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Green Bible Stirs Evangelical Concerns

By Ginger D. Richardson
Gannett News Service

In this day and age, you can buy a Bible aimed at almost any demographic imaginable: toddlers, teenage girls, and recovering addicts.

But it's the recently published Green Bible that is causing a stir in the religious community.

Supporters of the book, which highlights verses related to what believers call "God's creation" and God's desire for humans to protect it, say they hope it will encourage more Christians to embrace environmentalism.

"In every book of the Bible, there are references to the world and how we should take care of it," said Rusty Pritchard, editor of Creation Care Magazine, an eco-friendly publication for evangelicals. "When you look at it through that lens, it really jumps out at you ... that God is calling us to care for the world around us."

But others fear the new Bible, which has been endorsed by secular groups such as the Sierra Club and the Humane Society, will mislead Christians.

"I am concerned that many who call themselves Christians, or intend to speak for Christianity, don't interpret the Bible literally," said James Taylor, a founding elder and Sunday school teacher at Living Water Christian Fellowship in Palmetto, Fla. "These groups don't have a religious focus; they have a desire to spread their environmental message."

Taylor, who is also a senior fellow of environmental policy at the Heartland Institute, a conservative Chicago-based think tank, said there is a healthy amount of skepticism among mainstream evangelicals toward the new Bible.

The debate over the Green Bible's virtues and weaknesses underscores the growing tension within the evangelical community: those who think Christians should be embracing environmental causes as part of their stewardship, and those who worry that such activism distracts believers from their mission to literally follow and spread the word of God.

Although some Christians and many progressive churches have long embraced conservationism, others - particularly evangelicals - have historically shied away, viewing it as a "liberal" cause rooted in politics and questionable science.

The Green Bible, out since October, is simplistic and streamlined in its design. Printed on recycled paper with soy-based ink, the book features more than 1,000 verses printed in green ink.

With a forward by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, publisher HarperOne has printed more than 37,000 copies.

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090105/LIFE/901050316/-1/TODAY>

January 6, 2009

Pope: Pollution Could Destroy World's Future

By Associated Press

VATICAN CITY --Pope Benedict XVI is warning that pollution in the world could destroy our present and our future.

But his message in an Epiphany Day homily Tuesday in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City is that people should not lose heart in tackling the challenge.

Benedict is encouraging what he calls people's efforts to liberate human life and the world from "poisons and pollution." He says even though such efforts against "hostile forces" might not seem successful, Christian hope gives courage and guidance.

In his homily the pope also urged people to be hopeful during the global economic crisis. Benedict denounced the bloodshed in conflicts in many regions of the world, but named no countries.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2009/01/06/pope_pollution_could_destroy_worlds_future/

January 12, 2009

Cruelty Is Not Kosher

Lewis Regenstein

Guest Columnist

The Atlanta Jewish Times Online

The widely reported stories throughout the media about abuses at the Postville, Iowa, "kosher" slaughterhouse, Agriprocessors, may give people a false impression about Jewish law regarding treatment of workers and animals.

Workers at the plant, formerly the source for most of the country's kosher meat, have been taped

subjecting conscious cows to great suffering, cutting off ears, tearing out windpipes and shoving hooks down cows' throats. Cows with cut throats were seen "stumbling around . . . trying in vain to bellow."

Products from these and other abused cows have been labeled "kosher" and bought by observant Jews who obey the Jewish dietary laws. Ironically, the original intent of these laws was to slaughter food animals in the least painful way possible. But today, kosher meat often is the result of cruel production and slaughtering methods, a serious violation of Jewish law and tradition.

The code of laws forbidding cruelty to animals (the requirement "to prevent the suffering of living creatures") is one of the most important aspects of Jewish law, which also requires fair treatment of workers.

Indeed, the Jews pioneered the concept of kindness to animals some 3,500 years ago, and it is mandated throughout the Bible and Jewish law. Even the holiest of our laws, the Ten Commandments, requires that farmed animals be allowed to enjoy a day of rest on the Sabbath. So the almighty must have felt that kindness to animals was not a trivial matter.

Significantly, the first commandments given by the Lord (Genesis 1:22-28) concern the welfare and survival of animals, and human responsibilities toward them. God's very first commandment (Genesis 1:22) was to the birds, whales, fish and other creatures to "be fruitful and multiply" and fill the seas and the skies. His first commandment to humans (Genesis 1:28) was to "replenish the earth . . . and have dominion" [stewardship] over other creatures.

Clearly, the Lord was well pleased with the works of his creation. After he made each of the creatures, he blessed them, "saw" that each "was good," and commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply." And he pronounced the entire creation, when it was completed, "very good."

Later, when God made his promise to Noah and generations to come, never again to destroy the earth with a flood, He included in the covenant "every living creature...the fowl, the cattle, and every beast of the earth..." (Genesis 9: 12-17).). The Lord restates the covenant a total of five times, an emphasis that shows the importance to the almighty of including "every living creature."

As the Jewish Encyclopedia observes, "In rabbinic literature ... great prominence is given to demonstrating God's mercy to animals, and to the importance of not causing them pain ... Moral and legal rules concerning the treatment of animals are based on the principle that animals are part of God's creation toward which man bears responsibility...The Bible...makes it clear not only that cruelty to animals is forbidden but also that compassion and mercy to them are demanded of man by God."

The Jewish people are charged with the mission of being "a light unto the nations" (Isaiah 42:6, 60:3), which has inspired the Jews through the ages to provide the world with moral and spiritual leadership. Many Jews consider it to be a "shanda," a shameful thing, that a kosher label can appear on some products resulting from the massive abuse and suffering of billions of factory

farmed creatures, many of which spend their entire lives in misery, fear, and anguish, in addition to the often painful way they are killed.

Some rabbis and Jewish leaders have even characterized this as a "chillul Hashem," a desecration of the name of the Lord.

As an editorial in the venerable Jewish newspaper *The Forward* observed on Nov. 13, "The behavior attributed to Agriprocessors ... ought to disqualify its products from receiving religious certification by any standard worthy of the name."

It is hard to imagine that abuse of animals would be pleasing to a merciful God. Can this truly be the will of the Lord, whose first commandments concerned animals, who called each animal He created "good" and the creation itself "very good," who instructed us in *The Bible* to allow our animals an entire day of rest on the Sabbath, to leave some crops in the fields for the wildlife, to allow oxen to eat while working and who repeatedly prohibited cruelty to animals ?

As Proverbs 12:10 tells us, "A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast." Truly, in the words of Psalm 145:9, "His compassion is over all his creatures."

The writer is the author of Replenish the Earth: The Teachings of the world's Religions on Protecting Animals and Nature, and president of The Interfaith Council for the Protection of Animals and Nature, icpanonline.org.

<http://jtonline.us/main.asp?SectionID=34&subsectionID=84&articleID=6118>

January 25, 2009

The Integrity of Creation and the Athabasca Oil Sands
A Pastoral Letter by Luc Bouchard, Bishop of St. Paul in Alberta, Canada

“Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past. . . a new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge - the ecological crisis is a moral issue.”

Pope John Paul II, Jan. 1, 1990,
Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation (par. #'s 1 & 15)

“Alongside the ecology of nature there exists what can be called a “human” ecology, which in turn demands a “social” ecology. All this means that humanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology.

Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence and vice versa.”

Pope Benedict XVI, Jan. 1, 2007,
The Human Person, the Heart of Peace (par. #8)

Introduction

Dear faithful of the Diocese of St. Paul, the ecological crisis, described above by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II, is evident in many parts of Canada. Our wasteful consumerist lifestyle, combined with political and industrial short-sightedness and neglect, are damaging our air, land, and water. Personal, social, and political change will be necessary to meet this national challenge.

As the Bishop of the Diocese of St. Paul in north-eastern Alberta, it is my responsibility to provide moral advice and leadership on questions that affect the faithful who live in my diocese. It is therefore impossible for me to ignore the moral problem created by the proposed one hundred and fifty billion dollars oil sands developments in the Municipality of Wood Buffalo because these projects are in “my own backyard,” and have aroused strong ethical criticism. In this pastoral letter I will consider this extraordinary and controversial industrial development from a Catholic perspective.

Whenever I drive to Fort McMurray and enter the city on highway 63, I appreciate reading the prominently displayed motto of the Municipality of Wood Buffalo: “We Have the Energy!” The energy is not only in the sands but is also, as the sign implies, in the very hard working people who live in this northern community. The general public has only recently become conscious of Fort McMurray. They do not know of its history as a trading and shipping center, of its connection to the early fur traders, missionaries, and voyageurs, of its First Nations and Metis communities, of the near fifty year old history of the development of the oil sands industry and the risks the pioneers of this industry undertook. It is not generally known that Suncor and Syncrude in the 1980’s had contingency plans to shut down, padlock, and mothball their plants due to the then very low price of oil, twelve dollars a barrel!

The people of Fort McMurray have a long history of meeting challenges with hard work and dedication. They have worked through some very economically threatening days while maintaining excellent schools, medical and social services, and a vibrant city government. The oil sands plants have a deserved good reputation for fostering team work and innovation, promoting safety awareness, encouraging positive race relations, supporting the involvement of aboriginal entrepreneurs, advancing the role of women in the work place, and financing research and development in the environmental sciences.(1) Syncrude and Suncor have been very good employers. This letter is not written to criticize the efforts of those good people who call the Municipality of Wood Buffalo home. Their labor created a community where many now retire in order to remain close to their children and grandchildren who also work in the oil industry. The critical points made in this letter are not directed to the working people of Fort McMurray but to oil company executives in Calgary and Houston, to government leaders in Edmonton and Ottawa, and to the general public whose excessive consumerist lifestyle drives the demand for oil.

The letter is in four parts:

- The first section, “Theological Reflection on Creation,” presents the reasons why safeguarding the natural environment is a religious obligation.
- The second section, “The Environmental Impact of Oil Sands Development,”

summarizes the effects that oil sands development has on the air, land, and water in north-eastern Alberta.

- The third section, “An Action Plan to Safeguard Creation,” draws religious and moral conclusions from the above analysis and recommends actions that must be considered, if the integrity of the environment is to be respected.
- The fourth section, “Conclusion and Closing,” finishes with thanks and offers suggestions for a political and personal response to the environmental challenge of the oil sands.

Theological Reflection on Creation

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Gen. 1,31.)

The environmental movement has been steadily gaining in public support and awareness since the publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*. This movement has functioned for the Church as a prophetic “sign of the times,” causing the Church to re-examine her traditions and theology in the light of documented ecological distress. Since 1965, from all parts of the world, Catholic bishops have written over forty individual pastoral letters addressing the deteriorating quality of the world’s air, water, climate, and food. Additionally many joint pastoral letters written by regional and national conferences of bishops as well as several papal documents on the ecological crisis have also been written. As a result of this international theological reflection, a global Catholic moral consensus now exists: the environmental crisis is real and it requires a religious and moral response. In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published by the Vatican in 2005, a very significant portion of the text, chapter 10, is dedicated to “Safeguarding the Environment.”(2)

Environmental ethics is no longer of interest only to the specialist or to an elite group of theologians, but is now of great significance for mainstream Catholic life. I will briefly summarize the major themes presented in the *Compendium*, in papal encyclicals, in the pastoral letters of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Bishops of Alberta and in the many pastoral letters provided by Catholic bishops throughout the world and then apply these principles to the current development of the oil sands:

Foundational Catholic Theological Principles Supporting Environmental Ethics

- Biblical faith proclaims that creation is good. The earth is presented in the book of Genesis as being like a garden that is to be tended so as to sustain all of life.(3) God’s covenant with Noah includes all earth’s creatures that are later depicted in the psalms as joining with humanity in a common chorus of praise to God.(4) **All creatures, therefore, are gifts from God to be nurtured and safeguarded with which we enjoy a type of kinship.(5)**
- The earth is humanity’s home given as a gift from God. The earth, therefore, is to

be treasured, loved and safeguarded.(6)

- The earth has intrinsic value. Its future is still unfolding and has been part of the universe from the beginning in the form of a promise; one that Catholics believe will be completed when all of creation shares in the fulfillment of Christ's redemption. That is what we pray for when we say, "thy kingdom come." **To abuse creation, therefore, constitutes a lack of faith, a type of despair, or even a blasphemy.(7)**
- Jesus' many references to flowers, birds, crops, seasons, weather, etc. reveal that nature has for him a revelatory significance.(8) Christians learn God's ways primarily by reflecting on the Word of God but also by closely observing creation which in a sacramental like manner, make visible the power and beauty of God. (9) Spiritual growth results when Christians nurture a sense of "solidarity and companionship with all creation. " **Therefore, when people destroy or damage creation they are limiting their ability to know and love God.(11)**
- Creation has limits, and constitutes in itself an objective order that requires respect.(12) When creation is threatened with violent disrespect, it is only a matter of time before this violence spreads resulting in a breakdown of civil peace. (13) **Therefore, when we allow creation to be damaged and degraded we risk losing our sense of God's natural order and even our sense of God's existence.(14)**
- Pope John XXIII in his 1963 encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*, was the first Pope to extend the concept of the common good to a global, international dimension. Pope John Paul II extended it further to include the common good of creation when he stated that government is required to work toward a healthy environment, adequate and safe water, and effective regulation to limit hazardous pollution, and to insure clean air and safe food. He specifically noted that these goods cannot be sacrificed simply for the sake of financial gain.(15) The Canadian Catholic bishops further refined this concept by noting: the "Common good should be conceived as the sustenance and flourishing of life for all beings and for future generations."(16) **Therefore even great financial gain does not justify serious harm to the environment.(17)**
- When there is uncertainty as to whether a development project seriously endangers the environment, a pre-cautionary principle utilizing prudence and caution should guide the decision making process which itself must be administratively transparent.(18) **Therefore, massive projects that clearly endanger the environment must be approached in a deliberate, open, and consultative manner.**
- "The relationship of indigenous peoples to their land and resources deserves particular attention, since it is a fundamental expression of their identity."(19)

Therefore industrial projects that directly affect the traditional way of life for First Nations and Metis people must receive their support and approval.

