed to partially divest from fossil fuels, targeting some coal companies but maintaining its oil and gas holdings.
The bill before the Irish parliament had cross-party support and was the culmination of more than two years of lobbying by politician Thomas Pringle, an Independent member of parliament representing County Donegal in the northwest of the country. His constituency experienced an extreme weather event in August 2017 when two hours of torrential rain washed away a substantial amount of infrastructure. Over the past 12 months, Ireland has experienced three other unprecedented weather events including Hurricane Ophelia, the Beast from the East snowstorm and the current heat wave-induced drought. Now that climate change appears to have a direct impact at home, people are worried and want the issue addressed.

Pringle was supported in his initiative by a network of civil society groups, including Trócaire, the Irish bishops’ development and emergency aid agency, which has been highlighting and lobbying on climate change for well over a decade. It has seen the impact of climate change firsthand in the developing world where the agency does most of its work.

Lorna Gold, Trócaire's project coordinator on Laudato Si’, told NCR that the agency was "absolutely delighted" that Ireland finally is taking a position of leadership on a key aspect of climate policy. But her delight is tempered by the realization that Ireland's recent track record on the environment has been patchy. The 2018 Off Target report published by the Climate Action Network Europe, a major non-governmental coalition working on climate and energy issues, rated Ireland as the second-worst performing European Union member in tackling climate change.

Gold, who is author of the recently published Climate Generation: Awakening to our Children's Future, which documents her personal experiences of climate activism and motherhood, believes Ireland is "at an interesting point in terms of its response to climate change." On one hand is the success of the new bill and on the other is Climate Action Network Europe's report which "placed us just above Poland in terms of our climate commitment — 27 out of 28 countries in Europe."

The government has "played a very astute and deliberate game trying to convince the public that the country is doing something about this issue while its strategy around expansion of the beef and dairy industry is undermining targets and commitments," she said. "But it is not just the agricultural sector, we need to look at transport and at the lack of retrofitting of houses — we are lagging behind in most areas."

However, Gold also detects a renewed public awareness of climate change over the last two years. She believes the government-instituted Citizens' Assembly, which deliberated on climate change and produced a report backing a robust carbon tax, investment in public transport and a shift away from beef and dairy by the farming industry, has been instrumental in shifting the public's understanding.

"When people are given the right information on this issue and when they are given the time to deliberate on it, they really understand what is happening and want robust measures," she said. "The noises coming out of the political classes now on climate change are starting to shift."
A government committee, which includes Gold and theologian Columban Fr. Sean McDonagh, has been set up to address the outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly, and a national dialogue on climate action aims to address the knowledge gap that exists between citizens and the science on climate change.

But the proof of where Ireland is headed will be in the findings of the National Mitigation Plan's report because as Gold warns, "talking is cheap — and I think people are genuinely fed up with so much talking about this issue when we can see the impact that it is already having."

Her caution is echoed by theologian Msgr. Dermot Lane, the retired head of the former Mater Dei Institute of Education in Dublin and contributor to the book *Laudato Si': An Irish Response*. He attended the recent Vatican conference to mark the third anniversary of Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, "Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home." The message from scientists at the conference, he told NCR, was "globally we are losing the struggle against climate change. We are not meeting the targets of the 2015 Paris Agreement."

Furthermore, Lane is under no illusions that Ireland is now on top because of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill. The country is, rather, "second last in the class, having failed to meet its 2020 targets." In January, Prime Minister Leo Varadkar acknowledged that Ireland is a climate "laggard" when it comes to climate commitments. Lane added that failure to meet carbon emissions targets will be costly for Ireland as the country will have to pay EU fines of up to 500 million euros for this negligence.

Though Gold and her Trócaire colleagues were initially "quite skeptical" about the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill, she ascribes its success to three factors, the first being the precedent set by Trócaire's successful 1990s campaign which pushed the Irish government to divest the national pension reserve from companies linked to landmines.

The second is the current political state of play in Ireland. The country is being run by a minority government that is dependent on cross-party collaboration to survive.

"This bill was a real example of what can be achieved when there is cross-party collaboration," Gold said. "It was cross-party across all the parties in the end. There was nobody left outside of the collaboration on this issue."

The third factor is the growing divestment movement both nationally and internationally as the public is concerned by the proliferation of extreme or freak weather events. In Ireland, that same public is incensed by U.S. president Donald Trump's climate change skepticism, his decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement and his removal of climate scientists from the EPA.

"I think it is having the opposite effect to what he had expected," Gold said. "I think globally it has intensified and focused minds on the need to have a very robust response to climate change."

Gold is currently involved in a project to support the church in Ireland to divest from fossil fuels, "working collaboratively with the bishops' conference and their finance committee to examine
what investments they have in fossil fuels and to look towards divestment, hopefully in the near future."

She is also working "very closely with religious orders in Ireland and across the world to divest from fossil fuels." To date, six Irish religious orders have made divestment commitments, and Gold is hopeful that the number will rise significantly in the next few years. So far, 90 Catholic institutions and organizations across the world, including Dayton University, the Diocese of Assisi, Italy, the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland, and the Kiltegan and Columban Fathers, have all publicly committed and signed a divestment pledge.

"It is a growing movement within the church," Gold said.

Lane said that the church in Ireland has been "moving slowly in implementing the papal encyclical but it is moving. The bishops are listening to Trócaire and to the Laudato Si’ working group of the [Council for Catechetics of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference]."

The church has agreed to adopt a "Season of Creation" in September as a follow-up to the papal visit in August.

"The bishops have agreed to make a connection between the World Meeting of Families and Laudato Si’, pointing to the link between the care of the human family and the wider family of God's creation," Lane told NCR. "I do know that the bishops are very seriously considering divesting their funds from fossil fuel, and have reached an agreement to do this in principle, and are now waiting for individual dioceses to take action and sign up to the agreement."

For Gold, Francis' recent comments after a meeting with oil industry executives and his recent remarks at the Laudato Si’ anniversary conference "have really encouraged us that this issue is at the forefront of Catholic social teaching and that we need to protect the environment for creation."

"That means joining the dots between our actions in the financial and economic sphere and what we do in terms of our care for our common home," she said.

[Sarah Mac Donald is a freelance journalist based in Dublin.]


July 25, 2018

“Amazon of the North”: Canada’s Boreal Forest Could Save the Planet – But Only If Trudeau’s Government Saves It First
By Margie Kelly  
Natural Resources Defense Council

Clearcutting Canada’s boreal forest threatens Indigenous Peoples’ rights, the survival of wildlife like the iconic boreal caribou, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s commitment to combat climate change, according to a new report by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). The “Amazon of the North” stores more carbon than the world’s tropical forests, locking in more carbon than the world releases in three decades of burning fossil fuels and making its continued existence critical for limiting the worst impacts of climate change.

“The significance of Canada’s boreal forest to the survival of the planet cannot be overstated: this ‘Amazon of the North’ is stopping a global climate bomb,” said Anthony Swift, Canada Project Director for NRDC. “Yet every year, more than 1 million acres of intact boreal forest are lost to logging, mining, and oil and gas. For too long, Canada has traded on its reputation as an environmental leader, while gambling with the future of the boreal and the world as we know it. Canada must act now to protect a forest that will help save the planet,” said Swift.

Located just below the Arctic Circle, the boreal crowns the earth’s Northern Hemisphere, accounting for one-third of the world’s forested areas and 1 billion acres of Canadian lands.

Preserving the boreal forest must become a global priority for Canadian federal and provincial governments, as well as U.S. corporate customers and consumers of boreal wood products globally. NRDC, which has worked to protect Canada’s environment alongside Indigenous Peoples for decades, recommends the following steps to protect the boreal:

- Canadian policymakers should partner with Indigenous communities to take immediate action to protect the boreal forest through mandatory and enforceable caribou protections and Indigenous-led management;
- Canada’s federal government should account for logging’s negative climate impacts and address those impacts in its national strategy to limit carbon emissions;
- Corporate customers in the international marketplace – particularly U.S. companies, which purchase eighty-percent of Canada’s boreal forest product exports – should use their purchasing power to urge Canada’s governments to prioritize boreal protection and Indigenous-led land management.

**Boreal and Indigenous People’s Rights**

The boreal forest is home to more than 600 Indigenous communities, whose cultural identities are entwined with the forest. Because of colonial legacies related to land rights and the fact that many remaining commercially viable forests in Canada are located on Indigenous lands, Indigenous Peoples often suffer the worst of Canada’s unsustainable logging. Despite logging’s devastating impacts, many Nations and communities are largely excluded from decision making about development in their territories. However, to protect their homelands, many Indigenous Peoples are leading land-use planning initiatives, including protected area development, frameworks for caribou management and others that have become models for sustainable economic development across Canada.
“The Boreal forest is home to over six hundred Indigenous Communities who have maintained and evolved in a balanced relationship with this vital ecosystem for over ten thousand years,” said Valerie Courtois, Director of the Indigenous Leadership Initiative. “As Indigenous Peoples, we have the cultural responsibility of ensuring its health and vitality for future generations, and as Nations, our Rights and Titles need to be recognized and upheld.”

Chief Christian Awashish of the Atikamekw First Nation of Opitciwan said, “It is important to understand that we are not against economic development nor do we oppose forestry. However, we believe that the management of the natural resources within our ancestral territory, Nitaskinan, must be carried out only under our consent, at our own pace, and according to our values. The boreal forest is our pantry; respect for our Mother Earth is our first priority. The preservation of traditional practices such as hunting, fishing and gathering is critical to our people and to our culture. We believe that it is possible to find the right balance between extracting natural resources and respecting our cultures, without disturbing the delicate balance of our territory.”

**Boreal and Climate**

Canada’s boreal forest is extremely effective at storing carbon when forested areas remain undisturbed and soils are intact - there is as much carbon stored in its trees and soils as is in all the world’s recoverable oil reserves combined. But when the forest and soils are heavily logged and degraded, greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere and the forest’s ability to continue storing carbon is hampered. Canada says it wants to be a climate leader, but it’s unclear how destroying one of the world’s largest natural carbon storehouses will achieve this.

Between 1996 and 2015, more than 28 million acres of boreal forest were logged, an area roughly the size of Ohio. Clearcutting in the boreal forest is undermining Canada’s efforts to combat climate change, by adding annual greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those of 5.5 million vehicles to the country’s already accounted-for emissions. While Prime Minister Trudeau and his Environment Minister describe themselves as crusaders against the worst impacts of climate change, an analysis by NRDC concluded that each year, clearcutting accounts for 12 percent of the annual emissions Canada agreed to cut by 2030 under the Paris Agreement.

**Boreal and Wildlife**

Clearcut logging removes nearly all trees from an area, degrading intact forests and leaving ranges greatly diminished for species like the American marten, Canada lynx, wolverine and boreal caribou. Logging’s impact is best illustrated by the decline of the boreal caribou, an “indicator species” for the health of the forest more broadly. Boreal caribou have declined significantly due to habitat loss, particularly from logging, and now occupy only half their historic range. Of Canada’s 51 boreal caribou ranges, only 14 are currently considered sufficient to support self-sustaining populations. However, not a single Canadian province or territory has finalized a conservation plan to protect boreal caribou habitat, despite the federal government’s call to do so under the Species at Risk Act. Without policies that protect the critical habitat for this species, scientists and government reports predict that boreal caribou populations will continue to decline.
**Boreal and the International Marketplace**

International demand for wood products, especially demand from the U.S., is a major driver of the Canadian forest industry’s push into previously undisturbed boreal forest. The international market accounts for more than half of the revenue Canada brings in from the industry, with two-thirds of this coming from the U.S. Much of boreal clearcutting ends up in throwaway landfill products like tissue, toilet paper, and newsprint.

Since last fall, 21 companies with a combined annual revenue of more than $140 billion have written to provincial and federal government officials urging action in partnership with Indigenous Peoples to protect boreal caribou habitat. These companies voiced their desire for “materials that are free of controversy and have been acquired through sustainable harvesting.” Today, companies continue to press federal and provincial governments to fulfill their obligations to protect the boreal caribou.

For a French translation of this press release, please go [here](#).

**Additional Resources**

- [Cutting It Close: How Unsustainable Logging in Canada’s Boreal Forest Threatens Indigenous Rights, Wildlife, and the Global Climate](#)
- [NRDC Report Calls on Canada to Protect the Boreal Forest](#)
- [NRDC: Save the Canadian Boreal](#)

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Bozeman, MT, and Beijing. Visit us at [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org) and follow us on Twitter [@NRDC](https://twitter.com/NRDC).

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[https://www.nrdc.org/media/2018/180725](https://www.nrdc.org/media/2018/180725)

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**July 26, 2018**

Professor awarded grant for ground-breaking work on the Christian ethics of farmed animal welfare

University of Chester

*A University of Chester Professor has been awarded a £450,000 research grant to develop his work engaging churches and policy makers in relation to farmed animal welfare.*
Professor David Clough, who is Professor of Theological Ethics at the University, has been awarded the grant by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for a three-year project on the Christian ethics of farmed animal welfare. He will be working in partnership with major UK churches and a number of organisations with interests in animal welfare. The project will produce the first academic book on the Christian ethics of farmed animal welfare and a framework for policy for Christian organisations. It will offer support for policy implementation as well as offering briefings to UK government policy-makers.

Professor Clough is a leading international authority on the place of animals in Christian theology and ethics. He is the founder of Creature Kind which was established to engage churches and other Christian organisations in thinking about the implications of Christian faith for the treatment of animals, with a special focus on farmed animal welfare. He also recently launched a new #DefaultVeg project encouraging organisations to adopt a simple and cost-free policy for events catering with benefits for the environment, humans, and animals, with a number of University of Chester Departments and Faculties leading the way.

Through this grant, David will work as part of a small inter-disciplinary research team with Dr David Grumett (New College, The University of Edinburgh), Dr Siobhan Mullan (School of Veterinary Sciences, Bristol University), Dr Margaret Adam as a postdoctoral researcher, and Dr Paul Hurley (University of Southampton). The partnership will also include the following organisations:

- Church of England
- Roman Catholic Church
- Church of Scotland
- Church in Wales
- Methodist Church
- United Reformed Church
- Church Investors Group
- Compassion in World Farming
- Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals
- Catholic Concern for Animals
- Pasture-Fed Livestock Association
- Pan-Orthodox Concern for Animals
- Quaker Concern for Animals
- Veterinary Christian Fellowship.

The project will present its findings to the Church Commissioners and offer briefings to the Church of England bishops in the House of Lords, and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Animals. Three US observers on the project (Dr Charlie Camosy, Dr Matt Halteman, and Dr Grace Kao) will advise on the feasibility of a US successor research project on the same model.

Professor Clough said: “I am extremely pleased to have been awarded this grant, which comes at a time of a growing Christian recognition that concern for animals is a matter of Christian faith. In the 19th Century, Christians were at the forefront of campaigns against cruelty towards
animals, and they now have the chance to play the same role in challenging the cruelties inflicted on farmed animals in industrialised systems. Through this project we hope to contribute to public policy debates about farmed animal welfare at a crucial moment: the question of how animal agriculture will be regulated post-Brexit.”