The Environmental Impact of Oil Sands Development

“... creation itself will be set free from its bondage. . . we wait for it with patience.” (Rom. 8, 21 & 25.)

The above principles are severely challenged by the enormous scope of the proposed oil sands developments and by the environmental damage they will inflict. The Athabasca oil sands deposit represents the second largest known deposit of oil in the world. There are over one trillion barrels of oil embedded in the sands, with an estimated 315 billion barrels being theoretically recoverable. (20)

Because most of the currently proposed oil sands developments are in the region surrounding Fort McMurray and utilize surface mining techniques, (21) this letter will restrict itself to an examination of this industrial process in the Fort McMurray region. The principles I arrive at, however, also apply in general to the Peace River and Cold Lake areas where the in-situ method, in which steam is injected into wells and bitumen is extracted, is more common.

Surface mining of oil sands is a multi-phased, complex operation:

- ◆ Large tracts of boreal forest are prepared for mining by draining off ground water, removing the trees and topsoil, and removing the “overburden” of muskeg, peat, sand, etc. in order to expose the underlying oil sands. To produce a barrel of oil requires excavating two tons of earth and muskeg. (22)
- ◆ The oil sands, which have firm sandstone like density, are then surface mined and crushed into a granular state which is then mixed with water and solvents and piped to an on-site processing plant. Medium grade oil sands consist of 83% sand, 10% bitumen, 4% water and 3% clay. (23) On average, two tons of oil sands need to be mined and processed, for each barrel of oil produced. (24)
- ◆ At the plant site the sand slurry is placed into tanks where it is further mixed with hot water and sometimes caustic soda. Bitumen, a heavy viscous form of oil, floats to the surface where it is skimmed off into holding tanks, then diluted to improve its flow, and finally piped to refineries; the sand settles out to the bottom of the tank and is removed and returned to the earth, leaving a murky middle layer (middlings) which constitute a mix of water, silt, clay, traces of chemicals as well as some bitumen. The middlings are processed to remove as much water as possible for recycling and then the remaining middlings are deposited into tailings ponds.

The environmental liabilities that result from the various steps in this process are significant and include:

Destruction of the boreal forest eco-system

All of the oil sands leases slated for development are in terrain classified as boreal forest. This type of ecological site is environmentally valuable because it has the unique ability to store large amounts of carbon in its bogs, peat, soil, and trees. The destruction of boreal forest reduces the earth's capacity to store carbon and releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as it is destroyed. The proposed oil sands projects, if all were to be activated, would remove an area of boreal forest eco-system equivalent in size to the state of Florida. (25) This destruction will also have an adverse effect on wild life especially migratory birds, black bears, and woodlands caribou. When the affected land is reclaimed it is as it did in its original state as a boreal forest. This is especially true of what were once wetlands. (26) To date, reclamation is proving to be much more difficult, slow, and expensive than originally envisioned.

Potential damage to the Athabasca water shed

Two to four and a half barrels of water are required to produce a barrel of oil from oil sands. (27) This water is used to create the slurry of bitumen and oil that is heated and processed. Much of this water is recycled. The process used at the Syncrude oil sands plant recycles water a total of eighteen times and in the past twenty-five years has reduced water usage per barrel by 60%. (28) Also, approximately 35% of the water used in processing bitumen is returned to the water cycle through evaporation. (29) Despite impressive recycling efforts and improvements, for every barrel of oil produced approximately one barrel of water is contaminated in the process and deposited into a tailings pond. (30) At present, 76% of water allocations from the Athabasca River are for industrial use. This 3.2 billion barrels a year is slated to rise to 4.2 billion barrels when all of the proposed plants are operating. Cooperative ventures between industry, downstream First Nations and Metis communities, and the City of Fort McMurray are striving to arrive at manageable controls for water usage. But a recent report concluded that "Over the long term, the Athabasca River may not have sufficient flows to meet the needs of all the planned mining operations and maintain adequate instream flows." (31) This possible shortage threatens fish, wildlife, downstream communities, and transportation in the McKenzie delta. (32) Apart from the environmental issue of polluting one barrel of water in order to produce a barrel of oil, the toxicity of the tailings ponds also represent a very long term threat to the regions aquifers and to the quality of water in the Athabasca River due to the danger of seepage or a sudden and large catastrophic failure of a pond's enclosure. (33)

The release of greenhouse gases

Very large amounts of natural gas are required to heat water in order to process bitumen. By 2011, it is estimated that the then existing oil sands plants will burn enough natural gas to annually release 80 million tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere. This is far more than all of the CO₂ released annually by all of

Canada's passenger cars. (34) The oil sands plants will then account for 15% of all of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. At present, Alberta produces three times more per capita greenhouse gas emissions than the Canadian average and six times the West European average. The good news is that progress is being made in reducing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions per barrel and the concept of carbon sequestering (pumping CO₂ into sealed underground caverns) offers some potential hope in the reduction of emissions. The bad news is that this reduction will not affect the total amount of emissions because new oil sands projects and expansions keep raising the total amount of emissions despite average per barrel reductions.

Heavy consumption of natural gas

To produce a barrel of oil processed from oil sands requires approximately one thousand cubic feet of natural gas per barrel. It is estimated that as proposed future oil sands projects come on stream, 20% of Canada's total natural gas production will be burned in order to extract bitumen. (35) This means that a very significant amount of relatively clean burning natural gas will be used to produce much more environmentally damaging oil. Also this high consumption of natural gas will likely raise its cost thereby promoting the use of coal and/or coal bed harmful than natural gas. In summary, enormous quantities of clean natural gas are being burned to produce more environmentally damaging bitumen and the process is likely to bring about other adverse environmental effects.

The creation of toxic tailings ponds

The "middlings" (water, suspended clay and bitumen) that are deposited into tailings ponds settle over time into a layer termed "mature fine tailings," which compact into a stable suspension that cannot at present be further recycled. This suspension is very toxic containing naphthenic acids, phenolic compounds, ammonia-ammonium with traces of copper, zinc and iron as well as residual bitumen and naphtha. (36) Despite a great deal of research and effort, no fully effective means of neutralizing the toxicity of these tailings ponds has to date been devised although some slow progress is being recorded. (37) There are two proposed treatments for these ponds. One involves speeding the settlement process through the addition of gypsum or other agents and then filling the pond with tailing sand and further reclaiming it by established practices. The second method involves turning the final mine pit site into an "end pit lake," in which the toxic materials remain settled at the bottom and are covered over with fresh, clean water. If undisturbed, the toxicity remains localized and some aquatic life can return. The problem with these solutions is that the long term integrity of the containment structures is unknown. Toxic materials may in time seep into the Athabasca River polluting it and in succession the Slave River, the McKenzie River and the Beaufort Sea. (38) If a substantial leak of an end pit lake occurred, the result would be catastrophic. Tailings ponds will continue to grow in size and number as the oil sands industry expands. There are now 5.5 billion cubic meters (175,000,000,000 cubic feet) of impounded tailings. This is slated to

grow to 11 billion cubic meters. (39) This is an almost unimaginably large amount of toxic material. These toxic ponds will exist long after the plants have closed and will require one hundred years or more of supervision and maintenance.

Any one of the above destructive effects provokes moral concern, but it is when the damaging effects are all added together that the moral legitimacy of oil sands production is challenged. An even more alarming level of concern is reached when the scale of proposed future expansions, (a quadrupling of the number of barrels per day from 1.25 to 5 million,) is taken into account. It is then that the full environmental threat of the oil sands and the resulting gravity of the moral issue involved is most deeply felt.

The ecological objections and fears surrounding oil sands development outlined above are not contentious. Both industry and environmentalists, I believe, would agree that the above is a fair summary of the situation. The concerns environmentalists express are highly credible. The proposed additional oil sands projects are moving forward based on the confidence that technological solutions will be found to these concerns. This drive to development ignores the fact that forty years of research into the oil sands, while it has led to a substantial reduction in some forms of pollution, especially air pollution and water usage, does not at present hold out the hope of reducing environmental harm to an acceptable level primarily because of the enormous scale and rapid development of the projects.

The moral problem does not lie in government and industry's lack of a sincere desire to find a solution; the moral problem lies in their racing ahead and aggressively expanding the oil sands industry despite the fact that serious environmental problems remain unsolved after more than forty years of on-going research. The moral question has been left to market forces and self-regulation to resolve when what is urgently required is moral vision and leadership.

I am forced to conclude that the integrity of creation in the Athabasca Oil Sands is clearly being sacrificed for economic gain. The proposed future development of the oil sands constitutes a serious moral problem. Environmentalists and members of First Nations and Metis communities who are challenging government and industry to adequately safeguard the air, water, and boreal forest eco-systems of the Athabasca oil sands region present a very strong moral argument, which I support. The present pace and scale of development in the Athabasca oil sands cannot be morally justified. Active steps to alleviate this environmental damage must be undertaken.

An Action Plan to Safeguard Creation

“You have given them dominion over the works of your hands.” (Ps. 8, 6.)

When environmental and moral concerns are raised about the oil sands, they are politely received by government and industry, but are considered to be neither economically nor politically realistic. Environmental and religious objections are dismissed as too idealistic or negative, as minority voices which are unable to rally sufficient public support that would politically justify slowing the pace of development.

I believe public opinion on environmental issues is rapidly changing. Many now in the United States and Canada want government action to protect the environment. Government and industry will be forced to recognize that oil sands development should not proceed until the environment can be adequately protected. Environmentalists have created a list of requirements that industry should meet if sound and sustainable development is to proceed:

- o The integrity of the Athabasca water shed must be safeguarded. This includes not only the Athabasca River but the tributaries and ground waters within the surrounding water shed. The extraction of water from the Athabasca River must be regulated to insure the viability of the downstream First Nation communities living near Lake Athabasca and surrounding the McKenzie Delta. (40) The approved use of water removed from the Athabasca should take into account the probability of low flow conditions resulting from periodic drought and the transportation needs of First Nations people in the McKenzie delta. (41) A very prudent pre-cautionary approach should surround water issues. (42)
- o How much concentrated toxicity is manageable? Who is responsible for the long term (over one hundred years) supervision of these ponds? How much money is being put aside to insure this liability? The question as to whether it is ethical to create such enormous amounts of essentially poisonous materials with no known way to detoxify them needs to be addressed? A rational limit must be placed on the size and quantity of tailings ponds.
- o It is not acceptable to damage the environment to create oil if the oil is wasted. A national program of energy conservation that includes ambitious auto fuel efficiency standards should be initiated to reduce Canada's use of oil and to promote the development of alternative energy sources.
- o Any proposed oil sands development must insure that the traditional way of life of First Nation and Metis communities is not adversely affected. The treaty rights of First Nations people to hunt wildlife and to fish have to be respected. (43)
- o Hedging on our national commitment to reduce greenhouse gases is damaging to Canada's reputation and is damaging to the environment. Future oil sands developments must be paced so as to allow Canada to meet its international commitments. (44)
- o The enormous amounts of greenhouse gases created by the oil sands processing plants must be offset by national reductions.
- o Clear cutting of vast areas of forest should be minimized so as to allow the forest to remain connected with interlocking groundwater, bogs, and wetlands. (45) A land use plan should be created to protect the boreal forest ecosystem. (46)

- o The Municipality of Wood Buffalo should be provided with adequate social resources and infrastructure in order to meet the educational, health, and social services requirements to service a large and a transient population. (47)
- o Foreign workers must be protected from exploitation and Alberta labor standards must not be lowered or compromised.
- o Sufficient revenue for full reclamation has to be assured and in place before development proceeds. The cost of this reclamation must be arrived at by a public and transparent process. At present, the monies allocated for this purpose do not appear to be at all realistic. (48) These reclamation amounts cannot be dependent upon future revenue from the proposed plants. Assurance has to be iron-clad that reclamation monies or bonds are in place even if the oil plants were to suddenly fold or face bankruptcy. The public should not be faced with a reclamation bill for the Athabasca oil sands as happened with Nova Scotia's Sydney tar pond. Future liabilities for the reclamation of the boreal forest eco-system, the tailings ponds, ground water and the Athabasca water-shed area must be covered by full cost bonding. (49)

I believe that a serious commitment on the part of government and industry must be made to satisfying the above requirements before any further oil sands plants or leases are considered for approval.

Conclusion and Closing

“The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.” (Ps. 33, 5.)

I repeat my appreciation to the people of Fort McMurray and to the parish of St. John the Baptist, as well as to the First Nations and Metis people of Fort McKay, Janvier, Conklin, Chard and Fort Chipewyan for their faith witness of family life, hard work, and generosity as well as a genuine love for the Athabasca region and a deep concern for its natural integrity. I trust that this pastoral letter will encourage them in their efforts to protect the environment.

Also I wish to thank the efforts of ecologists working for the oil industry as well as the ongoing work of environmentalists and others associated with the Sierra Club, the Pembina Institute, and the Parkland Institute, as well as the good work done by consortiums of government, industry and environmentalists in the Cumulative Effects Management Association, the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association, and the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program. The people of the Diocese of St. Paul are deeply indebted for their dedication.

I hope you the faithful of the Diocese of St. Paul will contact your Member of the Legislative Assembly and Member of Parliament and tell them that you want responsible industrial development which means one in which the environment is in fact respected and protected. I hope that those of you who work in the oil sands industry or related fields will raise this issue in the workplace and will do whatever lies within your field of responsibility to safeguard the

integrity of creation.

Finally, in closing, I wish to share with you a most beautiful insight on the relationship between religious faith and the environment that was given in an address at the Vatican by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on October 18th, 2008 during the recent Synod of Bishops, "On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" which I was privileged to attend. Patriarch Bartholomew said:

The entire world is a prologue to the Gospel of John. And when the Church fails to recognize the broader, cosmic dimensions of God's Word, narrowing its concerns to purely spiritual matters, then it neglects its mission to implore God for the transformation - always and everywhere, "in all places of His dominion" -of the whole polluted cosmos. . . All genuine "deep ecology" is, therefore, inextricably linked with deep theology: "Even a stone", writes Basil the Great, "bears the mark of God's Word. This is true of an ant, a bee and a mosquito, the smallest of creatures. For He spread the wide heavens and laid the immense seas; and He created the tiny hollow shaft of the bee's sting." Recalling our minuteness in God's wide and wonderful creation only underlines our central role in God's plan for the salvation of the whole world. (50)

Fraternally yours in Christ,

† Luc Bouchard
Bishop of St. Paul in Alberta

January 25, 2009

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http://www.tarsandswatch.org/Files/Polaris_Tarsands_Moratorium_Declaration.pdf

- How justify ecological destruction without a serious environmental policy in place
- Moratorium on further expansion until fundamental environmental conditions are met
- Progressive reduction of green house gas emission - not intensity targets
- Targeted reduction of water consumption
- Full cleanup of tailings ponds
- Commitment to reduce fossil fuel addiction
- Transition to safe renewable energy sources
- Overheated labor market
- More orderly model of development
- Greater public control / input
- Adequate social resources for Fr. McMurray: public services, housing, school and health services, roads, reduce crime rate, liveable camp housing, drug programs
- Curtail foreign worker exploitation safe sustainable energy future

#2 Terrestrial Ecosystem Management Framework for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo by the Sustainable Ecosystem Working Group of Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA), June 5, 2008

- Recommends a triad land management approach
- Consists of:
 - o Intensive zone - 5 to 14% of municipality open to industrial usage
 - o Extensive zone - at least 46% of municipality open to ecosystem forestry
 - o Protected zone - 20 to 40% to exclude industrial activities, using specific boundaries for protected areas.
- Recognizes that aboriginal people must be engage in developing land use strategies

#3 “Oil patch split over proposal for partial moratorium” by Norval Scott, Feb. 25, 2008

<http://oilsandstruth.org/quoteil-patch-split-over-proposal-partial-moratoriumquote>

- group of industry, environment and CEMA request partial moratorium on oil sands development
- this includes local government, industry, ecologists, and aboriginals
- Premier Ed Stelmach refuses to “touch the brake” on development trusting in market forces to self regulate

#4 Pembina Institute, Oil Sands Watch.org :Reports, Backgrounders, and Position Papers: “Managing Oil Sands Development for the Long Term: A Declaration by Canada’s Environmental Community” Dec. 1, 2005

- Joint declaration by environmental groups:
 - o Pace and scale of development outstripping ability of government to protect environment
 - o Government has opportunity to lead
 - o License to operate should be conditional
 - o Need commitment to move to a sustainable energy economy through long term national energy framework
 - o Establish automobile fuel energy standards
 - o Full cost bonding
 - o Oil sands operations to be carbon neutral by 2020 achieved by on site emissions reduction and

offsets

- o Establish interconnected network of protected areas and corridors
- o Watershed integrity protected
- o Protect against catastrophic environmental risks
- o Slow down until environmental issues can be addressed

#5 “Canada’s Oil Sands: Pollution Delivery to the Great Lakes? Oct. 8, 2008 News Release from Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto

<http://huffstrategy.com/MediaManager/release/Munk-Centre-for-International-Studies>

- Critical of plan to build refineries for oil sands bitumen in U.S. Midwest - claims it is more environmentally damaging than standard refinery

#6 A survey conducted of the Globe and Mail by the Strategic Counsel, Jan 24, 2008 “Views Toward Oil Sands Development”

www.climatechangecentral.com/files/attachments/DiscussionPapers/C3_CCS_

- 32% of Canadians believe oil sands have lowered quality of life
- 41% feel pace of development is too fast
- 52% favour allowing only one large project to proceed at a time
- 38% see oil sands as having a negative effect on cost of living
- 55% see oil sands as having a negative effect on quality of the environment
- 64% in favour of more stringent approval process
- 82% of Albertans concerned about availability of fresh water

#7 “Wall Street meltdown gives Alberta breathing room for the oilsands” by Satya Das, Edmonton Journal, Oct. 1, 2008

- Oil sands is considered the world’s dirtiest oil - with unsustainable environmental cost
- Can we have sound environmental management
- Stewardship must be guiding principle
- Stelmach promises absolute caps on emissions by 2012 and dedicated four billion dollars to address climate change
- Wall street melt down will slow oil sands development - if we invest in cleaning up and prevention and invest in sustainable oil sands we might make it

#8 “The Second Coming of Peter Lougheed” John Gray, Globe and Mail Update, Aug. 28, 2008-11-02

<http://www.reportonbusiness.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080825.rmlougheed/BNStory/special/ROBmagazine/home>

- “fresh water is more valuable than crude oil”
- “the public policy of Alberta is wrong. . . they are trying to do too much too quickly”
- “We should have more orderly development . . . do one plant, finish it and build another plant, finish it, do another plant - instead of having four on the go at the same time.”
- Government is leaving the pace of development for the market to decide

#9 Conservation Voters of Alberta “Alberta’s Elder Statesman Speak Out,”

<http://www.conservationvoters.ab.ca/ResourceR-03-01-07.htm>

· Quotes various sources to illustrate Preston Manning’s and Peter Lougheed’s concerns about the oil sands:

- o Preston Manning: a coalition is needed to pressure politicians - 20 to 40 thousand in order to support an ecological agenda
- o Lougheed - sees lots of negative in an overheated economy
- o Government should give more preference to environmentally friendly approaches

#10 “The Alberta Tar Sands - a telephone survey of Canadians” conducted by McAllister Opinion Research, March 2008, Submitted to Environmental Defence

<http://www.environmentaldefence.ca/reports/Oil%20Sands%20Omnibus%20Questions%20-%20Topline%20Rep%20FINAL.pdf>

- 48% of Albertans favour suspending new oil sands projects until environmental issues resolved
- 81% favour a cap on green house emissions by oil sands companies

#11 “Discussion points on a moratorium” July 29,2008,

<http://oilsandstruth.org/discussion-points-a-moratorium>

- backs position of “no new approvals” for plants and lease sales
- would leave existing approvals in place
- Temporary foreign workers undermine labour legislation
- Sex trade thrives on camps
- Moratorium favors players already in place
- Moratorium would favour a minority of companies

#12 “Deh Cho leader calls for Tar Sands Moratorium” Feb. 2, 2007

http://www.polaris.institute.org/deh_cho_leader_calls_for_tar_sands_moratorium

- Head of Deh Cho (NWT) First Nations calls for moratorium

#13 “Push for Moratorium on new oil sands development, Feb. 25, 2008, Canadian Press

http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20080225/oilsands_moratorium_...

- Chiefs from treaties 6,7, and 8 call for moratorium on oil sands development

#14 Alberta Wilderness Association, April 23, 2007 “Call for Oil Sands Moratorium Grows Louder”

<http://news.albertawilderness.ca/2007NR/NR070423/NR070423.pdf>

- Development of oil sands has outpaced government policy and planning

#15 “First Nations demand oil sands moratorium: united chiefs call development unsustainable” by Darcy Henton, Canwest News Services, Aug. 18, 2008

<http://www.canada.com/topics/news/national/story.html?id=00686d4c-24d9-417d-9dd1-714592491e7f>

- Chiefs from BC, AB, SK, NWT, make joint declaration

Other points with no cited reference:

- Need sustainable job creation

- Public sector is losing jobs to the oil sands (teachers, etc.) can't compete
- High school students not continuing their education - feel they have it made in oil patch
- Worker alienation problem in camps - drug abuse, etc.
- Rapid oil sands growth creates inflationary pressures

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January 27, 2009

Bishop for Oilsands Region Questions 'Moral Legitimacy' of Development

By Shannon Montgomery in Calgary
The Canadian Press

FORT MCMURRAY, Alta. — The Roman Catholic bishop for the region around Alberta's massive oilsands projects is questioning the "moral legitimacy" of their rapid development, saying their destructive effect on the environment is against God's plan for the earth.

Bishop Luc Bouchard says in a pastoral letter posted to the website of the Diocese of St. Paul that the Earth is a gift that, undamaged, allows people to sense God's existence.

"Therefore, even great financial gain does not justify serious harm to the environment."

Oilsands developments threaten the natural order on an overwhelming scale, he writes.

They destroy large tracts of boreal forest, pollute the water, and will soon contribute far more carbon dioxide to the environment than all of Canada's passenger cars combined, he says.

"Any one of the above destructive effects provokes moral concern, but it is when the damaging effects are all added together that the moral legitimacy of oilsands production is challenged."

While efforts may be made to reduce these environmental effects, simply trying doesn't cut it, Bouchard continues.

"The moral problem does not lie in government and industry's lack of a sincere desire to find a solution; the moral problem lies in their racing ahead and aggressively expanding the oilsands industry despite the fact that serious environmental problems remain unsolved after more than 40 years of on-going research," the letter says.

"The moral question has been left to market forces and self-regulation to resolve, when what is urgently required is moral vision and leadership."

It is important that the church's voice be heard when it comes to the environment, Bouchard said in an interview.

“It’s a serious issue, and so we cannot continue to destroy without doing something, it wouldn’t be responsible,” he said. “And that’s a big challenge, to develop without destroying.”

His research came from environmental groups, the Alberta energy department and even sustainability reports from the oilsands companies themselves.

Copies of the letter were mailed to provincial politicians for the region, as well as Premier Ed Stelmach, said Bouchard.

The letter will be looked at and its solutions considered, said Jason Cobb, assistant director of communications for Alberta Environment.

“(Bouchard) certainly is entitled to his opinion, as is anybody,” Cobb said. “But really, when it comes down to it, we recognize that all industrial growth has an impact and every effort is being made to balance, in particular oilsands, development with environmental protection.”

The bishop’s comments will also be considered as part of an ongoing review into concerns about oilsands development, said Travis Davies, spokesman for the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

“We strongly believe oilsands development is sustainable, regulated and the cornerstone of Canada’s resource supply,” Davies said in a statement.

Bouchard, whose diocese covers nearly 55,000 Catholics, has also written pastoral letters on a number of other political issues, including legalized gambling in the province.

<http://www.thewesternstar.com/index.cfm?sid=215272&sc=26>

January 27, 2009

Canadian bishop slams oil sands development

By Scott Haggett

CALGARY, Alberta (Reuters) - The rapid-fire development of Canada's oil sands region has garnered a new critic -- the Catholic bishop whose diocese extends over the world's second-largest oil reserves .

Luc Bouchard, bishop of the diocese of St. Paul, which covers nearly 156,000 square km (60,000 square miles) of northeastern Alberta and includes the massive oil sands developments near Fort McMurray, said this week that "the integrity of creation in the Athabasca oil sands is clearly being sacrificed for economic gain".

In a pastoral letter to the region's 55,000 Catholics, the bishop wrote that the exploitation of the huge resource is environmentally unsound, challenging the "moral legitimacy of oil sands production".

More than a million barrels of oil a day are produced from Alberta's oil sands, where reserves of 173 billion barrels are second only to Saudi Arabia's.

Production was expected to more than double by 2015, but falling oil prices and tightened credit have forced most of the region's operators to set aside ambitious expansion plans until the economy recovers.

The bishop joins a growing chorus of environmentalists worldwide who have become increasingly wary of the environmental costs of oil sands production.

Bouchard's letter said development has damaged the region's boreal forest and reduced the habitat of wildlife and birds, while the toxic tailings ponds from oil sands mining projects are a threat to aquifers and the water quality of the Athabasca River, which flows through the region.

He also condemned the projects' greenhouse gas emissions and their consumption of large quantities of natural gas to extract the tar-like bitumen from the sand.

"Any one of the above destructive effects provokes moral concern, but it is when the damaging effects are all added together that the moral legitimacy of oil sands production is challenged," the bishop wrote.