For further information about Professor David Clough, please visit: [https://www.chester.ac.uk/departments/trs/staff/clough](https://www.chester.ac.uk/departments/trs/staff/clough)

[http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/43099](http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/43099)

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**August 1, 2018**

Tribal Members Are Already Scrutinizing Keystone XL Environmental Review

By Yessenia Funes

Earther

Construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline is set to begin in 2019, but before then, the public has a chance to comment on the new [environmental assessment](https://www.chester.ac.uk/departments/trs/staff/clough) that the State Department released Monday. And so far, some tribal members and groups aren’t loving its conclusion that the pipeline would have minimal impacts on land, groundwater, and environmental justice.

The federal government has taken a second stab at the environmental review process after [President Donald Trump’s commitment](http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/43099) to pushing through the crude oil project as well as the new route the Nebraska Public Utilities Commission [approved](http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/43099) last year.

That route—dubbed the Mainline Alternative Route—follows the already-existing Keystone Pipeline more closely. The assessment says that while there’s potential for oil spills, the developer has response plans in place to prevent any environmental damage. However, the original Keystone Pipeline spilled [more than 400,000 gallons of oil](http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/43099) last year.

Overall, the 300-page assessment makes the project sound like a net positive with minimal downsides for the communities that would live near it, including the 67 Native American tribes. And that’s what opponents of the pipeline have taken issue with.

“Here’s the largest aquifer in the world, and you want to put crude oil in it and consider it a minor impact?” Chandra Mechelle Walker, a member of the Omaha Nation in Nebraska who chairs on the state’s Native Caucus for the Democratic Party, told Earther.

She’s talking about the [Ogallala Aquifer](http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/43099), which covers more than 170,000 square miles from South Dakota all the way to Texas. The underground natural reservoir provides water for an estimated two million people, as well as [20 percent](http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/43099) of the wheat, corn, cotton, and cattle the U.S. produces. Overuse is already threatening the aquifer and its water quality. Any contamination would just worsen that.
The assessment said the State Department reached out to all 67 tribes along the proposed route to include their perspectives. However, the report said only two responded to these consultation requests.

Nicolette Slagle, the research director and deputy director at Honor the Earth, said other pipeline project developers have used loose language around tribal consultation. But sending a letter or making a call doesn’t count as tribal consultation, she told Earther. Tribal consultation means holding community meetings on the reservation and meeting with community members and tribal leaders.

Walker was also concerned tribes weren’t properly consulted. She pointed to the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, one of the 67 tribes with land along the route, which put out a resolution last year against the pipeline noting its alignment with other First Nations in the U.S. and Canada.

Though the report found 30 archaeological sites and four properties of cultural significance to indigenous peoples, Slagle wouldn’t be surprised if there were more. She also said it’s not individual sites that matter to tribes.

“Indigenous folks have a much different way of looking at and relating to the landscape,” she said. “One of the problems that comes in when you start talking about protection of sacred places for tribal communities and indigenous communities is that western regulators tend to want to have specific landmarks whereas, from an indigenous perspective, the relationship that they have with the environment is much more broader than that.”

Much of the land along the Keystone XL proposed route through holds cultural significance to tribal members, but there’s no way for them to measure that in a way the federal government will recognize.

Former President Barack Obama rejected the project before leaving office, which offers a little bit hope amid this chaos. If environmentalists won this battle once, perhaps they can win again even if the Trump administration has made its stance on oil and gas development pretty clear.

The State Department will soon open a 30-day public comment period for this environmental assessment. Indigenous opponents will have theirs ready.


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**August 2, 2018**

Canadian ecumenical document embraces Christian concern for environment

By Michael Swan, Catholic News Service

National Catholic Reporter
Toronto — Canada's two largest churches, which represent two-thirds of Canadian Christians, have jointly declared that climate change and ecological degradation are central, enduring concerns for Christians.

The declaration is contained in "The Hope Within Us," a document released July 23 from the Roman Catholic-United Church of Canada Dialogue in Canada.

"We claim that the divine presence permeates all creation, holds all together in a dynamic relationship and calls us beyond our human-centered perspective into a consciousness that affirms and respects all life and all creation," it said. "The acceleration of our technology, the rapacious ethic of progress and the greed of our economic and political systems are today wreaking havoc upon the environment and humanity."

The ecumenical document marks 40 years of dialogue between the churches. The 22-page statement draws heavily on Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home." On the United Church side, "The Hope Within Us" leans on the 2006 teaching document "Song of Faith."

But the ecumenical statement also relies on the desert fathers, medieval mystics and Scripture to make its case.

"Early church theologians saw the interrelationship of the Trinity through the dynamic life of creation itself," wrote the 21 dialogue participants, including two Catholic bishops. "In St. Bonaventure's trinitarian theology, every creature is a self-expression of God, and the inner structure of every creature and all creation can be said to reflect the trinitarian footprint."

"It is good theology," said Dennis Patrick O'Hara, director of the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology at St. Michael's College in Toronto. "(It) accurately and faithfully reflects the current discussion at the forefront of the Roman Catholic and United Church traditions."

That churches are working together on climate change is particularly significant.

"Let's be serious. If you're dealing with a planetary crisis, as we are, this is not a time for quibbling about barriers between us. It's a time to be finding common voices for the common good of our common home," O'Hara said.

The most significant common ground at play is how both Catholic social teaching and the United Church's social gospel tradition recognize the importance of social sin, said Dominican Father Prakash Lohale, director of ecumenical and interfaith affairs for the Archdiocese of Toronto.

"It's not so much something to feel guilty about, but because we can make that conclusion that creation also is holy -- Pope Francis talks about it as a sacrament -- then I think the concept of social sin could make people conscious," Lohale said.

Ecumenical dialogue provides an opportunity for religion to engage with the most important questions of our time, he added.
"We have long traditions of schisms and differences in theology," he said. "But it's like Pope Francis said during his visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva. 'Let not our differences stop us.'"

The statement should make it easier for Christians of all stripes to think about ecological issues as matters of faith, said Gail Allen, United Church staff support for the dialogue.

"There are people of faith who are struggling to think through these issues and just want to do it out of their faith," Allen said.

To help parishes and congregations act on the new document, it includes a liturgy for use during Earth Hour, which has been observed in recent years at 8:30 p.m., March 30, in each time zone worldwide.

Allen recognizes that Canadians have conflicting views and conflicting commitments when it comes to climate change. But Christians who make a living in the Alberta oil sands should not feel they are under attack, she said.

"Any move toward a different way of being does need to take into account how we are going to all work together as communities to find new possibilities for people's livelihoods that will be less harmful to the climate," she said.


August 3, 2018

Caritas Philippines lights up poor communities with renewable energy

By Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

**Manila, Philippines** — The social action arm of the Philippine Catholic bishops' conference is doubling efforts to promote the use of renewable energy to light up poor communities around the country.

Caritas Philippines has partnered with a local solar power system provider to accelerate the country's transition to renewable energy and to facilitate the "eradication of energy poverty," ucanews.com reported.

Of the country's 85 dioceses, 43 already are in the process of installing and fully employing solar panel systems as alternative sources of power.

"We are set to bring this renewable power system to far-flung and off-grid communities," said Jing Rey Henderson, communications officer at Caritas Philippines.
Henderson said the organization is coordinating with local power distributors in the provinces to help facilitate the storage of generated solar power and its distribution to communities.

Caritas Philippines inaugurated July 31 three pilot project sites in Sorsogon Diocese's cathedral, which also houses clergy and a minor seminary.

"This is a clear message to everyone that the church is serious in its energy campaign amid the failings of the government to implement the renewal energy law," Bishop Arturo Bastes of Sorsogon said.

Archbishop Rolando Tria Tirona, national director of Caritas Philippines, said the inauguration of the pilot sites is a "historic event" and the country's "concrete response" to Pope Francis' call to care for our common home.

In March, the Philippine bishops entered a partnership with WeGen Distributed Energy Philippines to install solar power services, with no upfront cash requirements, on churches, religious facilities, schools and off-grid communities.

Chris Cantal, the company's associate business development manager, said the firm saw the partnership as "an opportunity to help the church realize the message of Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

"As Catholics, we are called to act on the how we could assist Filipinos to minimize dependence on dirty energy," Cantal said.

Philippine Catholic leaders have been vocal in their opposition to "dirty energy sources" that they claimed only benefit large corporations and businesses.

Fr. Edwin Gariguez, executive director of the bishops' social action secretariat, said the church always considers coal as an energy source to be "dirty and destructive."

There are 28 existing coal-fired power plants in the country. Despite strong opposition from environmental groups, the power plants continue to operate, providing about 32 percent of Philippines' electricity, according to Energy and Natural Resource Market Reports.


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**August 5, 2018**

Myanmar's indigenous people fight 'fortress' conservation

By Rina Chandran

Reuters
BANGKOK (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Saw Ma Bu’s family has lived in the mountainous forests of Myanmar’s Kayin state for generations, farming and fishing in the Salween river, even as a decades-long armed conflict raged in the region.

Now, he says, they fear their way of life is under threat as the government declares swathes of forest in indigenous Karen homelands as protected areas.

Saw Ma Bu and other community leaders have drawn up their own plan to conserve the forest, preserve their traditions and livelihoods, and be a model for indigenous lands elsewhere in the country.

Under their proposal, the Karen people would manage the Salween Peace Park, a 5,200 sq km (2,008 sq mile) area on Myanmar’s eastern frontier with Thailand.

“The Peace Park is built on the culture and traditions of the indigenous Karen people. Conservation and coexistence with the environment is a fact of life for us, and essential for our survival,” said Saw Ma Bu.

Myanmar officials have not yet agreed to their proposal.

Saw Ma Bu has seen protected areas uprooting indigenous people elsewhere in the country, and is keeping a close watch on neighboring Tanintharyi region, where Karen people also live.

Civil society groups there have opposed the creation of large protected areas, saying they could force people from their homes and prevent those who fled fighting from returning.

Saw Ma Bu said the Peace Park would ensure that his community retains the rights to their traditional land.

“In the government’s plans for conservation there is no recognition of the territorial rights of our customary land and forest, or our traditional agricultural methods,” he said.

His concerns are mirrored amongst indigenous groups around the world, according to the advocacy organization Rights and Research International (RRI).

Indigenous and local communities own more than half the world’s land under customary rights. Yet they only have secure legal rights to 10 percent, RRI said.

The rapid growth of protected areas from Peru to Indonesia is exacerbating their vulnerability: more than 250,000 people in 15 countries were evicted because of protected areas from 1990 to 2014, according to data compiled by RRI.

**CAREFUL NEGOTIATION**

Land under protected areas tripled between 1980 and 2005, and as much as 80 percent of those areas overlapped with indigenous land, RRI said in a report published in June.
This “creates a near-constant state of confrontation and potential for conflict and violence,” including evictions and killings, said Janis Alcorn, a co-author of the report.

“Indigenous people and local communities have been conserving their land and forests for centuries. But the rise of ‘fortress conservation’ is forcing them from their homes, hurting people and forests alike,” she said.

In Kayin state, where the Karen National Union (KNU) fought for autonomy for more than six decades, the conflict has killed hundreds and forced tens of thousands of people from their homes, rights groups say.

The KNU and the Myanmar government reached a ceasefire agreement in 2012, ending their armed confrontation, although relations remain tense.

Government plans for protected areas in the region could undermine the fragile peace by jeopardizing the livelihoods and well-being of Karen people, said Hsa Moo at the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN).

That is one reason the Peace Park is so important, she added.

Community organizers have held consultations with the nearly 10,000 households within the proposed park, and have mapped their customary land and community forests with “careful negotiation and consensus”, she said.

“It is our hope the Myanmar government will recognize that respecting indigenous and community rights, and strengthening local livelihoods is a step towards achieving meaningful and equitable peace,” she said.

A government official pointed out that a law passed this year enables indigenous people and villagers to apply for a permit to establish a Community Conserved Protected Area.

“Engagement with the local communities lies at the very heart of safeguarding key biodiversity areas,” Win Naing Tha, director of Myanmar’s forests department, said in an e-mail.

“Local communities will be active participants of community forestry and promoting community conserved areas,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

RIDGE TO REEF

That promise is being tested as the government launches its ambitious Ridge to Reef Project, which covers about one third of Tanintharyi region and overlaps with some areas that the KNU says are contested.

The $21 million project covers 1.4 million hectares (5,405 sq miles) and includes forests, mangroves, islands and marine systems.
Officials say that declaring the area as protected is essential to conserve threatened wildlife, and mitigate damage from deforestation, illegal logging and industrial development.

Campaigners say the protected area proposals were made without the free, prior and informed consent of communities.

The protected area could make farming illegal, prevent refugees from returning, and uproot more than 16,000 indigenous people, including many Karen, according to the advocacy group Conservation Alliance Tanawthari (CAT).

Last month, CAT submitted a formal complaint to the United Nations and the Global Environment Facility - which has funded projects in developing countries since it was established at a U.N. conference in 1992 - asking that they suspend the plan.

“In the name of conservation, the local people will lose their ancestral lands and livelihoods,” CAT said.

CAT has called for a moratorium on establishing protected areas until customary rights of indigenous people are recognized, and a comprehensive peace deal is reached with KNU.

An official from the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), which is backing the project, said “a wide range of consultations” were held, and that feedback had been incorporated.

“The project will identify and realize opportunities for co-managing with local communities,” said Peter Batchelor, of UNDP in Myanmar.

Campaigners say they will continue to protest the project, and push for recognition for Salween Peace Park.

“By supporting indigenous communities to preserve their cultural heritage and secure tenure claims over land and forest, conservation can take place with, rather than in spite of us,” said KESAN’s Hsa Moo.


August 8, 2018

This man powers his whole house, plus two cars, with the sun

By Samantha Harrington
Yale Climate Connections

His faith motivated him to go solar.
Three years ago, Arkansas resident Terry Tremwel built an ultra-efficient solar-powered home. He was motivated by more than a desire to save on electricity. He was also driven by his Christian faith.

Tremwel: “When we burn fossil fuels, when we abuse nature, when we abuse creation, we’re working against God’s will for the world, which is to have this idyllic garden in which we can commune with God. One tool for restoring that relationship with the ecosystem, with the world, with the cosmos, is to reduce carbon emissions.”

Tremwel’s large home was designed to be as energy-efficient as possible. It’s tightly insulated, and south-facing windows allow winter sun to warm the house. And its electricity comes from solar power.

Tremwel: “The solar panels on the roof on a net-annual basis provide enough energy for not only all of the home’s operations, but the two electric cars that my wife and I have.”

Tremwel says he gives tours and shows off his zero-dollar electricity bills when people visit. Through his example, he hopes to inspire others to protect and restore God’s creation.

Listen to the audio recording of this story here:

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August 8, 2018

Cardinal shares message of ‘Laudato Si’ at Ghana World Youth Day event

By Damian Avevor, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Accra, Ghana — A top Vatican official urged young people at a local World Youth Day gathering to protect the planet and actively live the teachings of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment.

Expressing concern for the accelerating degradation of Earth, Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told 3,000 Ghanaians Aug. 5 to learn, know and spread the message of the 2015 papal teaching.
Turkson returned to his native Ghana for the country's fourth local observance of World Youth Day. The event allowed young people unable to travel to the Catholic Church's global World Youth Day in January in Panama to gather in their homeland for a celebration.