Bouchard called for the oil industry and government to halt further development until there are adequate environmental protection measures.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the lobby group that represents Canada's large oil firms, said producers are already committed to lowering the environmental impacts of their projects.

"We strongly believe oil sands development is sustainable, regulated and the cornerstone of Canada's resource supply," CAPP said in a statement.

"We look forward to talking with the bishop and others about environmental impacts, progress that has already been made, as well industry's future vision for balancing energy supply, environment and economy in the region."

<http://ca.reuters.com/article/businessNews/idCATRE50Q5NF20090127>

January 30, 2009

A Little Faith in the Oil Sands

Patrick Brethour
Globe and Mail Update

You know you have some ground to make up in public relations when you find out that God is making guest appearances in the other side's press releases.

This is the situation that the oil sands sector finds itself in this week. The Catholic Church's bishop for northern Alberta, Luc Bouchard, told his parishioners that the oil sands is, well, sinful. The oil sands lacks “moral legitimacy,” to be more precise, because of its cumulative environmental toll.

Asked about the new Catholic dogma on the oil sands, Suncor president and chief executive officer Rick George offers up a brief smile and gives the question a pass. But, speaking about other critics of the oil sands, Mr. George has lots to say – starting with the very big mistake that he and his fellow CEOs have made.

“We let the shrill voices of the world get out in front with a lot of misinformation,” he says, as blunt as always.

And what have those voices had to say? Just that the oil sands is an unprecedented environmental blight, a catastrophe that is poisoning the air, water and earth of Northern Alberta. That litany of sin is not baseless. The oil sands is a big, and growing, source of greenhouse gas emissions. The mining projects do tear up a great deal of pristine boreal forest (although in-situ projects are far less disruptive). And there are unresolved questions about the long-term impact of tailings ponds on the Athabasca River, although they are just that – questions.

The oil sands isn't alone as an environmental sinner, however. Mines, automobile factories, smelters, cities – they are all major contributors to global warming. And as far as despoiling landscape, there are more than enough sad examples in Canada, from the paved-over agricultural landscape of Southern Ontario to the flooded river valleys of Northern Quebec.

There is a lot more to the oil sands story, as Mr. George points out. Suncor has made major gains in energy efficiency since 1990, and has cut its water consumption – in absolute terms, not just per barrel – by two-fifths in the past half decade. Mr. George says he accepts that more can and should be done; the oil sands companies need to make it clear that they will pursue continuous improvements in greenhouse gases and water use.

However, such improvement doesn't necessarily mean that greenhouse gases would fall, or that the industry's megaprojects would stop tapping the Athabasca River for water. At best, the more thrifty use of energy and water is an incomplete rebuttal to the oil sands critics.

Greg Stringham, vice-president of markets and oil sands at the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, says the industry also needs to be able to demonstrate concrete action, for instance, by showing that tailings ponds can be reclaimed.

This March will present a big opportunity to demonstrate that words can match deeds, when the time comes to make formal proposals to the Alberta government for carbon sequestration projects. If falling oil prices prompt the industry to back away from that initiative, it will be all the proof that oil sands critics need that private firms will not act on their own. You can be sure that any backing away from carbon sequestration will be brandished as yet another moral failing.

Setting aside political optics, Mr. George makes a key point. Pretend for a moment that the opponents of the oil sands got their wish and the sector was shut down tomorrow. What would happen?

Production from other sources, no doubt Nigeria and Venezuela, would ramp up to take up the slack. Forget about the impact on prices; Suncor produces a graph pointing out that crude produced from the oil sands actually has a smaller carbon footprint than certain types of production in those two countries.

Even with a softening of global oil demand, the world needs the production from the oil sands, Mr. George says. "I think it is irresponsible, and a bit of folly, to say that you're not going to develop the second-largest oil basin in the world."

If Bishop Bouchard and others truly want the oil sands to be put on hold, the solution is obvious. Cut demand. Drive less, or not at all. Live in smaller homes, in cities, not in sprawling suburbs. As individuals make that (arguably) moral choice, oil use will fall accordingly, along with the need for oil sands projects.

Indeed, the stunning drop in oil prices in the past few months have already demonstrated the market's power to cool down energy development, including in Fort McMurray. Several oil sands projects, two at Suncor, are in stasis.

But in his letter this week, Bishop Bouchard rejects the power of the market.

He and other critics should have a little faith.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20090129.wbrethour0130/BNStory/energy/home>

January 30, 2009

Praise the Lord and Green the Roof

By Joseph Huff-Hannon
The New York Times

SISTER FAITH MARGARET, wearing a turquoise corduroy jacket, a flowered blouse and a wooden cross on a chain around her neck, set down a plate of freshly baked oatmeal chocolate-

chip cookies on the table in the conference room of her convent on 113th Street in Morningside Heights.

Sister Claire Joy, attired in her order's elective habit of navy robe and black rope belt, poured glasses of cold tap water. Six other men and women were seated around the table on this gray autumn afternoon, dressed in business casual.

Spread out in front of them were BlackBerrys, legal pads and architectural blueprints, along with a few samples of bricks of varying color and texture that the sisters were considering for their new "green" convent, to be built in West Harlem.

"This is the Palmetto brick?" asked Sister Claire Joy, rubbing her fingers along a sample from a South Carolina company. "I really love these crunchy-looking bricks myself."

Sister Faith Margaret had a question.

"And are any of these local?" she asked. "We really want to use as many indigenous materials as we can."

"I think most of these samples here are from Pennsylvania," replied Stephen Byrns of BKSK Architects, the Chelsea firm that is handling the project. As his colleague Julie Nelson spread out the blueprint for the new convent's chapel, members of the group proceeded to debate the relative merits of stone, bamboo or cork for the chapel floor, as well as of different kinds of energy-efficient heating and cooling systems.

In setting out to construct an environmentally advanced building to replace the trio of connected brownstones that they now call home, the Episcopal sisters of the Community of the Holy Spirit were taking a giant step in their decade-long journey to weave ecological concerns into their daily ministry. While they have long tried to reduce their carbon footprint at 113th Street, the new convent, for which construction will begin in March, will help them be green from the ground up.

Of the 14 firms that the sisters had invited to submit proposals, BKSK ultimately wooed them with a plan that features rooftop gardens, water heated by [solar power](#), rainwater collection, natural light and ventilation and the use of environmentally sensitive materials throughout.

BKSK is no stranger to this field; the firm has also designed a new green building at the Queens Botanical Garden and is drawing up plans for what will potentially be a new "eco-synagogue," the Sephardic Synagogue, in Gravesend, Brooklyn.

Now it is the sisters' turn to go an even deeper shade of green, which raises the question: Why would a community of nuns, devoted as they presumably are to spiritual matters, take the relatively unusual step of embracing environmentalism so energetically?

"It's a question of stewardship," said Sister Faith Margaret, a Staten Island native. "Of responsibility."

Letting the Sun Shine In

The green convent that the architects were discussing on this fall day seemed a far cry from their current convent, which is known as St. Hilda's House. Yet a close look at St. Hilda's reveals the same environmentalism that is shaping the new building.

Dotting the walls of the conference room — a long space filled with a hodgepodge of slightly faded furniture and painted with a thick coat of cream-colored paint — were framed paintings of rivers, forests and planet earth, along with assorted wildlife scenes. Underneath fluorescent lights, copies of National Geographic, Scientific American, Solar Today and World Ark sat neatly organized on a bookshelf, next to a slim book bearing the title "Mainstreaming Renewable Energy in the 21st Century."

The site of the new building, on Convent Avenue at 150th Street, is currently an empty lot. But if all goes as planned, then by the spring of 2010, the eight nuns of the Community of the Holy Spirit, most of whom are in their 50s and 60s, will be living in a home that reflects the environmental ethos that has become a central tenet of their lives.

The sisters approached [Columbia University](#) about buying the sisters' current building, and Columbia has also taken over the complex task of obtaining the construction permits required for the new convent. Although neither the sisters nor Columbia would cite specific costs, the nuns did say that the new building will be entirely financed by the sale of the old one, with money left over to create an endowment for their order.

When the work is completed, after 57 years in the shadow of the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine a few blocks away, the sisters will have accomplished their mission of scaling down both their space and their ecological footprint.

Architectural renderings of the new structure show a modern, four-story light-gray brick building. One of the two rooftop gardens, where vegetables and other plants will be grown, sits directly above the nuns' bedrooms, or cells, helping to cool them in summer. Many of the internal surfaces will be made of recycled concrete and glass, and the two-story chapel, which is set off in the back of the building, will have clear glass skylights to allow abundant sunshine to filter in.

The sisters have had plenty of practice applying their ecological principles at St. Hilda's. They compost food scraps, recycle bottles and cans, use energy-efficient light bulbs and eat organic produce, most of it from an upstate farm. Sister Faith Margaret, Sister Claire Joy and Sister Leslie speak at conferences and gatherings about "how to green your life."

The decision to move into a more environmentally sound home was the fruit of a running conversation the sisters have had for years, as their commitment to sustainability grew and as their current convent aged. Sister Faith Margaret, writing in the group's charmingly named quarterly newsletter, AweWakenings, told of a vision she had that nicely summed up the ultimate goal: It was an image of Sister Mary Christabel, the community's former superior, sitting by the garden on the new roof, her face lifted to the sun.

Before that day comes, however, more practical matters are pending.

“Sister Catherine Grace is still advocating for compost toilets,” Sister Faith Margaret told the architects at that fall meeting. “What do we think of that?”

“Well, I’ve done a lot of demonstrations of the compost toilets at the Queens Botanical Garden,” Ms. Nelson replied. “I’d be happy to give instructions.”

Corn Bread and Sunday Chats

The earth may loom large at St. Hilda’s, but like other religious communities or orders, the sisters have a deep spiritual life as well.

At 5:15 p.m. on a fall Sunday, a bell rang out softly in the convent announcing the call to vespers, the evening prayer service. Max, the sisters’ yellow Labrador, was among the first to arrive at the chapel, accompanied by Sister Mary Elizabeth, who lighted the two large candles that framed a brass cross standing upright against one wall. A tall organ made of mottled wood sat in a corner.

As the bell rang again, Sister Jerolynn Mary shuffled in on her walker and sat in a front pew, and Sister Mary Christabel was helped to her seat by a home health aide. The lightly worn prayer books sitting on the ledge in front of the women were open to Psalm 110. At 5:30 the bell rang a third time, and the sisters began to pray.

After the service, the sisters slowly filed out of the chapel and headed to the basement dining room for a meal of tomato salad, cooked cabbage, parsnip and beet goulash, and corn bread and, for dessert, a freshly baked chocolate cake and fresh strawberries.

On most nights the sisters eat in silence, but Sunday dinner is a chattier affair and has been ever since 1952, when St. Hilda’s House was incorporated by the Episcopal Diocese of New York.

The community was originally founded that year as a religious order for women in the Episcopal Church. The sisters founded and taught in St. Hilda’s and St. Hugh’s Episcopal day schools, a block away, as well as the Melrose School in Brewster, N.Y., north of the city. They later expanded their work to include other forms of teaching and serving God in the world, including setting aside space for out-of-town guests at the convent, working at soup kitchens around the city, and leading retreats and quiet days. They also minister to the many “associates,” people in the community who come to the sisters seeking spiritual direction.

Then, about 10 years ago, the sisters began to discuss a mission to care for the environment. They may embrace environmental concerns more tightly than do many other religious orders, but it is their religion, they say, that was their bridge to a green life.

“We began talking more deeply amongst ourselves about how spirituality and ecology are linked, how we could more fully appreciate that the universe is a creation of God,” Sister Faith Margaret said, speaking in the hallways near the front door, which is lined on both sides with ferns,

philodendron and other plants. “Some days I get up in the morning when the trees are about to pop, and I think, ‘How did God decide all of this?’ ”

One sister in particular, Helena Marie, had been a pioneer in prodding the nuns to make a priority of the environment in both their ministry and their way of life. Although Sister Helena Marie now lives with three other nuns at the community’s convent in Brewster, where the sisters run an organic operation called Bluestone Farm, her influence remains.

As with any community seeking to change old ways, transformation did not take place overnight.

“When she first started bringing it up,” Sister Faith Margaret said of Sister Helena Marie’s concerns, “some of us would roll our eyes. But she was very persistent. And at some point she broke through in a way that got us to think differently, and we started to do little bits at a time.”

Sister Helena Marie concurred.

“Let’s just say it didn’t go over too well at first,” she said from Bluestone Farm. “I think they thought it was too fluffy, and too crazy. And when I was pushing this idea — 10 years ago, 15 years ago — it wasn’t the thing to do.

“There was a big split in the community between people who wanted to have our ministry focus on healing the earth, and those who wanted to focus on healing people,” she added. “But for us, focusing on healing the earth is part of caring for people.”

Gradually, the sisters got greener. A few years ago, they sold their minivan and joined Zipcar, the car-sharing company. They began serving fair trade coffee to guests and growing vegetables in their backyard. Sister Faith Margaret and Sister Leslie began leading spiritual retreats around the country that offered a mix of prayer, silence and discussions about the environment.

“I remember the phase when some of the sisters went vegan,” said Sandy Wilson, a member of the Alexander String Quartet, a San Francisco group that performed at a fund-raising concert for the convent in November and whose members stay with the sisters at least once a year when they work in New York. “I’ve certainly been influenced by the sisters. It seems like now they’re thinking about how to approach this next chapter, the sustainability of themselves.”

That, said Sister Faith Margaret, is exactly the goal. The community hopes not to hit people over the head with its practice, she explained, but rather to live an example that trickles down. That example even extends to the clothes they wear. “We are working on trying to find a more earth-friendly habit,” Sister Helena Marie said. “We’re looking into a company that makes habits that are 100 percent organic cotton, and which uses labor practices that are fair.”

Going Organic and Wasting Little

A week after the meeting with the architects, Sister Claire Joy, who is responsible for the convent’s food, could be found pushing a shopping cart over to the Broadway Presbyterian Church two blocks away. There, during the harvest season, she picks up the convent’s weekly

produce from Roxbury Farm, an organic farm in Kinderhook, N.Y. Earlier that day, after morning prayers, she had bought organic eggs and milk at the farmers' market on Broadway near 114th Street.

In the church basement, where the produce is displayed, Sister Claire Joy examined and bagged the medley of parsnips, carrots, butternut squash, potatoes, beets, cabbage, kale and apples that were stacked in the middle of the room. Then she headed back to the convent's kitchen.

As the sister with what she calls an "undeserved reputation" as the house gourmet, she then started thinking about recipes for the week. In meal planning, as in so much of the nuns' daily life, environmentalism looms large.

"I made some delicious puff pastries with kale and peppers this week," Sister Claire Joy said. The sisters try to use every last bit of food they buy, she explained, "to make sure nothing goes to waste."

As Sister Claire Joy planned her menus, Sister Elise entered the kitchen sipping a mug of hot chocolate. The order's longest-standing member, the 87-year-old Sister Elise has lived in the community for more than 55 years. But she is not overly emotional at the prospect of moving to a new, greener home.

"I really don't have my roots set down here in this house — I'll be happy to live anywhere," she said. "I already have a reservation in another place."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/01/nyregion/thecity/01nuns.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

February 9, 2009

Opinion: Environmental rules are good, moral to protect God's creation

By the Rev. Canon Sally G. Bingham
Special to the Mercury News

The negotiations to resolve California's \$41 billion budget deficit are giving opponents of environmental regulations the chance to attack. Republican legislative leaders are seizing on economic uncertainty to demand a rollback of key environmental protections in exchange for budget votes.

For example, they want to give the state agency overseeing business, transportation and housing greater control over the state air resources board's power to impose regulations, and they want to weaken diesel pollution control rules for construction equipment.

This attack on environmental safeguards is distracting political leaders from the real business of budget resolution: making responsible cuts and identifying reasonable sources of revenue. More

importantly, it is an erosion of the moral responsibility doctrine of major religions: to fulfill our responsibility as careful stewards of the planet for future generations.

Budgets in California are complicated because of the requirement for a two-thirds vote in the Legislature. Adding to the complications by pressuring colleagues to abandon efforts to protect the earth, putting fragile water, air and other natural assets further in harm's way, is neither the right nor the best thing to do for California.

California's economy thrives on innovation. Environmental goals and the regulations that accompany them can spur innovations that create a win-win for the state. Recent regulations to reduce toxic and costly diesel emissions from trucks and off-road equipment led to the development of new pollution control technology and devices and created jobs for their design, manufacture and installation. By reducing diesel carcinogens, Californians' risk of pollution-related ailments and premature death will decrease.

The California Air Resources Board estimates that its recently passed rule to reduce diesel emissions will save up to \$68 billion in health-related costs over the next decade. A study just released by Brigham Young University and Harvard School of Public Health found that average life expectancy in U.S. cities increased nearly three years over recent decades, with approximately five months of that increase resulting from cleaner air.

For years, Republican legislative leaders have been angling to dismantle environmental laws, including the 40-year-old California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This law requires that state agencies with environmental expertise review big new construction projects to ensure that when they are completed, they will produce minimal air and water pollution and allow humans and other creatures in their surrounding areas to thrive.

More than 90 percent of the time, reviews go forward smoothly and result in better projects. When project proponents and watchdogs disagree on impacts, the dispute can land in court. However, even when that happens, better projects can result. For example, a recent court settlement related to environmental review of the Highway 50 project in Sacramento included new funding to expand light rail along the highway.

California's environmental safeguards are good and moral. They are designed to protect God's creation and all of its inhabitants. We are already paying dearly for disregarding them through toxic air pollution, contaminated drinking water and long, stressful, congested commutes, as examples.

Legislators should not get distracted from what should be their focus: resolving the budget. To gamble with environmental regulations that protect Californians' health and safety goes against what millions of us want: responsible stewardship of the planet and its glorious resources. Our political leaders can solve the budget problem, create jobs and protect God's creation by acting both morally and fiscally responsible.

The Rev. Canon Sally G. Bingham is president of the Regeneration Project and Interfaith Power & Light of San Francisco. She wrote this article for the Mercury News.

February 12, 2009

Churches set to go green

By Mathew A Thomas

CHENNAI: Preaching of the Church in India is likely to get an add-on to its prime concern of humanity's salvation in the days ahead as the powerful entity is all set to go 'green'. Waking up to address the enormity of the global ecological crisis and the resultant climatic changes, the Church is gearing up for a campaign to encourage people to refrain from the abuse of the nature's resources.

The National Consultation on Global Warming, which commenced here on Thursday under the auspices of the CSI has suggested that parishes should be encouraged to incorporate eco-concerns in the 'order of worship'.

The Ecological Concerns Committee of the CSI has broadened its horizons on a concept level and took it across the representatives of 21 dioceses under its fold in South India in the three day conclave, which was also attended by delegates from the Syrian Orthodox and Mar Thoma Churches and Lutheran, Presbyterian and Chaldean Churches.

The mainstream Catholic Church and other denominations are also being looked upon as active participants in the initiative.

Presiding over the inaugural session, Rev Thomas Samuel, Madhya Kerala diocese Bishop and chairman of the Synod EC, said that Christians have a vision of the world, men and environment, specific to the faith in God the Creator. The Church must realise that in addition to preaching humanity's salvation, it must also tell the story of redemption of all creations.

Exhorting to consider planting of trees as a celebration of an Eucharist, the bishop called upon members of the community to establish a right partnership with the nature and translate it through measures like the adoption of an ecological architecture if a new Church building is built as well as to use similar parameters in the construction of houses. The SECC has already given a call to all its members to plant one tree each in June 2009 in an attempt to contribute their might to mitigate the effects of global warming. The committee has also asked the members to dig one pit each to store rain water falling from roof-tops.

Inaugurating the event, A Ramachandran, director of the Centre for Climatic Change and Adaptation Research, Anna university, Chennai, said that it was time for the Church and other organisations to realise the gravity of the ecological issues and step in to provide their collective strength to undo the damage in various ways, eventually presenting viable and futuristic models for the whole society, especially in the developing nations.

Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, general convenor of the CSI SEC, welcomed the gathering. Rev Issac Mar Phelixinos, executive committee member of the World Council of Churches, Rev Fredy De Alwis, secretary, the Christian Conference of Asia, Thailand, and CSI general secretary Rev Moses Jayakumar offered felicitations.

NCI secretary Rev Azir Ebenezer proposed a vote of thanks. The meet was noted for paper presentation sessions on related topics of the focal theme of the conclave.

<http://www.expressbuzz.com/edition/story.aspx?Title=Churches+set+to+go+green&artid=s552rW8ZTog=&SectionID=vBlkz7JCFvA=&MainSectionID=fyV9T2jIa4A=&SectionName=EL7znOtxBM3qzgMyXZKtxw==&SEO>

<http://fore.research.yale.edu/publications/massmedia/CSI.doc>

February 13, 2009

Analysing climate changes: Concerns of marginalised lot stressed

Chennai: The burning issue of massive climatic changes including global warming should be addressed from the point of view of climate injustice, considering the abnormal level of green house gases emitted mostly by the USA and other developed countries, observed the ongoing National Consultation on Global Warming, here today. Any analysis of the issue and remedial measures should come from the angle of the poor and the marginalised, as a people's perspective, the meet felt.

The brainstorming sessions of the national conclave, being held under the aegis of the Church of South India (CSI), in partnership with the National Council of Churches in India and South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEPP), noted that the impact of climatic changes will disproportionately fall upon the poor and the marginalised in developing nations and the dalits and tribals will bear the brunt of the problem as their forests' and agriculture dependent livelihood will be hit badly.

Stressing the need to identify those who are really contributing to climate injustice and who is oppressing whom, the meet also felt strongly that the church and the Christian community should respond effectively on this score, supported with concrete action. Though there is also a view that all are victims of climatic changes and no nation could be singularly blamed for being the perpetrators, the pronounced opinion based on facts was that it is the US which is the main culprit, the meet was told.

Unveiling a Biblical perspective on fighting against exploitation and misuse of the Nature, while standing by the poorest among the poor in the society, Dr Sam P Mathew said that it is also important that the church addressed life-style questions on their own and subjected themselves for an environment audit in various activities.

Dr Sudip Mitra, Lead Fellow and faculty member in the School of Environment Sciences, JNU pointed out that though climate change studies was started as a science, it has ended as politics now. Any successful conduct of climate change issues is dependent on bringing some policies which will prove as a detriment in the emission of green house gases, he suggested. "It is remarkable for the Indian Parliament and democracy that the topic was discussed in detail by the houses for more than two weeks at a stretch recently", he said.

Pointing out that a natural hazard like earthquake, which is unavoidable, becomes a disaster when there comes an anthropogenic factor, Dr Sudip said that changing views on climate and disasters, leads to the fact that environmental changes is not only a scientific phenomenon but a personal experience. Also, the affected people does not see any difference between climate change and disaster management, though it is being dealt separately by policy makers at present.

Since climate changes cannot be avoided totally and it may be even rapid and pronounced, anticipatory adaptation of prevention strategies and capacity enhancement of stake-holders is more effective than a reactive approach. Keeping in mind that climate change issues have economic, social and ecological dimensions, an Integrated Climate Risk Management should be followed and for more positive results, the rich may be hit if they are contributing immensely for the damage of the environment, he said. Targetting the student community with eco-awareness and safety programmes will also produce good results, he added.

Co-relating health issues with global warming, Dr George Chandy, former director, CMC, Vellore affirmed that depletion of stratosphere ozone and increased ultraviolet radiation is occurring due to the latter phenomenon, leading to the high incidence of cancer and infectious diseases. The regulatory mechanisms of the life system stands to lose more and more in the present scenario, leading to decrease in the body immunity, which is evident through a four fold increase in the incidence of malaria ,in the past five years, leave other communicable diseases. Creating adequate awareness on the acuteness of the issue is of paramount importance and policy makers should also be prevailed upon for effecting necessary changes, he said.

The day was also noted for leads from various church denominations, to translate their concern for the environment in realistic terms. On behalf of the CSI, Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, who is also the general convenor of the organising committee presented an ambitious plan of the diocese to promote vetiver cultivation and mangroves in a big way by the side of various water courses, throughout the South.

He pointed out that though vetiver is a highly water conserving and effective soil erosion-resistant plant and which has a recorded origin in Tamilnadu, the value of it was realised only by countries like China, Japan, Vietnam and Thailand, which had ventured into strengthening river banks in a cost-effective, long term and environment-friendly way. He also gave a broad view of eco activities taken up in institutions under the CSI Madhya Kerala diocese in the past few years.

While a Malayalam short film titled `rain dreams', brought out by students of the Orthodox church seminary, Kottayam in a simple format caught the attention of the conclave, the Marthoma church's attempt to Green itself was presented through small initiatives taken up like awareness building exercises for both the clergy and the laity, earmarking the second Sunday of

July as Green Sunday every year and promotion of environment-friendly parsonages (rptparsonages).

For most of other participants in the meet, representing the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran church, Council of Baptist Churches in North-East, United Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mennonite Brethren Churches of India, Good Samaritan Evangelical Lutheran church etc., the initiatives of the bigger churches in the group were an eye-opener on two counts- redefining their activities with thrust on protection of the whole Creation and a true ecumenical order in a different milieu, in the changing world.

<http://fore.research.yale.edu/publications/massmedia/CSI.doc>

February 13, 2009

Church Effort Slows Philippines Mining

By James Hookway
The Wall Street Journal

MANILA -- The Philippines' ambition to become a world leader in mineral production isn't just running up against the global credit crunch. Mining in this Southeast Asian nation also is being hamstrung by the Roman Catholic Church.

Over the past few years, Bishop Arturo Bastes has spearheaded the church's campaign to shut down a gold and copper mine in Rapu-Rapu island, in the central Philippines. Bishop Bastes hounded the mine's Australian developers after a chemical spill at the site, and now is working on shutting down the new owners -- a consortium led by South Korean industrial giant LG International Corp.

In the process, Bishop Bastes -- with the support of the Catholic hierarchy in the Philippines -- risks thwarting a plan by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, herself a Catholic, to tap the Philippines' mineral wealth to lift the country out of poverty.