Emphasizing that Earth is like a mother to humans, Turkson called for deeper respect and more concrete steps to protect the planet during the event's closing ceremony. He also appealed for greater attention to the needs of poor and disadvantaged people.

The cardinal also addressed the importance of the need to change lifestyles to reduce environmental abuse. He noted that Pope Francis acknowledges that environmental awareness is growing as the world better understands the impact of the damage being done to Earth and all life on the planet.

The pope, he said, remains hopeful about the possibility of reversing the trend of environmental abuse as people adopt the encyclical's teachings.

The cardinal explained to the young Ghanaians that the full title of the encyclical, "Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home," was inspired by the invocation of St. Francis of Assisi, "Praise be to you my Lord," in his Canticle of the Creatures.

Climate change, he said, is a growing concern because it affects everyone and that the well-being of future generations is at stake.

He noted that scientific consensus holds that human activities have led to global warming, which has caused climates to change as shown through now unpredictable rainfall patterns, the extinction of some plant and animal species and the disappearance of islands and atolls under rising seas.

To save the earth and environment from destruction, he called for an end to the felling of trees at current rates. He also advocated for the reintroduction of the Arbor Day celebration in Ghana and elsewhere to encourage the planting of trees.


August 13, 2018

Ecology monks in Thailand seek to end environmental suffering

By Kiley Price
Mongabay

- At a time when Pope Francis is calling upon religious leaders to step up as environmental advocates, Thai Buddhist monks are answering the call. Through rituals
Like tree ordinations, monks are integrating Buddhist principles into the environmental movement in order to garner support from their followers and encourage sustainable practices.

- Although Buddhism is typically a religion famed for its detachment from society, ecology monks believe that their religion is inherently tied to nature.
- With such an immense amount of influence in villages throughout Thailand, Buddhist monks are utilizing their position to add a unique moral dimension to the environmental movement. However, rituals alone are not enough.

As development in Thailand is increasing, so is deforestation. Acres of forests are cleared for contract farming, habitats are torn down to make room for new factories, and soil is eroded, causing massive flooding during the rainy season.

But amid the environmental wreckage, some trees remain untouched. These trees are wrapped in iconic bright orange robes and deemed sacred, protected from harm and destruction. These trees have been ordained as monks.

At a time when Pope Francis is calling upon religious leaders to step up as environmental advocates, Thai Buddhist monks are answering the call. Through rituals like tree ordinations, some monks in Thailand are integrating Buddhist principles into the environmental movement in order to garner support from their followers and encourage sustainable practices.

Dr. Susan Darlington, professor of anthropology and Asian studies at Hampshire College in the U.S. and author of the book *The Ordination of a Tree*, explains that protecting trees is a form of merit-making, an important practice in Buddhism. By accumulating merit through performing good deeds, Buddhists are ensuring a better next life and taking a step closer to reaching enlightenment and, ultimately, Nirvana.

“Making merit is extremely important for Thai Buddhists,” Dr. Darlington said. “They see [tree ordination ceremonies] as an act of making merit, which can help with rebirth and, in some cases, having a better life now.”

One of the primary goals in the Buddhist religion is to end suffering, and the forests of Thailand are certainly suffering.

“There are places in Northern Thailand, particularly in Nan Province, where there has been a lot of deforestation, so the watersheds areas fill the water with mud, silt, and pesticide runoff causing more severe flooding in the rainy season and more severe drought in the dry season,” said Gordon Congdon, the Conservation Program Manager for WWF-Thailand. “In many ways, climate change is amplifying problems that are already existing.”

Leaders of Society

With over 90 percent of the Thai population practicing Buddhism, monks hold an influential role as leaders to whom people look for guidance in all aspects of life.
“They become the leader that people would trust,” said Dr. Chaya Vaddhanaphuti, a geography professor at Chiang Mai University whose PhD studies focused on climate change. “If I asked the farmers who they would choose to trust between government officers and the monks, they would choose the latter.”

With such an immense amount of influence in villages throughout Thailand, monks are utilizing their position to add a unique moral dimension to the environmental movement. However, rituals alone are not enough.

Although Buddhism is typically a religion famed for its detachment from society, ecology monks believe that their religion is inherently tied to nature. Buddhist monks like Phrakhu Ajan Somkit, who is based in Nan Province in northern Thailand where deforestation is an issue of major concern, are entering the political sphere to consult with government officials on environmental initiatives and rights for rural farmers. Other monks, like Phrakhu Win Mektripop, an ecology monk based in Bangkok, are trying to find more sustainable solutions to everyday problems by implementing solar panels in temples and helping villagers create cheap huts out of mud and natural materials.

“When the Buddha was born, he was born under the tree. He was enlightened under the tree. His first sermon was under the tree. We can see that most of his life was related to the forest,” said Phra Win. With a master’s degree in environmental economics from Chulalongkorn University, Phra Win understands how important agriculture is to the rural population of Thailand.

As Thailand shifted from a low-income to an upper-income society in less than a generation, however, sustainability hasn’t exactly been the focus of the country’s economic development. For instance, big companies like CP All Public, which owns over 10,000 7-Eleven stores in Thailand, are taking advantage of the rapid pace of growth by contracting rural farmers to mass-produce monocrops like maize and rice.

“They plant corn, they harvest it, they sell it to the big company and earn just about enough to pay off their debt,” said Congdon. “It creates this vicious cycle of dependency on the large companies and the farmers never get ahead, which leads to more and more deforestation.”

Seeing no other options, these farmers continue unsustainable practices that are stripping the soil of valuable nutrients and plunging them deeper into debt. However, ecology monks are working to provide an alternative that is beneficial to both the environment and the people.

**Education**

Another of the most harmful environmental issues in Thailand is simply a lack of knowledge.

“When I lived with the farmers during my PhD studies, they never used the term climate change,” said Dr. Vaddhanaphuti. “However, they knew that the climate had changed from how it was affecting their farms.”
In order to help teach rural farmers about the environment, Phrakhu Sangkom Thanapanyo Khunsuri, a prominent ecology monk based in Chiang Mai, developed an alternative farming school through his temple in Chonburi called the Maab-Euang Meditation Center for Sufficiency Economy. With 49 full-time students this year, Phra Sangkom mixes Buddhist concepts of personal reflection and a theory called “sufficiency economy.” This theory was developed by the previous Thai king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, and encourages subsistence farming, self-sufficiency, and a detachment from material goods.

Along with teaching classes at his school and working in the field, Phra Sangkom often travels throughout Surin and Chiang Mai on speaking tours to bring his philosophy directly to the people. Each speech typically has over 100 attendees, he says.

“If the people understand that the jungle gives them oxygen, water, good food, medicine, and clothes, do you think they are going to help protect it?” Phra Sangkom asked as he gestured to his own farm, which was filled with mangoes, bananas, rice, and more. “Of course!”

Enemies and Allies

Ecology monks like Phra Sangkom have been marked as leading environmental advocates in Thailand, but some have also been marked with a target on their back.

As their environmental influence spreads throughout Thailand, monks are helping to obtain more community forest rights for indigenous people and farmers, which takes land away from both the government and logging and oil companies. Some monks have been prosecuted by the Thai government for their controversial activism. Others have been assassinated, like Phrakhu Supoj Suvacano, an ecology monk involved in trying to prevent the land around a meditation center in Chiang Mai from being converted into a tangerine farm.

Even in the face of these threats, many ecology monks continue their work, which has started to receive help and support from other outlets, like local universities and NGOs.

“We are figuring out how we can bring the Buddhists who are just sitting and meditating out into the world to deal with the suffering,” said Somboon Chungprampree, executive director of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, an organization which is working to connect activist Buddhists and non-Buddhists from all over Asia. “There is not just personal suffering; there is social and environmental suffering out there and people need to figure out how they can help as a Buddhist.”

Kiley Price is a senior at Wake Forest University. Her reporting in Thailand was sponsored by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting in Washington, DC.


August 14, 2018
Should Rivers Have Rights? A Growing Movement Says It’s About Time

By Jens Benöhr and Patrick J. Lynch
Yale Environment 360

Inspired by indigenous views of nature, a movement to grant a form of legal “personhood” to rivers is gaining some ground — a key step, advocates say, in reversing centuries of damage inflicted upon the world’s waterways.

Chile is a land of rivers. Along its narrow 3,000-mile length, thousands of rivers and wetlands bring freshwater and nutrients down from the Andes Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Together, these river systems drain 101 major watersheds that support both terrestrial and marine ecosystems, ranging from arid lands in the north to blue whale nurseries off of Patagonia in the south.

Chile’s second-longest river, the 240-mile Biobío, once tumbled fast and wild through deep gorges and spectacular scenery on its way from the Andes to the sea. The Biobío was one of the world’s great whitewater rafting venues — until the 1990s, when the first of three large hydroelectric dams was built across the river. Over the past two decades, the Biobío dams have flooded more than 13,000 acres, displaced hundreds of families of the indigenous Mapuche people, turned long stretches of this once-unruly river into placid reservoirs, and caused abrupt fluctuations in water levels that have wrecked nesting habitat for native birds and disrupted the river’s natural rhythms.

Today in Chile, despite citizen opposition, hydroelectric development continues at a steady pace. The Alto Maipo dam, currently under construction, threatens the water supply of 7 million people in Santiago. Farther south, construction is about to begin on La Punilla dam on the Ñuble River, which is expected to flood 4,200 acres in the middle of a World Biosphere Reserve. Another conflict is playing out on the breathtaking San Pedro River, sacred to the Mapuche, Chile’s largest indigenous group. A dam that had been abandoned because of concerns it was located in a geologically unstable region is now back in play, despite overwhelming local opposition from both the Mapuche and their non-indigenous neighbors.

With the number of dams in Chile at 137 and counting, indigenous people, citizens, and environmental activists [including the authors, members of the Chilean Free-Flowing Rivers Network] say the time has come to look at granting legal rights — a form of legal personhood — to the nation’s rivers. This campaign is not occurring in isolation, however, and is taking inspiration from other countries where a small but growing number of courts and legislatures have begun bestowing legal rights upon rivers. Three countries — New Zealand, Colombia, and India — have all taken such steps over the past two years, though the practical ramifications of these declarations remain unclear.

In Chile, as in other places, we have come to this point because the traditional Western view of rivers — and of nature generally — has failed us. Western legal systems and governments traditionally viewed water and water rights as property, leading to overuse and contamination.
One criticism levied by environmental groups is that in countries like Chile and the United States, corporations are granted the same rights as people while the living ecosystems upon which we depend for survival are not. Chile’s Water Code was established during the Pinochet dictatorship, and still treats water as a replenishable (rather than increasingly scarce) natural resource. Under the code, companies may trade water rights to the highest bidder. Water is not a universal right in Chile, but a corporate one. This has inevitably led to the degradation of many rivers and the ecosystems they support, as well as to ongoing conflicts among users.

In figuring out how countries can reverse this environmental degradation and reduce conflicts, a lot can be learned from the indigenous view of rivers. Legal innovations that successfully incorporate this outlook could better protect rivers, essentially by giving them the same basic rights as people.

Today, the Mapuche nation — which retained autonomy until the 1880s, when it was finally occupied by the newly independent Chilean Republic — numbers around 1.1 million strong. Their territory extends across the southern portions of present-day Chile and Argentina. It’s easy for an outsider to understand why the Mapuche fought so hard for their homeland; the region is defined by lush forests, spectacular landscapes, and some of the most stunning rivers on the planet, including, until its recent damming, the Biobío. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a founder and senior attorney with the global Waterkeeper Alliance, said the Biobío was once “the jewel of Chile” and compared it to the Grand Canyon.

The cultural importance of the Biobío is heavily reflected in the Mapuche worldview, which presents a duality of one great earthly river and one spiritual river coexisting to create a balance between the earthly and spiritual dimensions. The Biobío signifies the terrestrial river, its hundreds of branches extending throughout the region, around which innumerable families constituted their lineages. Above the Biobío flows the great river of the sky, the Wenu-leufú, what Western astrologers labeled the Milky Way. This “galactic river” is home to the ancestors who inhabited the earth since its origins.

As this duality indicates, Mapuche culture is built around a profound understanding of and interdependence with rivers. Like the Eskimo-Aleuts and their more than 50 words for snow, the Mapundungun language has numerous words for water — trayenko, lil, menoko, leufú, leufquén, traytrayko, to name a few. Mapuche view rivers, lakes, and wetlands as sacred places inhabited by a great diversity of not just flora and fauna, but also spirits, which the Mapuche call ngen. If you want to enter the home of a ngen in search of medicine, food, or water, you must first ask permission.

Each river nook and eddy has its own ngen, meaning a single watershed and its people can be protected by hundreds of spirits. Contaminate or dam a river, even a small tributary, and the ngen will leave, abandoning the place and its people. Since ngen are protectors of both the land and its people — Mapuche literally means “people of the land” — their departure leaves the people who remain to suffer. In Western terms, suffering comes in the form of depression, alcoholism, and other mental and social health issues that have been widely documented in Mapuche communities that inhabit the upper, dammed part of the Biobío’s watershed. Thus, for the
Mapuche and other indigenous communities, conservation of the natural environment is also a matter of public health.

A key question now faces communities like the Mapuche and others around the world: Given the likelihood of ongoing water conflicts and continuing degradation of rivers, what legal changes could help protect both rivers and communities?

One solution to reducing conflicts draws on the “corporations are people” logic, applying it to waterways. Over the last two years, a series of legislative acts and court decisions have emerged across the globe that propose caring for a river as if it were a person. In 2017, New Zealand granted the status of legal personhood to the Whanganui River, the third-longest in the country and, the indigenous Māori believe, a living ancestor of their people. In doing so, the New Zealand parliament merged Western legal values with the Māori worldview to resolve the country’s longest-running water conflict, during which the Māori fought hydroelectric projects and gravel extraction schemes.

Under the new agreement, the Whanganui has the same rights as a person. A special committee that includes community representatives is authorized to act as legal administrator, and the river can now be represented in court proceedings. The river will be represented by two officials, one from the Whanganui iwi (Maori word meaning “people”) and the other from the government. Through the agreement, the Whanganui iwi will be granted authority to conduct cultural activities, give official geographic name assignments, and get financing for social and environmental projects, which include the river’s ecosystem restoration.

In May 2017, Colombia’s Constitutional Court granted legal personhood to the Río Atrato, part of the Chocó biogeographic region, an important biodiversity hotspot. The Atrato flows through the territories of 91 different indigenous communities for whom the river is the main source of both food and cultural traditions. The court’s decision establishes the Atrato River as a “subject of rights, which entails its protection, conservation, maintenance, and, in the specific case, restoration.” The decision instructs the government to create an Atrato Guardians Commission consisting of 14 legal guardians from communities affected by mining and pollution.

The river is the first in Colombia to receive this status, the result of local environmental campaigns against the mining industry. Gold mining was the first activity on the Atrato to draw international attention, and has badly damaged sections of the river through the use of dredging machines and mercury and cyanide used in the gold mining process. Recognition of legal personhood for the Atrato seeks to stop or lessen the damage caused by mining and clean up the mess made to date. However, local groups are still struggling to find a practical way to implement these legal protections.