Bishop Bastes is following a tradition of Catholic clergy taking on mining, especially in Central America. Priests in Honduras, for instance, have protested open-pit mining techniques and mining-rights laws which they say grant too many benefits to foreign miners.

"It's written in the Bible," Bishop Bastes says, quoting the book of Numbers, chapter 35, verse 34: "Do not defile the land where you live and I dwell."

On paper, the Philippines -- like Honduras, a former Spanish colony -- should be a superpower in commodities. Industry analysts estimate it sits on the world's third-largest deposits of copper and harbors hefty reserves of gold, nickel and zinc.

The Philippines also is near China, which remains one of the world's biggest consumers of metals. Gold, although off its highs, rose 5.5% during 2008. That means mining in the Philippine remains economically viable, especially if the U.S. dollar and other currencies weaken and international investors look for an alternative store of wealth.

Many of the world's major mining companies have given the islands a miss, despite a Philippines Supreme Court ruling in 2004 allowing foreign companies to own 100% of their operations, up from 40%.

Regulatory problems are partly to blame. The fact that the Philippines is home to Communist and Muslim insurgencies doesn't help, either.

But industry leaders say the Church's opposition plays a bigger part in crimping the growth of mining in the Philippines. Benjamin Philip Romualdez, president of the Philippines Chamber of Mines, said at a mining forum this year that while Philippine-based banks are willing to lend to miners in the country, insurgent groups and Church-backed anti-mining activists had discouraged companies from setting foot there.

The Church plays a prominent role in the Philippines. The Spanish conquistadors enlisted friars to convert many local inhabitants to Catholicism after arriving in the sixteenth century. They used religion to govern this unwieldy archipelago and unite it into a single nation.

The Church's political role has resurfaced throughout the Philippines' history. In 1986, Church leaders urged Filipinos to take to the streets of Manila to support a military coup against dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

In recent years, Church officials have stirred protests against other mining projects, including the Tamapakan site in the southern Philippines led by Xstrata Copper, a division of Xstrata PLC, and Australian firm OceanaGold Corp.'s planned gold and copper mine in Nueva Vizcaya, north of Manila. Both companies say their operations follow environmental safeguards.

When the Church began campaigning against mining in the 1980s, more than 50 mines operated in the Philippines, contributing a fifth of the country's exports. The number of mines declined to 12 in 2003 as opposition increased.

Environmentalists and activists such as Jaybee Garganera, of the Philippines' Anti-Mining Alliance, credit Bishop Bastes and other Church leaders for turning mining into a mainstream issue. "It's debatable whether we would have gained the same traction without the Church," Ms. Garganera says.

The Rapu-Rapu mine was supposed to illustrate the Philippines' new pro-mining policy. But the Australian founder of the project, [Lafayette Mining](#) Ltd., felt the brunt of Bishop Bastes's force when it began operations in 2005.

"Our project became politicized very quickly," says David Baker, who took over the reins at Lafayette in 2006 after a chemical spill at the site hardened anti-mining activists' resolve.

That accident, which killed thousands of fish, enabled Bishop Bastes and his colleagues to successfully campaign for the Philippine government to order the mine closed.

Lafayette sold the mine last year to a South Korean and Malaysian consortium headed by LG International. LG said last year it was buying into the project because it was convinced of the economic value of the mine, which contains ore with high gold content. The mine resumed operating in October after the new owners renewed pledges to abide by environmental regulations. Officials of the consortium didn't respond to requests for comment.

Bishop Bastes and his allies have marched on the South Korean embassy in Manila to protest the resumption of mining and are tapping environmental experts to expose the dangers of chemicals leeching from the project.

"Mining is the cause of all the trouble," Bishop Bastes says. "God created the world for people to enjoy, not for miners to destroy."

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123449556539081061.html>

February 14

Addressing eco issues, ensuring climate justice

Protestant, Orthodox churches nod for inter-religious initiatives

Chennai: The protestant and orthodox churches in India, coming under the fold of the National Council of Churches, have resolved themselves to engage in a mission to take up the challenges that would ensure the sustainable development and 'just' natural resources management, and thereby respond to the environmental crises including climate change and global warming, on a war-footing. In this regard, the churches have decided to come out of its shell and broaden its activities in association with other faiths and religions, and also work in liaison with the government and other agencies to combat the threats and go in for adaptive measures including creating awareness to change lifestyles and the value of alternative energy sources and contribute to the slowdown of emission of green house gases. All the proposed pro-active initiatives of the church on 'climate justice' will be essentially based from a victim's perspective and focussed on the vulnerable sections of the society.

A statement brought out today at the end of the three day National Consultation on Global Warming, organized here by the Church of South India (CSI) in partnership with National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme (SAEPP) has called upon all concerned to address the grave need that is posed by the pertinent issue of global warming, with due urgency, since it is a key determining factor in present and future global dynamics.

Affirming that it is evident that Global Warming is causing profound climate changes and is affecting the very survival of God's creation, especially in the developing countries which is experienced in rising sea levels, reduced yield in crops, spread of diseases, etc., the statement also reiterated that the phenomenon affects climate related disasters, causes imbalances in sharing of natural resources, has the capacity to create tensions among communities, affects socio-economic, cultural and political justice, increases the vulnerability of marginalised communities and women, and hits at the root of meeting the basic survival needs.

The statement has detailed a mission agenda for various church denominations to follow and propagate:

1. Promote Ecumenical Green Movements,
2. Adopt alternative energy sources,
3. Create awareness at all levels,
4. Review vision and mission statements from an eco-perspective,
5. View environmental problems from a victims' perspective,
6. Engage proactively on Climate Justice,
7. Ensure the rights of the vulnerable communities ,
8. Associating with other faiths and religions to address eco issues,
9. Liaison with government and networking with movements to combat issues/ practices that perpetuate global warming, and
- 10: Mobilise and influence public opinion on relevant policy changes.

Bishop Rev Thomas Samuel, chairman, CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee gave the concluding address. He stressed that concerns on climatic changes should have a matching action plan in a time-bound manner, apart from evolving a global and inter-religious perspective.

Rev Fredy De Alwis, secretary, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and Michael Angeliose, vice president, NCCI spoke. Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, general convenor, proposed a vote of thanks.

Earlier in the day, Prof Sudhir Chella Rajan, IIT, Chennai and Dr Sudip Mitra, JNU, New Delhi dealt with connected topics of the theme of the conference.

<http://fore.research.yale.edu/publications/massmedia/CSI.doc>

February 20, 2009

Saudi Muslim cleric warns that biofuels could be sinful

By Eoin O'Carroll

The Christian Science Monitor

A prominent Muslim scholar in Saudi Arabia has warned that those using alcohol-based biofuels in their cars could be committing a sin.

The warning was issued by Sheikh Mohamed Al-Najimi, a member of the [Islamic Fiqh Academy](#), an institute that studies Islamic jurisprudence for the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, an international group with a permanent delegation to the United Nations. According to the Al Arabiya News Channel, an international news outlet based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Mr. Najim [directed his warning to Saudi youths studying abroad](#).

Al Arabiya notes that Najimi stressed that this warning was not an official fatwa, or religious edict, just his personal opinion. Najimi added that the issue “needs to be studied by the relevant religious bodies.”

Ethanol, a common type of biofuel, is made of the same type of alcohol found in alcoholic beverages, and its production is similar to that of hard liquor. Plant matter is fermented using yeast, and the result is distilled to increase the concentration of alcohol.

Fuels with high concentrations of ethanol – the most common being E85, a gasoline blend with 85 percent ethanol – can be used in flex-fuel vehicles, which make up [more than seven million](#) of the roughly 250 million passenger cars and trucks on America’s roads. Most gasoline sold in the United States contains about 10 percent ethanol. The fuel is more common in many Latin American countries, particularly Brazil.

In addition to beverages and biofuels, ethanol is a widely used in industry for its properties as a solvent and an antiseptic. It’s a common component of perfumes and paints. The chemical is also necessary in the production of vinegar – [one of the Prophet Muhammad’s favorite seasonings](#).

The Koran prohibits consumption of alcohol in three separate verses that were written over a period of several years. The first mention occurs in [4:43](#), in which Muslims are told that they must not pray while intoxicated. A verse written later – [2:219](#) – says that in wine and gambling “is great sin, and some profit, for men; but the sin is greater than the profit.” Finally, in [5:90-91](#), intoxicants and gambling are called “an abomination” and “Satan’s handiwork”:

Satan’s plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah, and from prayer: will ye not then abstain?

This admonition is waived in the hereafter, apparently: Many passages in the Islamic holy book describe heaven as having rivers of wine.

Ironically, it was Muslim chemists who introduced distillation to the West. The process of distilling pure ethanol from wine was perfected by 8th- and 9th-century Persian chemists, who used it to create perfumes and eyeliner. Their writings were translated by European scholars in the 12th century, and the process was used to make potable spirits. The word “alcohol” is itself of Arabic origin.

<http://features.csmonitor.com/environment/2009/02/20/saudi-muslim-cleric-warns-that-biofuels-could-be-sinful/>

February 21, 2009

Church risks complicity in climate change, warns theologian

Christian Today

The church will be complicit in the destruction, poverty and injustice caused by climate change if it does not take radical and united action to demand cuts in the carbon emissions that threaten God's creation.

This is the message of a provocative new book by Paula Clifford, Head of Theology at Christian Aid, who recently served a year-long secondment to Lambeth Palace as Special Adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury on Climate Change.

'Angels with Trumpets: The Church in a Time of Global Warming' is published by Darton, Longman and Todd this week. In it Dr Clifford draws heavily on the book of Revelation to provide a theological critique of the church's approach to climate change – and finds the actions of the Christian community to date less than adequate.

"The science of climate change is not in dispute. Christians cannot close their eyes to it – for indifference is as dangerous as denial," she says. "Instead, we must look at what 'Love thy Neighbour' really means at a time of global warming.

"Climate change is a touchstone issue of injustice – and raises profoundly uncomfortable moral questions for those of us who live in economically developed countries," she says.

"Those people who have done the least to cause climate change suffer the most, as carbon emissions from the developed world wreak havoc with the lives of the poor in developing countries.. If we choose to go on protecting our current privileged lifestyles at the expense of both our fellow human beings and the world around us, then that truly is sinful."

Dr Clifford calls on the church to speak with a prophetic voice and to mobilise the global Christian community in lobbying international decision makers on more environmentally-friendly laws.

Her book takes issue with climate change deniers, including former Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson and Christopher Monckton, former science adviser to Margaret Thatcher, as well as those who say whatever happens to the planet must be God's will.

She uses relational theology to examine our response to climate change, arguing that there is a oneness, an interconnectedness between people, creation and God.

Sin, she says, lies in the breakdown of such relationships, revealed in the unjust distribution of resources creating a chasm between rich and poor, and the damage inflicted on the natural world by human-induced climate change.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.risks.complicity.in.climate.change.warns.theologian/22593.htm>

February 23, 2009

Biologist Discusses Sacred Nature Of Sustainability

by Staff Writers
St. Louis MO (SPX)
Seed Daily

The hot topics of global warming and environmental sustainability are concerns that fit neatly within the precepts of religious naturalism, according to Ursula Goodenough, Ph.D., professor of biology in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis.

In addition to being a renowned cell biologist, Goodenough is a religious naturalist and the author of *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, a bestselling book on religious naturalism that was published in 1998.

Religious naturalism neither requires belief in God nor excludes such faith. Rather, the movement is based on what Goodenough describes as "an exploration of the religious potential of nature."

Like all religious traditions, religious naturalism is anchored in a cosmological narrative, a set of stories accounting how the earth and its inhabitants came to be.

While conventional religions are generally based on older cosmological narratives such as those found in the Old and New Testaments, religious naturalism is based on a much more recent narrative.

"During the past 100 years or so, we have been provisioned with a new story that tells us about the universe," Goodenough explains. The story she refers to is one derived from groundbreaking advancements in science that help explain the Big Bang, the origin and nature of biological life, consciousness and the mind, and humanity's interconnectedness with nature. Goodenough admits, "It's a pretty big story."

"It's not ever going to be something written down on some tablet or a one size fits all kind of thing," she explains. "It's understanding nature."

The core of all religious traditions

Goodenough proposes that cosmological narratives serve as a basis for three kinds of activities that are at the core of all religious traditions, including religious naturalism.

The first activity is interpretation of the narratives. Goodenough likens this process to "what the preacher says on Sunday or how Talmudic scholars revisit ancient texts." In religious naturalism, science is the primary interpretive tool.

"Scientific inquiry is the primary tool for deriving the narrative", she says, "but the interpretive mode, in this schema, has to do with how the religious person interprets this narrative - for instance, theistically, a-theistically, and so forth." The second activity is spiritual practice, which Goodenough defines as one's spiritual response to these stories

She describes this reaction as including "awe, wonder, humility, and gratitude... that about which we sing and pray." Religious naturalists exhibit such reverence towards the earth, existence, and to what Goodenough refers to as "the epic of evolution," a scientific worldview of the origins and evolution of the universe, earth, and life.

The third activity, ethics, is the basis for Goodenough's presentation at this year's AAAS meeting. In religious naturalism, a scientific understanding of humanity's impact on the Earth combined with a religious viewpoint of nature gives rise to "ecomorality," a planetary ethic that prioritizes stewardship of the environment.