Another notable decision regarding the legal personhood of rivers was handed down by India’s High Court of Uttarakhand in 2017. This ruling declared both the Ganges and Yamuna rivers living entities with legal rights. The decision was short-lived, however, since India’s Supreme Court overruled it out of concern for practical application of the ruling. In 2017, the Madhya Pradesh state legislature also passed legislation recognizing the Narmada River as a living entity, citing both religious reasons and the river’s importance for drinking water and agriculture.
Those declarations are an important first step, but given the high levels of contamination in Indian waterways, it remains unclear how far these legal actions will go in remediating the problems. The Ganges is a profoundly contaminated river, with high levels of heavy metals other toxins caused by human activities. When and if India’s government or its courts bestow legal status on the Ganges and other waterways, officials must not only curtail ongoing pollution but also launch restoration programs to return these sick rivers to health.

Despite the promise held by establishing legal rights for rivers, difficult questions remain. What does it mean for a river to have the rights of a person? Does a river have the right to flow freely, and does this mean its waters can’t be dammed or diverted? Is compensation to affected communities permissible in lieu of court orders requiring removal of large obstructions like dams? What can we do to move beyond merely acknowledging humanity’s connection to rivers to actually saving them? And, finally, and perhaps most important, how should a legal regime determine who will advocate on behalf of a river, which lacks a voice of its own? In the future, these are questions policymakers will have to address.

Camila Badilla, coordinator of the Chilean Free-Flowing Rivers Network, says that granting legal rights to rivers is just one step in an ongoing transformation in how humans view their place in the natural world. “Perhaps in the future we will stop feeling like the center of nature,” she says. “Granting a right to a river is the first big step to opening ourselves up to seeing and understanding other living beings.”

Grant Gutierrez, a U.S. environmental anthropologist at Dartmouth College, and Tomas Gonzalez Astorga, a Chilean kayaker and natural resources engineer who coordinates the commission of investigation of the Chilean Free-Flowing Rivers Network, also contributed to this article.

https://e360.yale.edu/features/should-rivers-have-rights-a-growing-movement-says-its-about-time

August 16, 2018

Clergy divided as Kenya moves to save forest, evict 40,000 settlers

By Frederick Nzwili, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

NAIROBI, Kenya — When forest rangers arrived at Mau Forest Complex in June to evict thousands of illegal settlers, frightened villagers started moving out.

Villagers sought refuge at churches, schools and trading centers as smoke billowed from their homes, which were razed in the exercise. Churches, schools and crops have been burned in a clearing process that government officials say will save the main water supply.
Amid the mass clearing, clerics have been pulled into the controversy. Some religious leaders support the evictions, saying they are key to protecting the forest complex as a God-given heritage and an essential ecosystem. Other leaders are opposed, saying the evictions are inhumane.

More than 40,000 farmers and herders have been targeted in the mass eviction. They have been occupying 146,000 hectares (about 360,000 acres) of the 400,000-hectare (988,000-acre) forest land in a section known as Maasai Mau. They had bought pieces of land in what some church leaders describe as politically driven purchases aimed at influencing voting patterns in the region.

Some have lived in the forest for more than 30 years. But with visible massive destruction of the forest and river sources, the government is now forcing residents to move. Concerns include how removal of trees and brush has exacerbated erosion, increased soil in riverbeds and put them at risk of running dry. Communities downstream depend on the rivers to supply drinking water, including for livestock and wildlife living in refuge parks.

In the eviction process, large-scale tea farms have also been shut. Owners have been ordered to let the crop grow into bushes. Some 7,000 residents have been evicted this summer as the government reclaimed 12,000 hectares from them.

Jackson Ole Sapit, the Anglican archbishop of Kenya, told Religion News Service he supports the evictions. He said the forest is a holy ecosystem that must be saved at all costs.

"If we don't preserve it now, we will soon see communities suffering serious water shortages, and even wildlife and livestock," he said. "This is very urgent."

According to Sapit, the forest is home to many rivers that serve important bodies of water, including Lake Victoria, Lake Natron and the River Nile.

The forest "gives life to the Mara River, which is the lifeline of the wildebeests migration, one of the wonders of the world," said Sapit, referring to the phenomenon in which 1.5 million wildebeests, zebra and antelope make a circular tour between the Serengeti game reserve and the Maasai Mara in Kenya in search of greener pastures. "Killing forest will kill the wildebeest migration."

Others agree the government is taking necessary steps.

"I think the evictions are a win-win situation for Kenyans — including the settlers," said the Rev. Charles Odira, a Catholic priest and a conservationist. "It may take time to restore the forest, but in the long run the action will prove very beneficial for the country."

Kenya's government has ruled out compensation for forest residents, saying that they settled there illegally. The residents have to look for alternative land to settle or return to their original homelands. Some have been surrendering land title deeds, which government officials claim are fake.
According to Hassan Ole Naado, deputy secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, most of the settlers are innocent citizens who were duped by racketeers to purchase the forest land.

"The racketeers used their influence and power to swindle these people. The authorities should pursue them (instead)," said Naado.

While the evictions have widespread support in Kenya, some church leaders have raised a red flag. They say they are not opposed to the conservation of the water supply, but they argue the evictions are cruel.

Paul Leleito, a retired bishop of the African Gospel Church, said government authorities have failed to follow a steering commission's recommendations to clear the area by marking the forest border, determining land ownership and using resources to support residents who are forced to leave.

"My concern is they have enforced the evictions without a proper prior warning," said Leleito. "Many of those affected by eviction have no shelter and are living in the open where (they) suffer cold nights. Some of them are sick. Children are not going to school."

Leleito urged the government to give evicted residents time to plan their departure.

"For now, the people should be allowed to harvest the crops they had planted in farms," said Leleito. "This is not happening, and the crops are likely to go to waste."

Meanwhile, clerics are warning politicians not to use the evictions to score political points, which they fear is dividing the local communities. Sapit suggested that the forest should be fenced in to prevent future encroachment or illegal settlement.

"We need to look at the greater good and encourage the government to protect the environment," said Sapit.


August 17, 2018

Indigenous Peoples' Right To Land Can Help In Achieving Conservation Goals

By Palash Sanyal
Science Trends

Indigenous people make up about five percent of the world’s population, residing in 70 countries with minimum or no management control over their land, resources, and lives. Even though the
actual number is unknown for native populations, about 70% of the world’s population does not have a registered title to their land.

A recent analysis showed 370 million indigenous peoples have rights or claims to over 25% of the world’s land area which includes two-fifth of the world’s protected and reserved zones, mostly unrecognized. Published in Nature, the study pointed that providing the rights to land and resources to natives can ensure greater ecological conservation and meeting local and global conservation goals.

The researchers compiled land data from 87 countries out of 235 nations excluding Antarctica and some deserted islands in the Southern Ocean. They used five types of spatial dataset: regulatory, geographic range of indigenous peoples’ estates, preserved regions, human footprint, and anthropogenic biomes. Africa and Asia have the highest number of states with the native inhabitants. The results show indigenous communities hold 37% of the natural lands, and the lowest density of land use among these vulnerable population does not come across as a surprise. Almost 70% of the remote and least dense places belong to native communities. But the researchers also pointed out growing outside intervention in these areas.

The barriers towards granting land rights and maintaining trust are multiple. First, there is no consensus on defining indigenous peoples’ and land, and it is often disputed by proponents. Second, laws and agreements are based on trust, and there is usually a lack of trust between authorities and the natives. Third, governments are reluctant toward handling indigenous issues, especially land law reform, as it can destabilize the relationship between indigenous and settler communities, also toppling the state.

Fourth is the cultural sensitivity towards the indigenous population. The idea of land and resource varies throughout aboriginal societies within the spectrum of collective against individual rights. Fifth, the use of Free Prior Informed consent (FPIC) has been questionable in resource management. The idea of FRIC is to place bottom-up support and discussion for indigenous populations before the commencement of development projects on native lands or using indigenous resources. There have been cases where corporations and businesses have abused the duty to consult, which brings us to external problems, e.g. fossil fuel, mining, or agricultural industry intervention.

The deep connection of indigenous people to their cultural and social space allows them to manage their natural environment better. Their daily life, livelihood, and skillset all depend on interaction with the natural environment. The analysis emphasized their institutional capacity to be persistent and resilient.

Indigenous people have their motivations and desires to prosper, like any other community of the world. It is unfair to put the unnecessary burden of conservation on them when it comes to creating goals for global carbon reduction. The study urges a “bottom-up” approach to ensure community participation in policy design, interventions, and implementation process of any initiative taken. The growing representation of the indigenous society in the global post-2020 biodiversity framework is a positive sign, even though this pattern needs to be channeled in local, national and regional contexts. The World Bank and United Nations focus on such
consultation and interventions as part of their green fiscal reform initiatives. Innovation and technological advancement will influence their traditional life. Preserving the conventional ways of life, and providing education and technical skillset to find local solutions to complex modern problems is a must.

Indigenous people are at the forefront of facing the adverse impact of climate change. Change in the weather pattern, disease cycles, food cycles, and natural disasters bring unwarranted consequences for the aboriginal communities. Providing land rights will guarantee that they have the administrative stability to become resilient communities. Their sustained existence will ensure the crucial traditional knowledge is passed on from generation to generation and also toward achieving global targets for conservation.

_Plash Sanyal is a professional in the field of sustainable development, environment and energy. He has worked with IFAD, TEDTalk, WaterAid Bangladesh and other non-government organisations. Palash specialises in innovative design process, behavioural change and transdisciplinary sustainability issues. He has more than five years of facilitation experience, facilitating controversial issues for Soliya, UNESCO, Harvard University, University of Saskatchewan and various other organisations. Twitter: @prsanyal._


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August 20, 2018

Lessons Learned from Centuries of Indigenous Forest Management

By Richard Schiffman

_Yale Environment 360_

_In an interview with Yale Environment 360, ecologist Charles M. Peters discusses how, in an era of runaway destruction of tropical forests, the centuries-old ecological understanding of indigenous woodland residents can help point the way to the restoration of damaged rainforests._

Over centuries, even millennia, indigenous communities have developed interdependent systems of agriculture and forestry that are uniquely suited to the ecological requirements of the land they inhabit. Yet even today, says Charles M. Peters, a curator of Botany at the New York Botanical Garden, that skill and knowledge often remain unacknowledged, with some government officials and conservationists arguing that indigenous communities should sometimes be excluded from protected lands that are part of their historical territory.

In an interview with _Yale Environment 360_, Peters — author of the recently published book, _Managing the Wild: Stories of People and Plants and Tropical Forests_ — discusses what he has learned from 35 years of working with indigenous forest communities; explains how indigenous farming, even slash-and-burn agriculture, can actually improve forest health; and reflects on the need to enlist indigenous groups as allies in the struggle to preserve and restore tropical forests.
“We need everyone’s input to solve this problem,” Peters told *Yale e360*. “I’m saying [forest dwellers] have incredible knowledge … There are tracts of forest all over the world that have been intensively managed for generations by local people, and that’s precisely why they are still forests.”

**Yale Environment 360:** Governments and NGOs often think they know better how to manage forests than the communities that live in them. You are suggesting that local people know a lot more than we give them credit for.

**Charles Peters:** Local people know a lot more about how to manage tropical forests than we do. Indigenous forest-dwelling communities need to be at the table when decisions are made about tropical forests, because there is this incredible body of traditional knowledge and experience in this replicated experiment that they have been engaged in that has been going on in the tropics for hundreds and thousands of years.

**e360:** How do you make use of this resource of traditional knowledge in your own work with indigenous groups?

**Peters:** The way interventions usually go is that you have some idea and you go to the community and you try to implement that idea. In most cases, the agenda involves some particular species and protecting that. It really has nothing to do with what the community itself might know how to do and what is in their best interest.

My method is different. We go in and the first thing we do is we try to define the demand for a given forest resource through household interviews. We ask people, for example, what did they make their house out of? Where did they get these materials? We talk about rattan, we talk about bamboo, medicinal plants, forest fruits. Then we go into the forest to find out how much of these resources are out there. We quantify the demand and supply for a particular resource. When you put those two things together, you can figure out how big a piece of forest the community needs to produce the resources that they require.

**e360:** You also train local people to do things that professional foresters usually do, like conducting forest surveys and measuring the growth of trees.

**Peters:** That’s right. We teach them how to do growth studies and [tree] inventories so that later on they can monitor the forest themselves. The community needs to know how much the timber or the rattan grows in a year, because that is all that you can sustainably harvest … This also empowers them to deal more effectively with their governments. Nowadays, to continue gathering forest resources, somebody has to give you permission — the forest department or the central government. That usually involves writing a management plan, applying for a permit. To do that, you need to provide numbers, you have to provide data on things like the stock and yield of a resource.

**e360:** The idea that local people should even be allowed to use resources in the forest is not universally accepted by conservationists. In the past, there was an emphasis on creating pristine forest reserves that exclude humans and human activities. Was that wise?
Peters: In recent decades, we’ve moved a bit away from this strict protectionist conservation mindset — to kick the people out of the reserves. In many ways, though, we are still in that mindset. But some people are coming around to the idea of allowing local people to make some use of these resources.

That is what happened in Brazil, for example, with the extractive reserve idea. It is a whole new kind of protected area that gives communities the right to extract rubber, Brazil nuts, and other products from pieces of forest as a form of conservation. There are millions of hectares of extractive reserves currently in Brazil. Granted, the execution of the extractive reserve has not always been very good at all.

e360: You mentioned Brazil. You have worked extensively in the Amazon. Some people believe that the form of slash-and-burn agriculture that is practiced there is destructive to the rainforest. You have a different view.

Peters: There is a way to do slash-and-burn incorrectly, but properly done it is a really amazing solution to enriching sterile tropical soils. In temperate soils you can farm them every year — they were glaciated, it’s new, mineral-rich dirt. Most of the nutrients are in the soil. But in the tropics and especially the Amazon, which gets heavily rained on, the soils are leached out and nutrient-poor. Most of the nutrients are in the vegetation, not in the soil. So when you clear the forest there is not much left. If you try to farm that land as we farm in temperate zones, it doesn’t work. The soil is not good enough, you have to add a huge amount of fertilizer and other inputs. But when you take a small piece of forest and burn it, then corn, rice, cassava, or a variety of other crops are planted in the ash. These sites are farmed for several years until excessive competition by weeds and declining yields make additional cultivation untenable. Eventually the forest returns.

e360: It is an agricultural system that works in the tropics.

Peters: If you were looking for someone who could help you farm the moon, these are the people who could help you figure that out. So this is why I’m saying they have incredible knowledge. We don’t have to give them complete control, but let’s ask them what they think before we tell them what they need to do.

e360: I’ve done some reporting from the Amazon. I was frankly surprised by how beautiful some of the small farm plots in the jungle were. They were full of fruit trees, cassava plants, flowers, in some cases even fish ponds, with a great variety of birds and wildlife, especially at the margins.

Peters: You know you see advertisements from some conservation group with pictures taken immediately after the smoking burn, and it looks horrible. But come back to the same site 10 years later and things look very different. All of this is a bit insidious, the way we disenfranchise the people who actually know how to farm these areas, who actually know something about the forest and how it regenerates.
**e360:** You have argued that not only do indigenous farmers not destroy the forests that they depend on, but they frequently improve them. How so?