The expanding human footprint

If the cosmological narrative of religious naturalism is one based on science, then the story has taken a scary twist, she explains.

Scientific evidence suggests that humanity is on a dangerous trajectory. Human activities are very likely the primary driver of global warming; experts predict that accumulation of greenhouse gases will lead to climbing temperatures, rising sea levels, and shifting weather patterns.

Degradation of ecosystems is increasing human susceptibility to natural disasters such as hurricanes, tsunamis, pest-outbreaks, and disease. The expanding human footprint is contributing to a mass extinction of species at a scale comparable to that of the end of the Cretaceous period, when the dinosaurs disappeared. And the list goes on.

Goodenough suggests that taking a religious perspective of the earth (and of the science that elucidates our complex relationship with the earth) might prompt us to take better care of it.

Although Goodenough and her colleagues were viewed as "a bunch of hippies" ten to fifteen years ago for their take on the potential for synergy between religion and science, this attitude is changing. She explains, "In more and more mainstream religions, you're seeing an increased emphasis on the earth and its creatures as sacred."

This paradigm shift is due, at least in part, to a growing awareness that the old stories might not be sufficient to frame an ethic that alters the environment's current trajectory. She suggests that the new story offers a basis for understanding what a sustainable trajectory might look like.

http://www.seeddaily.com/reports/Biologist_Discusses_Sacred_Nature_Of_Sustainability_999.html

February 24, 2009

Bishops of Liverpool and London call for "carbon fast" during Lent

Energy minister Ed Miliband supports clergymen's call for 40-day experiment in carbon sacrifice

Adam Vaughan
guardian.co.uk

[The UK's energy and climate change minister](#) Ed Miliband has joined church leaders by calling for a "carbon fast" this Lent. Along with the Right Rev James Jones, bishop of Liverpool, and the Right Rev Dr Richard Chartres, bishop of London, Miliband is encouraging the British public to cut their carbon footprints during the 40-day fast by taking steps such as removing a light bulb at home.

"This initiative shows there are ways we can make a difference that might seem like a sacrifice to begin with but can easily become part of everyday life and help tackle dangerous climate change," said Miliband. He confessed that the carbon sin he'll miss most is driving short distances into town.

Jones plans to install a solar hot water system at his home and has pledged to ensure his computers, telephones and televisions are turned off, and not left on standby every night.

"There is a moral imperative for those of us who emit more than our fair share of carbon to rein in our consumption," said Jones, who devised the carbon fast idea.

The carbon-fasting initiative is led by development agency [Tearfund](#), which signed up 2,000 people to [cut their carbon last year](#) resulting in an estimated annual saving of 9,000 tonnes of CO2.

The campaign group said there is an urgent need to protect poor communities hit by climate change. "Traditionally, black-majority churches do not observe Lent, however we believe in the strength of the whole church and the power in uniting for a greater cause," said City Chapel International's Jonathan Oloyede, one of the black pastors taking part in this year's carbon fast for the first time. "Many of the countries where we come from in Africa are the least responsible for climate change, yet they bear the brunt of its devastating impacts."

This year's fast is accompanied by [an online campaign](#) involving other websites such as [YouTube](#). Tearfund's site is using an RSS feed to send daily carbon-cutting tips and social networking site [Facebook](#) is encouraging users to share energy-saving tips. Suggested carbon-

cutting actions include eating no meat for a day, avoiding products with excess packaging and sharing car journeys with friends.

Tearfund highlighted 2009 as a crucial year for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, because international climate negotiations come to a head in [Copenhagen this December](#).

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/feb/24/carbonfootprints-climatechange>

February 26, 2009

Indigenous people in legal challenge against oil firms over tar sand project

Canada's Beaver Lake Cree Nation group say their traditional way of life is being devastated by the rush to extract oil from vast tar sand fields

Juliette Jowit
guardian.co.uk

British oil firms are facing a legal battle over exploitation of the huge Canadian tar sand fields with indigenous people who claim the industry is ruining their traditional lands.

The Co-operative Bank will announce today that it is to fund a legal challenge by the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, which claims the boom in tar sands extraction is destroying their hunting and fishing lands.

The court challenge calls for an injunction to stop more than 16,000 permits issued by the Alberta state government and, if successful, could dramatically reduce or even stop what has been described as a modern day "gold rush" for the oil, spurred by the expectation of high long-term oil prices.

Last year the International Energy Agency estimated that the amount of oil in tar sands and other "unconventional" sources, especially in Canada and Venezuela, was 1-2tn barrels, only slightly less than the remaining conventional oil sources. Companies involved include Shell, BP, ConocoPhillips and Total.

Visiting London this week to highlight the case, the Beaver Lake Chief Al Lameman said they had taken action after evidence began to emerge that caribou, elk, moose, deer and other animals were disappearing and infected with diseases, fish stocks were damaged by pollution in the water, and plants used for traditional medicine were under threat.

A study funded by the US-based Natural Resources Defense Council estimated more than 160m migratory birds could die early over the next 30-50 years because of disturbance of migratory grounds and pollution. There have also been claims of an increase in human health problems.

"The impacts are very, very devastating sometimes," he said. "We refer to the earth as our mother, the mother of all things."

The census records 922 Beaver Lake Cree people, of which about half live on the reserve. Most of them regularly hunt, fish for winter food supplies and gather medicinal plants, said Jack Woodward, the indigenous peoples' rights lawyer who is handling the case. "People tend to think first nation [indigenous peoples] culture is dying off and gone, and it's not," he added.

The case rests on a treaty signed in 1876 under which the Beaver Lake Cree gave up their ownership of huge areas of land, in return for a guarantee that "as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows, we can continue our traditional way of life", including "traditional rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather for food and support". However another clause in the treaty excluded land that may "be required or taken up for settlement, mining, lumbering or other purposes."

In 2007, Woodward helped win a landmark ruling in the British Columbia Supreme Court that the provincial government had overstepped its authority in granting land-use rights to companies without the approval of the local Tsilhqot'in first nation. He said the precedent should help the case against Alberta, which was originally lodged in May 2008.

A spokesman for the Alberta state government said: "The province has not yet filed a statement of defence, although the intent is to rigorously defend ... this lawsuit." He noted the economic benefits of tar sand exploitation, saying that between 2000-2008 an estimated CAN\$87bn (\$67.5bn) was invested in oil sands projects in Alberta, that and every dollar invested in the oil sands creates about \$6 worth of economic activity in Alberta and another \$3 elsewhere.

The Co-operative Bank has offered the Beaver Lake Cree nation £50,000 initially and more funding if necessary in future. Paul Monaghan, head of social goals and sustainability for Co-operative Financial Services, said the company wanted to help fight the legal battle and publicise the problem internationally.

If the Beaver Lake case is successful, other indigenous groups could also mount legal challenges and oil companies could be hit with potentially "massive investment damages", said Monaghan. "In addition to the ecological devastation, the extraction and production of these fuels emits between three and eight times more carbon dioxide than conventional oils," he added. "If unchallenged, this trend risks making attempts to avoid dangerous levels of climate change almost impossible."

In the Beaver Lake area, future extraction might not stop altogether, but would be much more tightly controlled "to the point it is not a danger any more", said Lameman. "What we want is control over what's happening on it."

- This article was amended on Monday 2 March 2009. Alberta is a province of Canada, not a state.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/feb/26/activism-carbon-emissions>

March 1, 2009

The Amazon's most ardent protector

By Alicia Trujillo
BBC World Service

Father Edilberto Sena has added preservation of the Amazon to his already heavy pastoral load.

The Brazilian Roman Catholic priest founded the Amazon Defence Front to protect the forest against government plans which he believes put commercial development ahead of environmental concerns.

Father Sena created the Front because he feels the Brazilian government has betrayed the Amazon and the commitments it made to the people of Brazil to protect it.

In 2002, he voted for President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, after dreaming for more than 20 years that there would be a change to the way Brazil was governed.

Father Sena had hoped social issues would take priority over the economy.

But he told the BBC World Service that "social issues have only been a drop in the ocean" during President Lula's five years in office.

A long-standing campaigner against the destruction of the Amazon, Father Sena has fought together with Greenpeace against large multinationals, including the American company Cargill.

In 2006 the firm was building a new port in Santarem, halfway between the Atlantic coast and the city of Manaus.

In 2007, the Brazilian government forced Cargill to close the port down.

Sense of duty

For nine years, Father Sena has run a Catholic rural radio station in his home town of Santarem which reaches at least 500,000 people in the Amazon. He uses his station to highlight many of his campaigns.

"I am a human being and see what is happening there, and I am a native Amazonian, so I can't cross my arms and close my eyes," he says.

"I have a duty as a leader, a social leader and have a duty to help my people fight, and stimulate my people to confront the enemies of our region."

Father Sena says that the Amazon faces five main threats: agri-business chiefly from soya farmers, loggers, cattle ranchers; mineral companies and the Brazilian federal government.

He includes the government in this list because it is planning to build 10 hydro-electric dams in the Amazon region.

"This would cause great devastation to the environment by changing the ecosystem and for the people who live there because they depend on the forest and the river for survival," he says passionately.

Father Sena, born 60 years ago 45km from Santarem, in the state of Para, is one of 12 brothers and sisters. His father worked for the Ford Company as a researcher into the diseases of rubber trees in Santarem.

After studying in the United States at a Franciscan College, in Quincy, Illinois, Father Sena was awarded a scholarship to study radio communication in the Netherlands.

In 1979, he left the Franciscan order and entered the diocesan priest group in Santarem, after being inspired by the radical South American movement of Liberation Theology.

Liberation Theology was born as a response to the poverty and the ill-treatment of ordinary people.

Global purpose

Father Sena says he understands that he cannot preach God to people by closing his eyes to reality. This is why he feels the Amazon Defence Front is important.

"Jesus, when he came to Palestine, he was talking about the life of the people that's why he gained interest of the people, he didn't preach doctrine he preached love," he says, referring to his faith.

Father Sena argues that his campaign is not just important for his local community in Santarem but for everyone, as damage to the Amazon affects climate change, and this, he says, affects all of us.

In 2007 the Brazil government gave an initial go-ahead for the construction of two hydro-electric dams on the Amazon's longest tributary.

This decision, which caused an intense debate, both inside and outside government, summed up the challenge in Brazil to reconcile the ambitions of a developing country alongside the need to protect the environment.

Brazil suffered extensive power cuts in 2001 and President Lula was determined this was an episode that would not be repeated.

The government believes the two dams, when built, could supply around 8% to 10% of the national demand for electricity.

It says the environmental consequences will be minimised by the conditions attached to the proposed schemes.

Father Sena recognises his campaign has a long way to go.

"We are like little ants pinching the food of the giant but we pinch," he says.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7915568.stm>

March 4, 2009

Amazon rainforest: Upping the anti

Honoured at home for his fight against an Amazon soya port, Father Edilberto Sena is calling on British consumers to take a stand

Felicity Lawrence
The Guardian

"I would like to say two things to European consumers with a conscience: first, you should know that the meat you eat is fed by our Amazon rainforest, so eat less of it; second, put pressure on your government to tackle the big soya exporters." Father Edilberto Sena, a priest from Brazil, has been in the UK this week hoping to mobilise Christian and political networks - by changing their personal habits and by lobbying for change - to act against the destruction that our way of life is causing in his area of the Amazon.

After meeting members of the House of Commons environment, [food](#) and rural affairs select committee, he described himself in his fight against agribusiness as "an ant biting the foot of an elephant". Sena, a diminutive figure with a contagious laugh, has proved to be a particularly persistent irritant. His philosophy is that armies of small ants together can break down what seem impossibly large structures.

Since 2001, he has been on a crusade to stop the world's largest private company, the transnational grain trader Cargill, from using the vast new port it has built on the Amazon river to export its soya from Brazil to northern Europe. The millions of tonnes of soya that have been shipped out of Sena's hometown of Santarem have supplied the intensive meat and dairy industries of Britain, Holland and France.

In a recent report, Friends of the Earth claimed that large-scale soya [farming](#) for cheap protein to fuel UK factory farms was one of the main drivers of [deforestation](#) in Latin America. It launched a new campaign to reform EU livestock production last December, as an urgent priority in combating climate change.

Sena, working in Brazil with his local federal prosecutor and campaign groups such as Greenpeace, has found a way of challenging the \$20m Cargill grain terminal through the courts. A protracted legal battle over whether the company had all the correct permissions to build it is still being fought after more than six years. Last year, the corporation was forced briefly to close the port, the future of which now awaits a public hearing.

From the pulpit in his parishes, Sena has also preached of the need to protect the environment, and now he wants British churches to do the same and tell their congregations about the consequences of their dietary habits. He also broadcasts the message to around half a million people each week in the Amazon area as director of Santarem's Catholic radio station, and he has led protests by local communities displaced by large-scale soya farmers. His work has earned him awards at home: he was the second recipient of the Brazilian lawyers' human rights prize - an honour which, he explained, is a mixed blessing. The first recipient, the American nun and rainforest campaigner Dorothy Stang, was shot dead in 2005 by gunmen allied to illegal ranchers. Sena too has received death threats, traced by police back to the sons of large-scale soya farmers.