**Peters:** For the longest time we thought that indigenous people just put in their swiddens [temporary agricultural plots formed by cutting back and burning off vegetative cover] and just walked away from it and cleared another piece of forest. But we’ve been finding, to the contrary, that the fallow [open area] that they leave, they are actively managing that, they are enriching it with things that are of use to them. In addition to agricultural crops, they plant fruit trees, timber species, thatch palms, medicinal plants, and rattan canes in their fields. The villagers return to their fallows periodically to weed, to clear the underbrush, remove unwanted tree species, and, depending on the season, they collect fruits and palm thatch. Far from being abandoned, much of the fallow vegetation created by indigenous farmers in the tropics is enriched with useful species and carefully managed. For them, there is no clear line between agriculture and forestry. Forest succession is carefully controlled, rather than arrested or inhibited.

**e360:** You write in your book about working in Borneo where the Kenyah Dayak people manage subsistence orchards of amazing complexity. Can you talk about that?

**Peters:** I’m a forester and I know what foresters can do in temperate forests, for example. We do really well managing one species like pine or spruce. In a hardwood forest maybe we can do a couple of species of oak and then we move into the tropics and maybe we find four or five species that we feel are merchantable — so we cut four or five species. But the trees that come up to replace them are totally different species and so we exhaust the forest and we don’t have anything more to cut.

But these guys in Borneo are managing 150 species of trees in a hectare. So we Western foresters can’t manage four species in a plot, and these people are managing 150. As a forester you just go, “Oh my God, how do they do this?” Because to do what they are doing you have to pay attention to every one of those species and ask how it is doing and what its requirements are. Are there seedlings and saplings? Are you ensuring that once you harvest that tree there will be others of its kind that take its place? It’s a very complicated and wonderful thing. And all of this is being accomplished with traditional knowledge, as opposed to putting in plots and counting things [as Western foresters do]. How are they doing this? How did they learn this? They learned it by trial and error over a thousand years and more.

**e360:** They have a lot to teach us.

**Peters:** We Western silviculturalists have learned basically nothing from them, because we don’t even see that they have any useful information. Well, that is totally incorrect. Do you know the one thing that has been transferred from Western forestry to traditional forestry? Do you know what the one thing we have given them is? We have given them chainsaws.

**e360:** Which is a mixed blessing.

**Peters:** Yes, a mixed blessing.
**e360:** What lessons have you learned personally from working with indigenous foresters?

**Peters:** We conventional foresters operate at the level of adult trees — we manage forest composition at the adult tree stage. What all of these community silvicultural systems have in common is that they are operating at the seedling and the sapling stage to create a forest that you won’t see for decades in the canopy. They are actually doing something that to an outsider is invisible, but that is producing lasting changes because they are controlling precisely what is able to regenerate and what is not.

**e360:** We sometimes speak about virgin wilderness untouched by human intervention. But you suggest in your book that much of what we call pristine forest has actually been created by human interventions over a period of centuries.

**Peters:** That’s right. You walk through it, you think you are in pristine forest and the people tell you, “Oh, no, no, this is an orchard that we have created.” These forms of indigenous resource management had been invisible to us. There are tracts of forest all over the world in Brazil, in Africa, in Southeast Asia that have been intensively managed for generations by local people and that’s precisely why they are still forests — because they are important to local communities and carefully managed by them. And then somebody in a district forest office comes along and draws a circle and says, “This is a virgin protected area” and kicks the people out — that sort of thing happens a lot.

**e360:** You write about numerous cases where indigenous people have successfully managed, and in some cases saved, their local forests from destruction. Do we know how much forest they have succeeded in saving?

**Peters:** We don’t really know how big it is globally. But it is probably getting smaller every year because it gets no support. It is not recognized and somebody — oil companies, palm oil interests, you name it — is paying these people a lot of money to do something that is in nobody’s interest. These systems of indigenous management are really fragile. No one thinks that they know what they are doing, people think that [forest dwellers] are the problem and not the solution. And when you receive no support, when someone comes in and says, “We want to buy your timber and here’s the money,” and you don’t have any alternative, you will sell it off.

https://e360.yale.edu/features/lessons-learned-from-centuries-of-indigenous-forest-management

August 23, 2018

In Sicily, A Plague of Cancer Overwhelms an Oil Refinery Town

Yale Environment 360
The winner of the 2018 Yale Environment 360 Video Contest examines how the people of Augusta, Sicily, led by the town’s priest, are fighting back against a cancer epidemic linked to a massive petrochemical complex.

Watch the video here: https://e360.yale.edu/features/in-sicily-a-plague-of-cancer-overwhelms-an-oil-refinery-town

The Augusta-Priolo petroleum refinery complex, one of Europe’s largest, has for more than 50 years spewed a toxic brew of pollutants into the air and water of eastern Sicily. In recent decades, the roughly 60,000 residents of surrounding towns have experienced abnormally high rates of cancer, an outbreak that one comprehensive study has shown is tied to emissions from the refineries.

In his new documentary, “Venerable Augusta” — winner of the 2018 Yale Environment 360 Video Contest — Italian filmmaker Francesco Cannavà depicts the crisis in Augusta and nearby towns through the eyes of the local priest, Father Palmiro Prisutto. We follow him and other Augusta residents as they stage a demonstration against government inaction in the face of a deadly epidemic. “The accusation I am making today against the Italian state is this: Our cancer dead have been murdered,” says Prisutto. “For some time, the population has repeated this chorus: ‘Better to die of cancer than of hunger.’ This saying is unacceptable. One cannot trade health and life merely for a job.”

Also featured in the film is Augusta resident and cancer patient Carmelo Miano, who, shortly before he dies, says, “The Fifth Commandment says, ‘Thou shall not kill.’ Here, instead, they are killing everyone.”

About the Filmmaker: A Rome-based film director and screenwriter, Francesco Cannavà has made documentary films on subjects ranging from human evolution, to Greek grave masks on the Aeolian Islands, to Italian youth soccer. His films have won awards at European film festivals and have been screened at numerous international festivals, including the Tribeca Film Festival in New York.

About the Contest: The Yale Environment 360 Video Contest honors the year’s best environmental films, with the aim of recognizing work that has not previously been widely seen. Entries for 2018 were received from six continents, with a prize of $2,000 going to the first-place winner.

https://e360.yale.edu/features/in-sicily-a-plague-of-cancer-overwhelms-an-oil-refinery-town

August 23, 2018

Catholic institutions commit to climate action

By Erika Street Hopman
Yale Climate Connections
They're speaking out in support of the Paris Agreement.

Listen to the audio version of this article here:


Last year, President Trump announced that the U.S. will pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement. But almost 600 U.S. Catholic institutions recently signed a declaration stating that they still support climate action.

Aguto: “We come upon this with a desire to take this out of the realm of partisanship and economic interest, and to work together in order to manifest climate solutions – so manifesting the most challenging commandments of our faith, which are to love our brother and sister, to love our neighbor, and most importantly and most courageously, to love our enemy, and stepping forth and building bridges towards a common future.”

Jose Aguto of the nonprofit Catholic Climate Covenant says the dioceses, parishes and schools that signed the declaration will now commit to specific actions.

Aguto: “For example, having homilies on care for creation, having educational sessions amongst parishioners or reducing your carbon footprint.”

In September, the covenant will share the commitments publicly.

Aguto: “We would love for the Catholic church to be a leader and an inspiration with regard to climate action in spirit, word, and deed.”


August 24, 2018

Green Hajj takes roots in Mecca: How devouts are working to reduce carbon footprints

Diligent Media Corporation

Thousands of cleaners are busy separating plastic from other rubbish as more than two million Muslims wrap up a pilgrimage to Mecca that presents a huge environmental challenge for Saudi Arabia.

The Mamuniya camp in Mina near the holy city is dotted with colour-coded barrels -- black for organic waste and blue for cans and plastics for recycling.
It's all part of an initiative to reduce the environmental footprint of the hajj, one of the world's largest annual gatherings.

More than 42,000 tonnes of waste are produced during the pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites, according of Mohammed al-Saati, head of sanitation for the Mecca municipality.

"We're facing some real challenges, primarily the sheer volume of waste produced ... along with the number of pilgrims, the limited space around the holy sites, different nationalities and the weather," Saati told AFP.

"Islam as a religion does not encourage excess," he added.

"Pilgrims can be friends of the environment. It starts by raising awareness back home." The hajj, which started on Sunday and ends tomorrow, drew nearly 2.4 million Muslims from around the world this year, according to official Saudi figures.

More than 13,000 sanitation workers and supervisors were hired during the pilgrimage season, which saw temperatures rise to 44 degrees Celsius (111 Fahrenheit) this week.

A handful of camps in the town of Mina, the site of the symbolic stoning of the devil ritual during hajj, have begun to implement plans to turn "green", cutting back on waste and encouraging pilgrims to do their part.

Banners hanging near the Kaaba, a black structure inside Mecca's Grand Mosque towards which Muslims around the world pray, also featured the recycle logo this year.

Authorities aim to cut waste volumes by two-thirds by 2030, Saati said, with a plan that speaks to both environmental ethics and religious belief.

Sorted waste collected from the pilgrimage sites will be sold to companies that handle recycling. All proceeds will be given to charity in standing with the Muslim belief in "sadaqah," or voluntary donations.

Workers in bright green vests made their way across the streets and alleys, picking up soda cans and plastic water bottles as pilgrims packed their things to return home.

Signs encouraging pilgrims to sort their waste could be seen across the Mamuniya camp -- along with signs reading "Sadaqah, not litter." "The idea of an environmentally friendly camp is really important to us, to preserve the sanctity of the site," said Hatem Mumena, the camp's general manager.

But he admits there is still far to go, as the numbers of pilgrims attending hajj is expected to rise. Saudi Arabia hopes to welcome some 30 million pilgrims per year by 2030.

"This is just the beginning," Mumena said.
Irish bishops announce divestment from fossil fuels ahead of the pope's visit

By Christine A. Scheller
Religion News Service

DUBLIN (RNS) — Hours before the arrival of Pope Francis, the world’s leading champion of the environment, the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference announced it would divest from fossil fuels.

The move comes in response to Francis’ 2015 environmental encyclical, “Laudato Si,” (or “On Care for Our Common Home”), and follows the introduction of a bill in the Irish Parliament requiring the country’s sovereign wealth fund to divest from all fossil fuels.

The bishop’s move means withdrawing investments in 200 oil and gas companies within 5 years, Bishop William Crean, chairman of the Irish Catholic humanitarian agency Trócaire, said in a statement.

The Irish Bishops Conference joins 95 other Catholic organizations worldwide in committing to divestment. If the Irish bill passes, it will make Ireland the world’s first government to divest from fossil fuels.

“The impact in terms of human suffering to families is devastating,” the Irish bishops said in a statement Friday (Aug. 24). Climate change is already leading to forced migration, separation of families, and increased pressure on resources.”

On June 9, Pope Francis met with oil executives at the Vatican. “Civilization requires energy, but energy must not destroy civilization,” he said in his address.

Building a more sustainable approach to the economy, work and the environment is one of six major themes at the World Meeting of Families in Dublin this week.

At a panel on “Care for Our Common Home: Why the family matters to the future of our planet,” and at an interfaith service at Dublin’s Christchurch Cathedral, bishops from Myanmar and New Zealand addressed the topic of climate change.

Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar, noted that three decades of international debate and negotiation over environmental degradation are “already exacerbating hunger, water shortages in the poorest parts of the world, affecting profoundly and unjustly those who have done least to cause the problem, and who have least resources to cope.”
Bo said, “We often fail to see that decisions we make in one arena of life — what we consume, how much we consume, what transport we use, how we dispose of things — have an impact on everything else.”

A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach, he said.

Juan Carlos Mendoza, managing director of the United Nation’s Convention to Combat Desertification, said tackling climate change is not something that is going to be done by politicians or leaders.

“It’s going to be by people, including the communities of faith,” he told RNS. “They play a very critical role in their families, in their parishes, as citizens.”

The Great Green Wall Initiative, which seeks to combat the impacts of climate change in the countries in the Sahara, is one example, he said.

“We have seen local communities of different religions coming together around this” Mendoza said. Muslims and Christians who live in close proximity are working together towards land rehabilitation.”

Cardinal John Dew, archbishop of Wellington, New Zealand, also spoke at the gathering.

“The world is gifted to us for our good, for our use, but not for our domination. This means protecting it for those who will come after us, “ he said. “We’ve come to see ourselves as lords and masters, people who are entitled to plunder it at will,” he said. “The pope asks us to lament for the harm that we have done and to repent.”


August 31, 2018

Buddhist Monks Battle to Save Cambodia’s Forests

By Dipen DB
Buddhist Door Global

Deforestation is a major environmental threat in Cambodia. According to a World Bank report, 73 per cent of the country was under forest cover in 1990, but by 2010 that had fallen to 57 per cent. Now Cambodia’s forests have found support from an unlikely group of activists: Buddhist monks, who have united in organizations, such as the Monks Community Forest (MCF) and the Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ), to battle to save forests by demanding stronger government action against deforestation and by lobbying lawmakers for greater protection.
“We lost the forest and this made the temperature increase and our rain unpredictable, which lead to increased diseases and an increased release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere,” said Venerable Bun, head of Samrong Pagoda in Oddar Meanchey Province. In 2002, Ven. Bun Saluth established the MCF to protect a 18,261-hectare forest. “I had to think about ways to protect this land,” he said. “So we [monks] created a boundary by digging a ditch around the entire forest.” (Climate Heroes)

Ven. Bun grew up in a rural village, the son of a farmer, but left home at an early age to become a monk. He spent five years studying in Thailand, where he lived with the “ecology monks,” a group of engaged Buddhist monks who are actively working to protect the environment by integrating Buddhist principles with environmental awareness in Thailand. He returned to his country in February 2002 with a vision to protect his own country’s forest, and has since succeeded in preserving 18,261 hectares of forest land in Oddar Meanchey Province. The MCF is the largest community-managed forest conservation site in Cambodia. For his work, Ven. Bun was awarded the Equator Prize by the United Nations Development Programme in 2010.

“When I returned home to Oddar Meanchey I realized the importance of these forests,” he said. “In Thailand they have largely lost their forests and the government must replant huge areas. In Cambodia we should treasure the forests that we already have and preserve them for the next generation.” (Climate Heroes)

Another organization active in the preservation of Cambodia’s shrinking forests is the Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ), which has more than 5,000 monastic followers who are teaching local people how to use social media to raise awareness of illegal logging by uploading photos and videos, and by writing articles. The monks also teach local residents what they can do to prevent deforestation.

IMNSJ founder and leader Ven. Buntenh, ordained 16 years ago, has now made it his business to fight deforestation: “No one has told me that I should go out there to protect the forest, but for me it was a logical thing to do. I am doing all I can to save it. I plant new trees, I help the people who live from the forest, I am reminding the government of the promises they’ve made.” (The Star Online)

Among Ven. Buntenh’s current concerns are the threats against Prey Lang, one of Cambodia’s largest and oldest evergreen woodlands. Prey Lang has 3,600 square kilometres of forest, including giant luxury timber trees, and is home to at least 20 endangered plant species and 27 endangered animal species. Large sections of Prey Lang have already disappeared to make space for plantations, and illegal loggers have removed large patches of trees in protected areas.

“The government says that the cutting of the forest is necessary for the development of our country. But if this is development, why does it cause us so much grief?” said San Reth, a 63-year-old Cambodian who has lived his entire life near Prey Lang and used to be dependent on the forest for his livelihood. He is happy with the support of the monks. “For a long time, we hoped a good man will stand up to save our forest,” he said. (The Star Online)
However, the activist monks are also coming under threat for their activities. Last year, a pagoda that houses them was searched by the police. Even the supreme patriarch of Cambodia’s monastic sangha has turned against the activists, saying that monks should not be involved in protests, and calling on pagodas to keep their doors closed to those who are. Over the past few years, many attempts have been made to thwart the activities of the monks.

The monks are not the only ones under threat—several activists and journalists have been intimidated or even killed for reporting on illegal logging. Similar threats were made on Ven. Buntenh’s life some time ago. “I don’t think I’m a good monk, because I am mean to the police and to the military,” Ven. Buntenh stated. “But I’m ready to give everything for my people and the forest. If I have to give my life for it today or tomorrow, then I’m willing to make that sacrifice.” (The Star Online)

https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/buddhist-monks-battle-to-save-cambodiarsquos-forests

August 31, 2018

First Nations Celebrate Win Against Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion

By Shannan Stoll
Common Dreams

Indigenous leaders, coast protectors, and others demonstrate against the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, on March 10, 2018. (Photo: Jason Redmond/Getty Images)

A Federal Court of Appeal on Thursday struck down the Canadian government’s approval of the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain oil pipeline expansion, halting construction of the 1,150-kilometer project indefinitely.

The expansion would have tripled capacity of the existing Trans Mountain pipeline, allowing it to ship up to 890,000 barrels of bitumen oil every day from Alberta’s tar sands to a terminal in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The court decision cited the Trudeau government’s failure to consult with Canada’s First Nations, specifically the government’s insufficient treatment of oral traditional evidence, lack of sufficient time given in the consultation process for affected groups to inform themselves well enough to participate, and failure to consult about the environmental assessment.

The decision comes after months of indigenous-led opposition to the pipeline. Efforts suffered a big blow back in May, when the Canadian government announced it would purchase the project for $4.5 billion when Kinder Morgan struggled to fund the expansion.

The court decision cited the Trudeau government's failure to consult with Canada’s First Nations.
“Without question today is a day of celebration,” said Grand Chief Stewart Philip of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs in an interview posted on Facebook. “But also it’s a day that we must reflect on our journey up to this point in our opposition to the Kinder Morgan Trans mountain expansion project. And I’d like to take this opportunity to thank that massive infrastructure that was pulled together in terms of grassroots people, indigenous leadership, and rank-and-file British Columbians and Canadians.”

Here’s what that leadership has looked like.

**Coast protectors**

In British Columbia, indigenous coast protectors led direct actions of allies, environmental activists, and local residents to stop pipeline expansion. Over 200 people have been arrested in direct actions over the past several months.

This campaign was launched in March, when the coast protectors built a traditional cedar watch house in Burnaby, the site of the planned oil terminal for the expansion project. The cedar watch house was a gathering place for people organizing actions to stop construction of the pipeline.

CBC News reported that 211 people were arrested between March and early July at Kinder Morgan’s work sites.

**Divest the globe**

Even before the direct actions of coast protectors began in British Columbia, indigenous groups—including Mazaska Talks and the Treaty Alliance Against Tar Sands Expansion—organized an ongoing campaign to put financial pressure on the banks funding the pipeline. The indigenous-led divestment movement that emerged from Standing Rock expanded its focus last year to target the banks funding four tar sands pipelines, including Kinder Morgan’s Trans Mountain pipeline.

Native women were particularly involved in leading the campaign and engaged in work to expand the movement to a global stage.

Last October, the Divest the Globe campaign saw demonstrations in more than 50 cities around the world.

**Tiny House Warriors**

Indigenous women have had a leading role in opposing the pipeline. Since the fall of 2017, the Tiny House Warriors have been building homes in the path of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. Women of the Secwepemc First Nation formed the group, building homes that were fossil fuel-free, mobile, and solar-powered.

In July, three were placed on the site of an ancient Secwepemc village in North Thompson River Provincial Park near Clearwater, British Columbia. That month, Kanahus Manuel, who co-
founded the group, was arrested “after allegedly defying an eviction order from the BC Parks service,” according to Canada’s National Observer.

Thursday’s decision will require the Canadian government to restart its consultation with First Nations, which would likely cost millions of dollars.

What happens next isn’t certain, but for now the First Nations and allies who opposed the pipeline expansion are celebrating the victory.

“I’m elated,” said Grand Chief Philip in a press conference Thursday. “The future of our grandchildren depends on our ability and our courage and our integrity to stand up and defend the land and defend the water.”

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September 1, 2018

Pope calls for action on ‘emergency’ of plastics littering oceans

By Josh Gabbatiss, Science Correspondent
Independent

Pontiff encourages followers to preserve ‘great waters and all they contain’

In a message focusing on the “precious element” of water, Pope Francis has called for urgent action to combat the “emergency” of plastics littering seas and oceans.

He lamented the lack of effective regulation to protect the world’s waters while also drawing attention to the perilous ocean crossings made by migrants around the world.

To mark the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, Francis issued a statement intended to galvanise the global community into saving the “impressive and marvellous,” God-given gift of the “great waters and all they contain.”

“Sadly, all too often many efforts fail due to the lack of effective regulation and means of control, particularly with regard to the protection of marine areas beyond national confines,” the pope wrote.
“We cannot allow our seas and oceans to be littered by endless fields of floating plastic,” Francis said.

“Here, too, our active commitment is needed to confront this emergency.”

Francis recommended a two-pronged approach, saying: “We need to pray as if everything depended on God’s providence and work as if everything depended on us.”

He also denounced as “unacceptable” the privatisation of water resources at the expense of the “human right to have access to this good.”

With countries from Italy to Australia promoting policies to thwart migrants from arriving by sea, Francis prayed that “waters may not be a sign of separation of peoples, but of encounter for the human community.”

“Let us pray that those who risk their lives at sea in search of a better future may be kept safe,” Francis added.

Malta and Italy have recently cracked down on charity-run boats that aim to rescue migrants from smugglers’ unseaworthy boats.

Other EU nations, such as Hungary and Poland, have refused to share the burden of caring for some of the hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers who reached the continent’s southern shores in recent years.

Francis did not single out any countries. Instead, he directed part of his message to all politicians having to tackle migration and climate change, appealing for them to apply “generous and farsighted responsibility.”

The emphasis on preserving the marine environment is the latest act by the current pope to establish his environmental credentials.

At last year’s climate talks in Bonn, Francis rebuked those who denied the science behind climate change, and urged negotiators not to fall prey to such “perverse attitudes”.

He also described climate change as “one of the most worrisome phenomena that humanity is facing”.

In a previous message to mark the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation he has also emphasised the role that a changing climate and environmental disasters are having on the world’s most vulnerable people.

“God gave us a bountiful garden, but we have turned it into a polluted wasteland of debris, desolation and filth,” he said.
September 1, 2018

Season of Creation marks month of eco-contemplation for Christians

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Christians across the globe Thursday joined in celebrating the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, but for many the day only marks the beginning of a longer contemplation on the planet the pope regularly refers to as our common home.

The Season of Creation is a month-long prayerful observation of the state of the world, its beauty and the ecological crises that threaten it and all its inhabitants. It runs from Sept. 1, the World Day of Prayer for Creation, through Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi.

For many Catholics, the day of prayer for creation landed on their radar for the first time last year after Pope Francis officially placed it on the Catholic liturgical calendar. Because of the timing -- Francis instituted the annual prayer day just three weeks before Sept. 1 -- many Catholic groups scrambled to piece together small celebrations with an eye toward larger, more coordinated events this year.

At the Vatican Thursday, Francis helped kick off the Season of Creation by celebrating the World Day of Prayer for Creation with a message that urged Catholics to view care for creation among the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The Season of Creation comes as the planet continues its own season of sizzling temperatures.

July 2016 was the warmest month ever recorded -- with modern records extending back 136 years -- and 15 consecutive months of record global heat. NASA has projected 2016 will eclipse 2015 as the warmest year on record, which would make it 16 of the 17 warmest years on record since 1880 occurring since 2001 (the remaining year, 1998, is tied for 6th on the list).

A Christian tradition of creation care

While 2016 marks the first year of concerted Catholic participation in the Season of Creation, other Christian denominations have recognized it for decades.

A common origin point is 1989, when Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I proclaimed Sept. 1 as a day of prayer for creation in the Orthodox church. From there, faith communities, often at the parish and grassroots levels, began extending the celebration beyond a day throughout the month and until the Assisi feast.
One of the earliest organized celebrations of the season occurred in 2000 at a Lutheran church in Adelaide, South Australia. Three years later, the Catholic bishops of the Philippines issued a pastoral statement creating a day and season for creation, with different dioceses then adding them to their calendars in subsequent years. In 2007 the Third European Ecumenical Assembly adopted it, with the World Council of Churches following suit the next year.

It’s been the passion at the local level that has grown the Season of Creation into something bigger, said Episcopal Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, an interfaith environmental coalition. That the pope, ecumenical patriarch and the archbishop of Canterbury now all recognize it “represents an affirmation of the really good work that people all over the world, that Christians all over the world have been doing,” he told NCR.

For many, the day and season have come to symbolize not only collective awareness of the responsibility to properly tend to the earth, but also a gathering point for all Christians and faiths. “I can’t think of many themes and specific campaigns that bring Christians together at such scale as this one,” said Tomas Insua, co-founder and global coordinator of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, who added that this year’s efforts mark a first in terms of global coordination around the season.

Prayer and action

The 300-plus climate network of Catholic organizations has led coordinating efforts for the 2016 Season of Creation along with the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network, which produces the monthly papal prayer intention videos. For the Season of Creation, it released a modified version of Francis’ February prayer intention calling for care for creation. [The prayer intention for September is for the centrality of the human person.]

“As we are [the pope’s] official service of prayer we couldn't miss this project,” said Jesuit Fr. Frédéric Fornos, international director of the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network (formerly called the Apostleship of Prayer).

Fornos said the pope encourages all the Catholic church to be engaged in the day of prayer and the spiritual and lifestyle transformations he has called for in his encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home.”

“He gave us the direction, and then we commit ourselves,” Fornos told NCR in an email.

During a private audience Thursday morning, Fornos said Francis was aware of the ecumenical initiatives planned around the World Day of Prayer.

Other sponsors of the Season of Creation include the World Council of Churches, GreenFaith, the ACT Alliance and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network.

Events around the Season of Creation began Thursday morning with an ecumenical online prayer service. Almost 200 additional prayer services on six continents have been planned, according to
the Global Catholic Climate Movement. A map of the various events is on its website and the [Season of Creation website](http://www.seasonofcreation.org). Insua told *NCR* roughly half of the celebrations are ecumenical.

Prayer is essential to the season, said Fornos.

“[C]hanging our lifestyle is not enough, because change requires a deep conversion. It is the prayer, closeness to Jesus, at his word, which can transform our hearts and our lives and help us to live everyday with a simple way and solidarity style,” he told *NCR*.

Along with the pope’s video, people can pray with Francis through the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network by using its Click To Pray app. The daily prayer for Thursday read in part, “Father of All Creation, on this World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, I am thankful for the beauty of the world that you have created for all your children. Help me to live each day aware of my vocation as a steward of your creation and work with others for the care of our common home.”

In addition to prayer, many have used the Season of Creation as occasion to live out their litanies.

On Thursday morning the English charity Christian Aid announced that more than 3,500 churches in the United Kingdom have already or plan to substitute fossil fuels for renewable energy as an electricity source, including 2,000 parishes from 16 Catholic dioceses.

Along similar lines, the Global Catholic Climate Movement anticipates a major announcement at the season’s end of religious congregations divesting from fossil fuels. On the one-year anniversary of Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*, four Pacific-area religious orders announced their divestment intentions. Global Catholic Climate Movement will host a [Sept. 7 webinar](http://www.globalcatholicclimate.org) on divestment.

Other plans under way for the Season of Creation include:

- The Vatican produced a [booklet for vespers celebrations](http://www.vatican.va/directory/document/en/dv-wor-2013-00001246_en.html) on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. Similar liturgical resources have been compiled by the U.S. bishops’ conference, Global Catholic Climate Movement, Franciscan Action Network and Columban Mission Institute in Sydney. ([all available here](http://www.globalcatholicclimate.org)
- The Sisters of Mercy will share a visual meditation daily on their website, inviting photographers to send their own shots demonstrating “an aspect of the beauty of our world.”
- The Catholic Climate Covenant has released materials for its [annual Feast of St. Francis program](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/feastofstfrancis), now in its fifth year. This year’s theme centers on the presidential election and echoes the pope’s call for constructive dialogue – at home and in politics – about the impacts of environmental harm on the poor.
- Numerous faith groups are using the season as a way to prepare for participation in a wider climate mobilization set for mid-October.

Having an official date for creation care on the Catholic liturgical calendar is “massively significant” in terms of making it concrete in their daily lives and communities,” Insua said.
“Having this happen every year will be a good way of not letting *Laudato Si’* fade away,” he said.

**Liturgical emphasis**

Another way to breathe life into the encyclical would be formally adding a season for creation in the liturgical year, according to one Australian priest.

Columban Fr. Charles Rue has proposed doing just that, viewing it as “one way to structurally help implement the vision of Pope Francis given in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*,” he wrote in a proposal paper that has circulated among faith-based environmental circles. A fellow Columban, Fr. Sean McDonagh, has made a similar endorsement of inserting creation care deeper into the spiritual and liturgical lives of Catholics.

Rue added that a new liturgical season focused on creation “would help believers face the 21st century ecological challenge” in a way that recognizes its magnitude.

“Church communities would be in a better position to dialogue with people of other churches and faiths, scientists and people of good will about earth as our common home, leading to new commitments as congregations and individuals,” he said.

Insua said the development of a liturgical season of creation would be a big step toward embedding *Laudato Si’* into the mindset and lives of Catholics. For now, Harper of GreenFaith said seeing the day of prayer eventually raise to the significance of other notable days within the religious calendar would be a major step forward in ingraining environmental concern with faith.

“What I’d love to see is the day of prayer for creation assume some of that dignity and the ability to provoke the kind of introspection and change in life,” he said.


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**September 3, 2018**

Sisters of Earth: hopes and dreams

By Joan Brown
Global Sisters Report

*How to Face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy*, the subtitle of Joanna Macy’s book *Active Hope*, aptly describes the time many of us feel immersed in this summer of 2018. It was also the inspiration for the Sisters of Earth gathering that took place July 12-15 at Mount Saint Joseph, home of the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati, Ohio.
The conference is held every other year. Begun in 1994 through the inspiration of several U.S. and Canadian Catholic sisters, this informal network includes women of all ages — a means for women engaged in diverse professions to explore the new cosmology and its implications for a new and emerging worldview; to address concerns about the ecological/spiritual crises of our times; and to support one another in healing the human spirit and restoring Earth's support systems.

The Cincinnati gathering location was chosen partly because of the ancestral inspiration of Sister of Charity Paula Gonzalez, who promoted solar power and sustainability projects and teachings throughout the Catholic world. This year, nearly 100 women from the United States and Canada began by remembering Sister Paula and other guiding ancestors.

A visit to the cemetery where Paula is buried and a circle of remembering and dance set in motion a weekend filled with tears, laughter and inspiration. For three days we explored the theme, "Sharing the Wisdom, Shaping the Dream: Creating the Future We Want."

The vision of Sisters of Earth includes four elements of Active Hope: gratitude, pain for the world, seeing through new eyes, and bringing forth something new. Mercy Sr. Jan Stocking and Diza Velasco, two directors of Rockhaven Ecozoic Center in House Springs, Missouri, guided us through an experiential day focusing upon each of these four elements.

We combined the wisdom of Active Hope and the Awakening the Dreamer program, asking: Who are we? Where are we? How did we get here and what is possible? And — where do we go from here?

Sisters of Earth are very engaged in the world's suffering and realities of climate change. In a "Despair Ritual" we owned the pain of the world, and entered into anger, despair, sadness or fear, in order to be open to creative ways forward. I was really moved when the youngest woman in the group stepped to the circle, lifted the stone of fear, and bravely said, "I am afraid I will not have the strength to bear all of the suffering of the world that lies ahead in my lifetime."

Rituals of song, dance, anointing, and blessing honored such moving moments of the weekend. Composer and performer Joyce Rouse masterfully wove her music into our hearts and helped create some boisterous laughter at a Saturday night of song, dance and acting. She wrote a song for Sisters of Earth, called "A Life Well Lived," which reflects much of the wisdom shared over the weekend — ranging from bio-mimicry to dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery.

We shared inspiring stories of the work of Sisters of Earth:

Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati Marge Kloos and Mary Bookser described how their community is following Paula's inspiration by living into the meaning of transformational community life and the common good. They are changing the witness and the look of their campus through education, and by addressing climate change with sustainable technologies: geo-thermal, energy efficiency measures, replacement of 25,000 lights with LEDs, and installing a first solar array for six of their sisters' residential homes. They are saving thousands of tons of carbon emissions and sending excess energy to their utility company six months of each year.
The Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, with their extended community and school children, are getting their hands dirty with a garden project. Sr. Barbara Ann Smelko said, "Two weeks after planting potatoes, seeing green shoots emerge in the field was the most thrilling and exciting thing any of us had witnessed in a long time."

Potatoes have become a community affair with young people harvesting, elder sisters sorting and cleaning, and volunteers building wooden crates to transport the harvest to a local food bank. Bat houses, butterfly gardens, an Amish-built garden shed and now onions stand witness to a spiritual community in physical terms — and to Mother Seton's theology: "Nature speaks to us in God's design."

A 2000 assembly and a study of cosmology and feminist cosmology over the years pushed the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, an international community (based in the United States, India, Botswana and Nepal), to "scrutinize our lifestyles where we live", said Sr. Susan Gatz.

To help them reach a 2017 goal of zero emissions, they developed principles to guide decision making: protecting Earth and creatures; developing eco-consciousness; caring for the poor and marginalized, especially women; repurposing/relinquishment for mission; and collaboration.

Caroline Cromer, their sustainability director, helps the community implement numerous projects sprung from their years of reflection: a conservation easement on property in Pennsylvania; putting aside carbon offset money from travel to plant trees on their property in all of the countries they serve; bio-gas production and the creation of a plastic-free zone in their Indian community.

Through Caroline, the community is purchasing electric vehicles and battery-run lawn mowers; restoring native habitat; and discovering ways to address medical waste in their sisters' elder care facility. They are also part of a "best practice" collaborative with Loretto, Dominican, and Charity Sisters and other community partners.

Anne Simons-Bucher, filling in via Skype for Joanna Macy (who was ill), shared another example of a life well lived in community at Canticle Farm, Oakland, California.

Among the many surprises of this neighborhood community (intentionally racially mixed), is what she called the "Big Work" — to live in relationships that heal cultural and racial divides. Great honesty, truth telling, love and action are required to address the foundational causes of much of the ecological degradation, human cruelty, and economic disparity.

Two quotes inspire Anne in her "Big Work." St. Francis of Assisi called followers to their soul work when he said, "I have done what is mine to do. May you do what is yours." And a line from the poet David Whyte propels one into the far reaches of what is required in our moment: "What you can plan is too small for you to live."

Mabel Najarro, a Salvadoran Sister of Earth living in Victoria, British Colombia, reflected upon the weekend and the meaning of Active Hope:
Active hope is like a magic wound of pure love that always keeps us enlightened and in connection with the positive constructive energy from the universe, even if we are facing darkness in our lives and around the world. Our choices must be taken with consciousness and from the energy of pure love that sustains everything in the universe. From that source, we always are going to harvest the result of our deeds, because the pure love of the universe will never fail.

Author's note: All women are welcome to be part of the Sisters of Earth Network. For information or to join contact Loretta Peters at loretta502@embarqmail.com.

[Joan Brown is a Franciscan Sister from the Rochester, Minnesota, community and the executive director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light working on creation care and climate justice.]


September 4, 2018

Pope: Pray, act to protect clean water, guarantee access to it

By Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City — Water is a gift of God that makes life possible and yet millions of people do not have access to safe drinking water, and rivers, seas and oceans continue to be polluted, Pope Francis said.

"Care for water sources and water basins is an urgent imperative," the pope said in a message Sept. 1, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, an observance begun by the Orthodox Church and now celebrated by many Christians.

With the world day 2018 focused on water, Francis drew special attention to the more than 600 million people who do not have regular access to clean drinking water.

"Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights," he said, quoting from his encyclical "Laudato Si'" on the environment.

"In considering the fundamental role of water in creation and in human development," he wrote, "I feel the need to give thanks to God for 'Sister Water,'" as St. Francis of Assisi said. Water is "simple and useful for life like nothing else on our planet."
Fulfilling the Gospel mandate to give the thirsty something to drink involves more than individual acts of charity, although those are important, he said. It also involves "concrete choices and a constant commitment to ensure to all the primary good of water."

Believers have an obligation to thank God for the gift of water and "to praise him for covering the earth with the oceans," Francis said. But they also have an obligation to work together to keep the oceans clean instead of allowing them to be "littered by endless fields of floating plastic."

Thinking of oceans and seas, also led the pope to think of the thousands of migrants and refugees who "risk their lives at sea in search of a better future."

"Let us ask the Lord and all those engaged in the noble service of politics that the more sensitive questions of our day, such as those linked to movements of migration, climate change and the right of everyone to enjoy primary goods, may be faced with generous and farsighted responsibility and in a spirit of cooperation, especially among those countries most able to help," he wrote.

Francis also offered prayers for people who fish and others who earn their livings at sea, for those who minister to them and for all the scientists and public policy experts who help the public recognize the treasures of the sea and work to protect them.

And, as the Catholic Church prepares for a world Synod of Bishops on young people, he urged Christians to educate and pray for the young "that they may grow in knowledge and respect for our common home and in the desire to care for the essential good of water, for the benefit of all."


September 4, 2018

Indigenous Activists Win “David vs. Goliath” Victory as Court Rejects $4.5B Trans Mountain Pipeline

Democracy Now!

Watch the show here:

This is a rush transcript. Copy may not be in its final form.

Canada’s Federal Court of Appeals has rejected the government’s approval to triple the capacity of the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline in a major victory for indigenous groups and environmentalists. On Thursday, Justice Eleanor Dawson nullified licensing for the $7.4 billion
project and brought construction to a halt until the National Energy Board and the federal
government complete court-ordered fixes. Her ruling cited inadequate consultations with
indigenous peoples affected by the project, and found the National Energy Board’s assessment of
the expansion was so flawed that the federal Cabinet should not have relied on it during the
approval process. Just minutes after the court’s decision, Kinder Morgan’s shareholders agreed
to sell the existing pipeline and the expansion project to the federal government for $4.5 billion.
Prime Minister Trudeau had announced in May that Canada would purchase the pipeline. This
means the government now owns the project as its expansion faces years of further review. We
speak with Winona LaDuke, Native American activist and executive director of the group Honor
the Earth, and Eriel Deranger, founder and executive director of the group Indigenous Climate
Action.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: In a major victory for indigenous groups and environmentalists, Canada’s
Federal Court of Appeals has rejected the government’s approval to triple the capacity of the
Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline. On Thursday, Justice Eleanor Dawson nullified
licensing for the $7.4 billion project and brought construction to a halt until the National Energy
Board and the federal government complete court-ordered fixes. Her ruling cited inadequate
consultations with indigenous peoples affected by the project, and found the National Energy
Board’s assessment of the expansion was so flawed that the federal Cabinet should not have
relied on it during the approval process. She said the report failed to address the impact the
project could have on the marine environment near a shipping terminal at the end of the
expanded line or the impact of a sevenfold increase in tanker traffic on endangered killer whales
in the area.

Hours after the court decision, indigenous groups celebrated the ruling. This is Tsleil-Waututh
Chief Rueben George responding to the court decision Thursday.

RUEBEN GEORGE: We’re winning. At the beginning, I remember people saying this is a
David-and-Goliath fight. And it’s true. The spirit of the people that I feel behind me was too big
for Kinder Morgan. It was too big.

AMY GOODMAN: In an interesting twist just minutes after the court’s decision, Kinder
Morgan’s shareholders agreed to sell the existing pipeline and the expansion project to the
federal government for four-and-a-half billion dollars. Prime Minister Trudeau had announced in
May that Canada would purchase the pipeline. This means the government now owns the project
as its expansion faces years of further review. Canada’s finance minister, Bill Morneau,
responded to the developments Thursday.

BILL MORNEAU: We’re absolutely committed to moving forward with this project. What the
decision today asked us to do was to respond promptly, gave us some direction on how we could
do that in a way that was going to be efficient from a time standpoint. So we will—we will be
considering our next steps in light of that. What we really saw today was a confirmation that our
government’s decision to buy this pipeline, because of political risks that were hard for a private-
sector actor, was absolutely the right conclusion.
AMY GOODMAN: Kinder Morgan has confirmed its work on the pipeline will now stop, saying in a statement, “Trans Mountain is currently taking measures to suspend construction related activities on the Project in a safe and orderly manner,” unquote. Well, all of this prompted Alberta’s premier, Rachel Notley, to announce Alberta is pulling out of Canada’s federal climate plan.

RACHEL NOTLEY: Until the federal government gets its act together, Alberta is pulling out of the federal climate plan. And let’s be clear: Without Alberta, that plan isn’t worth the paper it’s written on.

AMY GOODMAN: For more, we’re joined by Winona LaDuke, Native American activist, executive director of the group Honor the Earth. She lives and works on the White Earth reservation in northern Minnesota, but she is joining us from Mexico City. And joining us from Alberta, Canada, by phone is Eriel Deranger, founder and executive director of the group Indigenous Climate Action, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation.

We welcome you both to Democracy Now! Well, let’s go north first to Eriel. Your response to the judge’s decision and what this means for First Nations’ opposition to this pipeline?

ERIEL DERANGER: Well, I think, first off, we have to consider the fact that this isn’t the first time that the federal court has ruled in favor of First Nations. In 2016, we saw that, with respect to the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline, that it found that the previous administration had failed to adequately consult with First Nations. This is another case where consultation is flawed.

We have to consider what this actually means. The consultation process in this country is fundamentally broken and doesn’t actually uphold international standards that are outlined within the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. And that is really the fundamental thing, that we need to be achieving free, prior and informed consent. And we’re not getting that through the consultation process. And we have to look at what we’re doing wrong in this country, and take actual measures to correct it. And that means giving communities the right to say no. And that’s not happening here.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And I’d like to ask you—in terms of Prime Minister Trudeau, on the one hand, he claims that he is a leading fighter trying to halt climate change; on the other hand, he’s continuing to pursue the exploitation of fossil fuels in Canada. Can you talk about his situation right now?

ERIEL DERANGER: Yeah, you know, this is exactly it. The fact of the matter is, is that we are not talking about moving the line towards taking aggressive steps to take action on climate change, but we’re talking about building a giant constructed pipeline that will carry Alberta’s bitumen, which is extracted from my people’s territory, that increases global climate change by adding enormous amounts of emissions annually. And we’re talking about a government that’s doing whatever it takes to get this pipeline built, so that we can continue to create emissions rather than decreasing emissions like the rest of the world.
AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk about what it means that the shareholders have just voted, Trans Mountain, that, yes, the government can buy it for four-and-a-half billion dollars? So that means you all own it now, and yet the judge has ruled against it moving forward.

ERIEL DERANGER: Well, this is just it. We are out $4.5 billion in this country because of government’s lack of ability to look at the fact that indigenous rights actually hold weight. They hold their weight in this country. The court has continued to rule on our side, that the government is failing to do this. And now we’re out $4.5 [billion]. I think that is the reason why Trudeau and the government is trying to save face by saying, “We’re going to do whatever it takes to build it,” because now they’re on the hook for the $4.5 billion bill.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: I’d like to bring in Winona LaDuke, director of the group Honor the Earth. Your reaction to the decision of the Canadian federal court?

WINONA LADUKE: Well, first, I want to say that Canada has a problem. I mean, they don’t have a plan B for their economy. You have to remember that Canada is the tar sands producer, and they’re trying to figure out how to milk the tar sands in the face of, you know, everything is burning, from California to the Arctic. The other thing is, is that, you know, they are—75 percent of the world’s mining corporations are Canadian. And so, Canadians—the Canadian economy is predicated on this still “let’s just mine it, let’s suck it out, let’s ship it to someplace” staples economy. So, Canada needs an economic restructuring. That’s what it needs in order for us to deal with some of the problems that we’re facing, you know, across the board.

Now, of course, you know, we are all really pleased with this, because the fact is, is that these are illegal and immoral pipelines. What Eriel is talking about, the idea of free, prior and informed consent, that’s a U.N. standard. That’s a United Nations standard for relations between state governments and indigenous nations or First Nations. That’s not being upheld by Canada, and that’s certainly not being upheld by the United States. Canada’s approach is pretty much gunboat diplomacy, as it is in the United States: “We will starve you until you come to an agreement to host a pipeline or host a mine.” That’s how Canada operates. That’s how the U.S. operates. But this court has said, “You’re not going to do that. And, in fact, you’re going to have to get consent from these people.” So it’s a very, very important decision for all of us.

AMY GOODMAN: Winona LaDuke, you’re in Mexico City right now, but you were arrested last week in Bemidji, Minnesota, as you were opposing the Enbridge Line 3 oil pipeline, the pipeline that would carry tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to a terminal in Superior, Wisconsin. In June, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission approved that pipeline. Can you talk about why you were arrested and how that pipeline links to this Canadian decision?

WINONA LADUKE: Yeah. I mean, the state of Minnesota has had this long process. For six years I’ve been facing down the barrel of the Enbridge pipelines. And every agency in the state of Minnesota and the administrative law judge, after reviewing 72,000 comments, of which 68,000 comments were opposing the pipeline, and as much additional written testimony, recommended against issuing a certificate of need and against issuing a permit for the route. In a rogue decision, unprecedented in Minnesota history, the Public Utilities Commission, five members said they felt like they had a gun to their head by Enbridge—the gun meaning that
Enbridge would just let Line 3 collapse and break and leak all over northern Minnesota—therefore, they felt they had to issue this permit. We all know that that’s wrong. One, you should remove the gun, because you’re the regulatory agency. And you shouldn’t buckle to a Canadian pipeline corporation that now wants a seventh pipeline across your territory.

Yes, you are right, I got cited last week—we call it kind of like “arrest-lite”—in downtown Bemidji with about 26 other people, mostly members of the Ojibwe Nation and church people, as well as the board chair of the Sierra Club, for opposing this line. And what we’re trying to point out also is that in the final days of the final negotiations on the pipeline, right in front of us, at the Public Utilities Commission, one of the PUC commissioners turns to Enbridge and says, “Will you pay for the police required to put in this pipeline?” In other words, “Will you finance the brutalization of Minnesotans in order to get your pipeline in, Enbridge?” And Enbridge said yes. And so, we have, you know, a multiagency task force out of Bemidji now that is preparing to launch—you know, we saw an LRAD, long-range acoustic device, and MRAP heading up to northern Minnesota. We are seeing the beginning of policing. And so, what we’re pointing out is, is that thousands of people are going to get arrested in Minnesota, if they proceed with a pipeline which is immoral, and it is illegal, and goes across our territory.

You know, I also want to say, Amy, you may remember that two years ago on this day is known as the day of the dogs. That is the day, on Standing Rock, when you were charged, and the dogs were released on our people as the Energy Transfer Partners moved ahead and bulldozed sacred sites for the Dakota Access pipeline. And I think that you also know that the Enbridge Corporation owns 28 percent of that Energy Transfer Partners pipeline, the Dakota Access pipeline. And so, we are fully aware of how brutal Enbridge can be. And that’s why we stood there to get arrested, to say, “You should not do that to our people. It is wrong to do.”

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Eriel Deranger, I wanted to ask you about the debate among the peoples of the First Nations in Alberta in terms of the pipeline, because, obviously, also the energy industry employs a lot of folks in that area. Your sense of how the debate is going on among the First Nations?

ERIEL DERANGER: Well, you know, I think Winona hit the nail right on the head with her explanation of what it’s like in the U.S. People feel as though they have a gun to their head. It’s not making the best choice for your people. It’s making the best choice out of a slew of options that are going to really, you know, undermine your people’s rights, are going to destroy the environment, they’re going to impede people’s health and safety, or you have a roof over your head and food on your table, and you can like, you know, put clothes on the backs of your children. This is the reality, is our communities are put in economic hostage situations. As the number one employer in the region, our communities are forced into a corner to make really hard decisions.

And I have a lot of relatives, family members, that are employed by this industry, that also support the opposition to the Trans Mountain pipeline, that support the opposition to the continued expansion of the Alberta tar sands in our backyard. But when it comes down to leadership, our leadership has been coerced through bribery, through coercion by the government, coercion by the companies themselves, to make deals. And what we’re looking to
do in this region, rather than look for the consent of indigenous communities, is we’re looking for what it’s going to take monetarily to get communities to finally buckle under the pressure, the financial pressures that exist within our territories.

So, as far as the debate goes, it’s really, really mixed. People don’t know what to do anymore. They feel really locked into this economy, and they feel forced to make decisions that they don’t necessarily agree with. And we’re not really being given any other options. Like we’re hearing about Line 3 in the region here, they’re saying that we need these pipelines in order to make transportation of oil safer. It’s one or the other, not a good decision for our communities to be making.

AMY GOODMAN: We want to thank you both for being with us. We’re going to do Part 2 and post it online at democracynow.org. Eriel Deranger, speaking to us from Alberta, Indigenous Climate Action. Winona LaDuke, Native American activist with Honor the Earth.

https://www.democracy now.org/2018/9/4/indigenous_activists_win_david_v_goliath

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September 6, 2018

Why Defending Indigenous Rights Is Integral to Fighting Climate Change

By Jade Begay and Ayşe Gürsöz
Common Dreams

Even as the Trump administration rolls back regulations meant to protect Americans from pollution, the EPA recently released a report that finds that people of color are much more likely to breathe toxic air than their white counterparts. The study’s basic findings—that non-whites bear a higher burden in terms of pollution that leads to a range of poor health outcomes—is supported by other similar studies, and underpins the issue of environmental injustice that impacts many politically marginalized communities.

It’s these communities that are hardest hit by the climate crisis—even though they are the least responsible for causing it. In addition, these communities, by design, are most imperiled by environmentally devastating extractive industries like coal mining, tar sands, fracked gas, and more. Let’s be clear: Climate change isn’t just a scientific issue—it’s an issue of racial inequity, economic inequity and cultural genocide.

Indigenous peoples around the world are quickly becoming the generation that can no longer swim in their own waters, fish in their rivers, hunt their traditional foods or pick their traditional medicines. The climate isn’t just changing the landscape—it’s hurting the culture, sovereignty, health, economies and lifeways of Indigenous peoples around the world. Yet despite the immense impacts climate change and fossil fuel industries have on Indigenous cultures and ways of life, Indigenous communities are tremendously resilient.
This was strikingly clear at the 17th Protecting Mother Earth conference, where tribal leadership and environmental activists called for a unified front to help find solutions. Hosted by the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Nisqually Indian Tribe and Indigenous Climate Action, the conference provided a space for hundreds to come together to share lessons, celebrate victories, and build stronger alliances to defend and protect land, water, the climate, and Indigenous rights.

“We Native people will always be here, standing up to protect the land and water,” said Nisqually Tribal Councilman Hanford McCloud during the conference’s opening ceremony. “We will always be the voice of those on the frontlines who continue to fight against the violation of Indigenous treaty rights, self-determination, environmental justice, and climate change.”

It’s essential to note that Indigenous vulnerability and resilience to climate change cannot be detached from the context of colonialism, which created both the economic conditions for climate change and the social conditions that continue to limit the capacity for Indigenous resistance and resilience. Both historically and in the present, climate change itself is thoroughly tied to colonial practices. Greenhouse gas production over the last two centuries hinged on the dispossession of Indigenous lands and resources.

Since the fracking industry began on Casey Camp-Horinek’s reservation in Ponca, Oklahoma, tribal members have experienced a spike in cancer. She says that since fracking began there, her small community averages a death per week. The water wells on her reservation are now too toxic to drink. “They need to understand that what they call resources, we call life sources. We all know that water is life. The years of fish kills related to the fracking and injection wells amount to environmental genocide.”

Eriel Deranger, Executive Director of Indigenous Climate Action, expressed during a press conference that the U.S. and Canada, by further investing in dirty energy projects that infringe on Indigenous rights of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (like Kinder Morgan’s Trans Mountain pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners’ Bayou Bridge pipeline, Enbridge’s Line 3 pipeline, and TransCanada’s Keystone XL pipeline, to name a few) are making decisions and policies that move society further away from a climate-stable future. “They aren’t adhering to international climate commitments,” said Deranger, who is a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. “This is an indication that we the people, Indigenous peoples, must be prepared to take real action on climate change and be the leaders for the protection of Mother Earth.”

The conference was held in an especially significant location: Frank’s Landing, named after the late Billy Frank Jr., who led the historical stronghold where the Nisqually Tribe stood up in non-violent direct action during the 1960s and ‘70s to defend their way of life and their inherent treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather. The Fish Wars stand today as one of the most important civil rights moments for Indigenous rights in the Pacific Northwest. “We watched our elders get beat up right here. Hauled off,” said Don McCloud Jr., father of Hanford, and the oldest son of Don McCloud Sr., a central leader of the Fish Wars. “We suffered many things. But we’re not here to complain. The struggle still goes on. The battle is still here. We might have won one fight, but we’re here continuing the fight for Mother Earth.”
The event, which ran from June 28 through July 1, included plenary sessions with key speakers and break-out sessions addressing themes ranging from Just Transition, Climate Justice, Environmental Health, Rights of Mother Earth and more. One particular session, which featured a delegation from Alaska, demonstrated just how dramatic an impact climate change is having on the landscape and traditional lifeways.

Adrienne Blatchford, a member of the Inupiaq Tribe living in Unalakleet, Alaska, said:

“The cost of development is the land. And that right there is so profound to me, because no amount of oil money can pay to relocate our villages or subsidize any kind of living in the way that we have done since time immemorial, it can’t compensate for that. Indigenous people are connected to the food and to the land. Without it we get sick. It’s genetic. It’s something we have to have to provide for ourselves through the land. There is a spiritual connection that we have to these animals and what it provides.”

According to Blatchford and her team at Native Movement, climate change is drastically changing the landscape, which translates to major disruptions of deeply rooted cultural traditions. There are fewer moose, beavers and salmon, which are traditional sources of food. In the fall and winter, due to starvation, wolves began to attack dogs and people. The rapidly melting permafrost is causing trees to fall down, and fewer trees mean less shade, which causes more melting. Even flowers that are supposed to be pink and blue are now turning up white. Blatchford’s colleague Misty Nickoli, a member of the Denaá and Tsimshian tribes, adds that “those details are important because it’s everything. From our land to animals to our weather to our water. When all those things are upset, the people, our health, gets out of balance and we get sick too. And when we don’t have our food to take in as our medicine, we stay sick and we get sicker.”

Indigenous communities around the world have struggled to maintain their cultural identity and cultural practices through initial and ongoing periods of colonialism, genocide and forced assimilation. A USDA report, “Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples: A Synthesis of Current Impacts and Experiences,” notes that “this history has provided many indigenous communities with valuable adaptation experience to inform climate-change adaptation, resilience and resistance.”

Once such instance is the Black Mesa Water Coalition, which first formed in 2001 to address issues of water depletion, natural resource exploitation and public health within Navajo and Hopi communities. “Our emphasis is on healing and decolonization—as individuals, communities and as our culture,” said Jihan Gearon, a member of the Diné nation and Executive Director of Black Mesa Water Coalition, during a plenary presentation. “How can we transition our economy to reflect those things? We have a term ‘Just Transition.’ We know the situation we’re in right now is bad, and we know where we want to go. Culture revitalization. Healthy communities, lands and water. Just Transition means how do we get from A to B.”

Even the seemingly groundbreaking Paris Agreement neither includes human rights in its text nor acknowledges Indigenous rights—even though lands and waters stewarded by Indigenous communities make up 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity. What we need is for climate policy
and the overall climate movement to address problems of inequality, because climate change is just as much a social issue as it is an environmental issue.

We need to ask ourselves what kind of world we want to live in. And who is going to lead us into that world? Sadly, we cannot count on the Trump administration. We also can’t look to so-called climate heroes such as California’s Governor Jerry Brown, whose climate policy leans on the market-based carbon trading systems, which are widely criticized as false solutions that further exploit Indigenous lands and peoples.

From Standing Rock to the pipeline fights happening across the U.S. and Canada, Indigenous peoples are leading the resistance to extreme fossil fuels. We all need to stand with them and call for grassroots solutions that center Indigenous traditional knowledge. Our next opportunity to do this is in September during the Global Climate Action Summit, where grassroots groups from across the nation and world will host a week of action to counter the false solutions being celebrated there.

*This article is part of a content partnership between Rainforest Action Network (RAN) and Earth | Food | Life, a project of the Independent Media Institute, and was originally published by EcoWatch. RAN supported travel of Indigenous representatives to attend the Protecting Mother Earth Conference as a part of Community Action Grants*


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**September 7, 2018**

Blessing of the Waves brings religions together this Sunday for one common love: the ocean

By Laylan Connelly
Orange County Register

Water is a bridge – a part of nature that bonds people, even if they have different beliefs.

That’s how Blessing of the Waves organizer Dave Garofalo described the multi-religious event happening Sunday, Sept. 9 on the north side of the Huntington Beach Pier, a gathering that draws an estimated 1,000 people to share traditions and give tribute to the sea.

“It brings everyone together,” Garofalo said. “It’s a reflection of how important the environment is to us, particularly in Huntington Beach. In every religion, water plays some part.”

Now in its 11th year, the event is put on by the Greater Huntington Beach Interfaith Council, which aims at joining various religious groups together to share their beliefs and to educate others on their traditions.
There are two words Garofalo uses when he thinks of the annual event:

Better together.

“There’s no doubt, everyone looks at their own religion as their own way of life,” he said. “We don’t really care what you call your god – your god is your god. We’re more better together because we believe in something. I think that’s what brings us together.”

**Remembering late leaders**

In addition to various religions sharing their beliefs and talking about how water and the ocean play a part in their religions, a special tribute will be made to two leaders in the religious and surfing community who passed away earlier this year.

Pastor Sumo Sato, who ran H20 in Huntington Beach and who died of colon cancer in March, and Rev. Christian Mondor of Sts. Simon & Jude Catholic Church, known as the “surfing padre” and who died the following month, will be remembered with a bronze statue to be placed on the pier near lifeguard tower zero.

“Both of them were an integral part of our community, particularly of our surfing community,” Garofalo said.

Sato, an avid surfer from Hawaii and chaplain for Huntington’s Marine Safety Department, could be found on most day riding waves on his longboard on the north side of the Huntington pier.

Sumo spoke at the 2016 Blessing of the Waves after learning he had been diagnosed with cancer.

He talked about surrendering to God, and told a story about nearly dying in Hawaiian surf in October, at first panicking but then recognizing he was being cared for by a higher power. At that event, he thanked the crowd for their prayers as he battled cancer.

Mondor rode waves until a heart attack at age 88, but continued to be a spiritual voice in the surfing community by leading prayer at community events such as the Surfing Walk of Fame each year.

Each year at the Blessing of the Waves, Mondor would bless the crowd with rosemary branches soaked in salt water:

“We ask your blessing upon all the creatures that inhabit the sea, from the smallest plankton to the formidable sharks and humpback whales, for they all have a place in the order of your creation…”

“But please keep the great whites always in their space, and not in ours,” he said, drawing a chuckle from the crowd.
Mondor would then lead a group down to the water, saying a prayer before surfers gathered for a paddle-out, where they hold hands in a circle.

He would often talk about the ocean’s beauty.

“It’s God’s great gift to us all,” Mondor said in front of the crowd in 2103. “It’s wonderful to have this opportunity to say thank you to a lovely God who has given us this great gift.”

‘Walk away smiling’

With the surf expected to be strong – in the 4-7 foot range with some larger sets – it’s unclear whether surfers will hold the paddle out in the ocean after the ceremony in the Pier Plaza.

“But it’s the weather – when is the weather ever right” Garofalo asked.

Even if the paddle-out doesn’t happen, those who attend will learn much about how the ocean plays a part in various religions from around the world, he said.

“When people do that, you learn you have more in common than you have differences. I never in my life would have gone to a synagogue, a temple, a mosque – and I’ve been able to do that by participating in the Interfaith Council, because we visit all those places,” he said. “You walk away smiling, even if you do things differently.”

**When:** Sunday, Sept. 9, 8:30 a.m.

**Where:** North side of the Huntington Beach Pier in the Pier Plaza

**More info:** [ghbic.org](http://ghbic.org)