Sena, a charismatic Franciscan friar who is now in his 60s, favours polo shirt and native beads over dog collar, but faith infuses all his work. He takes his inspiration from liberation theology, part of the Latin American church movement of the 1960s and 1970s that argued that to do God's work on earth entails fighting poverty and social injustice, rather than just praying. When the movement fell foul of the war being waged by US president Ronald Reagan and the then pope, John Paul II, against communism in the 1980s, he went to the Amazon wilderness as parish priest of an abandoned church. There, for seven years, he served a community of 20,000 people you could only reach by an eight-hour boat journey upriver. Eventually he returned from self-imposed exile to take up political activism again.

When his bishop entrusted him with the radio station in Santarem in 2001, he found Cargill building its port. He knew the impact it and the expansionist grain trade generally would have on the sort of communities he had served, and their environment, so decided he had to fight it. "I am a caboclo - a descendant of Negro slaves, Brazilian Indians and Europeans. We as Amazon natives, as caboclos, feel so indignant. This is the new colonisation. It's the same as the 17th century, but now they call it globalisation. The soya people come from outside, they don't know our ecosystem. They suck the wealth and life out of the land here, and leave nothing for us. And when they have destroyed everything and cut down the trees that have fed people for hundreds of years, and soya is finished, they will go away."

Cargill argues that by building new infrastructure that stimulates exports it is helping one of Brazil's poorest regions to develop. It says it opposes illegal deforestation, and while it finances farmers in the area it does not plant soya itself. "It is important to remember that the Amazon is home to 23 million people," it says in a statement. "Economic development is the long-term solution to protecting both the Amazon's peoples and the environment. Poverty doesn't do that."

Battle of ideologies

Following a high-profile campaign by Greenpeace against the port and expansion of soya

farming in the region, Cargill, together with other soya traders, joined a moratorium on buying soya from newly deforested areas. It said it was working with the nature conservancy, the farmers' union and farmers who sell soya to it "to implement best practices for environmental stewardship".

Sena says the moratorium - initially for two years, now extended for another year - is not long enough, and that the roots of the problem go deeper. Now the forest that is so vital to the world's climate faces threats not just from soya but from mineral mining and ambitious government plans for hydroelectricity. "We are in the middle of a battle of two ideologies: the trans-national neoliberal model of progress, and the social model of development," Sena says. "They say I am against progress. I am against only this model of progress.

"I have never read Marx. I read the gospel ... 'Blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the earth ... I was hungry and you gave me meat, I was thirsty and you gave me drink ...' I do think Fidel Castro has a special place waiting for him in heaven though," he adds with a laugh.

• Felicity Lawrence's book *Eat your Heart Out: Why the Food Business is Bad for the Planet and Your Health*, is published by Penguin, £8.99. To order a copy for £8.99 with free UK p&p go to guardian.co.uk/bookshop or call 0330 333 6846

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/mar/04/edilberto-sena-amazon-rainforest-soya>

For an audio clip of Father Edilberto Sena's explanation of the economic threats to Amazonia, visit:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/audio/2009/mar/04/amazon-endangered-sena>

March 19, 2009

Religious heads to hold own summit during G8

Politicians attending meeting in Muskoka will get push to aid the poor, environment

Stuart Laidlaw
Faith and Ethics Reporter

When the world's most powerful government leaders gather in cottage country next year to discuss how to get the global economy back on track, religious leaders from around the world will be on hand to push them to remember the poor and the environment.

"How can the G8 ignore it if all these voices are speaking together," asks Rev. Karen Hamilton, general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches.

The Council of Churches is organizing what promises to be the biggest ever such gathering of religious leaders from around the world in a counter-conference to coincide with the annual G8 political leaders' conference planned for the Deerhurst Resort near Huntsville.

Hamilton says there will be top representatives from all the world's major faiths at the counter-conference, including South Africa's Desmond Tutu and the Aga Khan. She has also been told the Dalai Lama hopes to attend, which she says will give the meeting added clout with the political leaders.

Her group launches its countdown to the June 25-27 summit tonight with a public lecture by University of Toronto economist John Kirton at the Noor Cultural Centre on Wynford Dr. Word of the event has been spread by the centre through its network of churches, synagogues, mosques and temples.

Kirton, a world-recognized expert on the Group of Eight, says that while the group of the world's top industrialized nations has promised many times to address the needs of the poor, it has only a 47 per cent success rate in fulfilling its own promises for action.

"They just need to be held to account," says Kirton, an active member in the Anglican Church.

Left to themselves, the G8 leaders have fallen badly behind their promises to address the needs of the world's poor, he says.

Kirton points to promises made at successive summits to fight AIDS and polio in developing countries, for example, while funding for treatment programs has been cut and the diseases are once again on the rise. The same can be said for promises on global warming, hunger and numerous other issues, he says.

And with the financial crisis deepening around the world, Kirton warns, political leaders will be tempted to further cut their help for the sick and poor in developing countries. He has not, however, given up on the G8 leaders just yet.

"They really want to (live up to their commitments), they are not lying to their people," says Kirton. And that, he says, is where faith leaders can play a key role.

"We know faith-based leaders can push the G8 to go further," he says.

Unlike black-clad protesters who battle police outside the gates of each G8 meeting, it's harder for political leaders to ignore the admonitions of the world's religious leaders.

The religious counter-summit will be held at the University of Winnipeg, where school president Lloyd Axworthy, a former federal Liberal cabinet member, has donated the use of his campus.

That's a long way from Huntsville, Hamilton admits, but says that with all the security at such meetings, there is no way the religious leaders could meet at Deerhurst as well.

She is expecting more than 100 religious leaders, plus their staff and followers, to attend. It will be the largest ever such event, and open to anybody who wants to attend.

The first faith-groups meeting to be held alongside the G8 was in 2005, and organizers have typically spent only a matter of months getting ready. Hamilton and her team have been laying the groundwork since last summer when the Deerhurst resort in Muskoka was announced as the 2010 venue.

Kirton said such long preparation time will give the event added sway with the political leaders, adding the G8 tends to most respect groups that show a long-term commitment to organizing summit-related events.

Hamilton hopes that will translate into the first face-to-face meeting between political and religious leaders during the Muskoka G8.

<http://www.thestar.com/News/Canada/article/604652>

March 20, 2009

Hindus criticize ambitious Copenhagen Climate Summit for neglecting world religious leaders

By Sindh Today

Hindus have strongly criticized non-inclusion of world religious leaders in much-publicized and prestigious “Copenhagen COP 15” United Nations Climate Change Conference of December next.

Acclaimed Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, emphasized that for successful implementation at the grassroots level of environmental decisions coming out of this Conference, involvement of world religions and their leaders was extremely important.

Currently the Conference sessions are open to government representatives only with United Nations system bodies and accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs), inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and press as observers.

Without the blessings of leaders of various religions and denominations of the world, the high-flown and ambitious global agreements coming out of such conferences many times were practically reduced to “paper plans” and “sweet talk” in many parts of the world. Involve the faiths and give faith leaders a respectable role to play to achieve concrete results at the ground level and to see effective and smooth implementation of global climate agreements reached at this Conference, Zed suggested.

Rajan Zed, who is the president of Universal Society of Hinduism, said that religion was the most powerful and far-reaching force in our society and could prove very influential in handling concerns like ecological responsibility. Faiths jointly coming out in support of the environment

would be a remarkable signal, he added.

Senseless use of natural resources, extravagance, greed, etc., were some of the major causes of this ecological crisis and these could be effectively dealt with by world religions. Current trend of one percent increase in emissions every year, if left unchecked, would be catastrophic for the environment and humanity, Zed warned.

Rajan Zed pointed out that ancient Hindu scriptures, especially Atharva-Veda, were highly respectful of mother nature.

Conference of the Parties (COP), Fifteenth session, of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to be held at Bella Center in Copenhagen (Denmark) from December 7-18, 2009, will enter into a binding global climate agreement applicable to period after 2012.

Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about one billion followers and moksha (liberation) is its ultimate goal.

<http://www.prlog.org/10202464-hindus-criticize-ambitious-copenhagen-climate-summit-for-neglecting-world-religious-leaders.html>

March 25, 2009

Renewing the Face of the Earth: Human Responsibility and the Environment

The Archbishop gives a lecture at the Ebor Lecture, York Minster, to spell out why respect for the environment is not an optional extra, particularly for Christians. Dr Williams suggests that "we are capable of changing our situation"; in "Christian terms, this needs a radical change of heart, a conversion." The Ebor Lectures are a series of lectures which aim to relate faith to public concerns.

For an audio clip of Father Edilberto Sena's explanation of the economic threats to Amazonia, visit:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/audio/2009/mar/04/amazon-endangered-sena>

I

Some modern philosophers have spoken about the human face as the most potent sign of what it is that we can't master or exhaust in the life of a human other – a sign of the claim upon us of the other, the depths we can't sound but must respect. And while it is of course so ancient a metaphor to talk about the "face" of the earth that we barely notice any longer that it is a metaphor, it does no harm to let some of these associations find their way into our thinking; because such associations resonate so strongly with a fundamental biblical insight into the nature of our relationship with the world we inhabit. "The earth is the Lord's", says [the 24th psalm](#). In its context, this is primarily an assertion of God's glory and overall sovereignty. And it affirms a

relation between God and the world that is independent of what we as human beings think about the world or do to the world. The world is in the hands of another. The earth we inhabit is more than we can get hold of in any one moment or even in the sum total of all the moments we spend with it. Its destiny is not bound only to human destiny, its story is not exhausted by the history of our particular culture or technology, or even by the history of the entire human race. We can't as humans oblige the environment to follow our agenda in all things, however much we can bend certain natural forces to our will; we can't control the weather system or the succession of the seasons. The world turns, and the tides move at the drawing of the moon. Human force is incapable of changing any of this. What is before me is a network of relations and interconnections in which the relation to me, or even to us collectively as human beings, is very far from the whole story. I may ignore this, but only at the cost of disaster. And it would be dangerously illusory to imagine that this material environment will adjust itself at all costs so as to maintain our relationship to it. If it is more than us and our relation with it, it can survive us; we are dispensable. But the earth remains the Lord's.

And this language is used still more pointedly in a passage like Leviticus 25.23: we are foreign and temporary tenants on a soil that belongs to the Lord. We can never possess the land in which we live, so as to do what we like with it. In a brilliant recent monograph, the American Old Testament scholar, Ellen Davis, points out that the twenty fifth chapter of Leviticus is in fact a sustained argument about enslavement and alienation in a number of interconnected contexts. The people and the land alike belong to God – so that "ownership" of a person within God's chosen community is anomalous in a similar way to ownership of the land. When the Israelite loses family property, he must live alongside members of his family as if he were a resident alien (25.35); but the reader is reminded that in relation to God, the entire community, settled by God of his own gratuitous gift in the land of Canaan, has the same status of resident aliens. And when there is no alternative for the impoverished person but to be sold into slavery, an Israelite buying such a slave must treat them as a hired servant; and if the purchaser is not an Israelite, there is an urgent obligation on the family to see that they are redeemed. Davis points out that the obligation to redeem the enslaved Israelite is connected by way of several verbal echoes with the obligation defined earlier of redeeming, buying back, family land alienated as a result of poverty (vv.24-28). The language of redemption applies both to the land and to the people; both are in God's hands, and thus the people called to imitate the holiness of God will be seeking to save both persons and property from being alienated for ever from their primary and defining relation to the God of the Exodus (Ellen Davis, [Scripture, Culture and Agriculture](#), ch.5, esp. pp.90-94).

A primary and defining relation: this is the core of a biblical ethic of responsibility for the environment. To understand that we and our environment are alike in the hands of God, so that neither can be possessed absolutely, is to see that the mysteriousness of the interior life of another person and the uncontrollable difference and resistance of the material world are connected. Both demand that we do not regard relationships centred upon us, upon our individual or group agendas, as the determining factor in how we approach persons or things. If, as this whole section of Leviticus assumes, God's people are called to reflect what God is like, to make God's holiness visible, then just or good action is action which reflects God's purpose of liberating persons and environment from possession and the exploitation that comes from it – liberating them in order that their "primary and defining relation" may be realised. Just action,

towards people and environment, is letting created reality, both human and non-human, stand before God unhindered by attempts to control and dominate.

II

It is a rather different reading of the biblical tradition to that often (lazily) assumed to be the orthodoxy of Judeo-Christian belief. We hear regularly that this tradition authorises the exploitation of the earth through the language in Genesis about "having dominion" over the non-human creation. As has been argued elsewhere, this is a very clumsy reading of what Genesis actually says; but set alongside the Levitical code and (as Ellen Davis argues) many other aspects of the theology of Jewish Scripture, the malign interpretation that has latterly been taken for granted by critics of Judaism and [Christianity](#) appears profoundly mistaken. But what remains to be teased out is more about the nature of the human calling to further the "redemption" of persons and world. If liberating action is allowing things and persons to stand before God free from claims to possession, is the responsibility of human agents only to stand back and let natural processes unfold?

In Genesis, humanity is given the task of "cultivating" the garden of Eden: we are not left simply to observe or stand back, but are endowed with the responsibility to preserve and direct the powers of nature. In this process, we become more fully and joyfully who and what we are – as St Augustine memorably says, commenting on this passage: there is a joy, he says, in the "experiencing of the powers of nature". Our own fulfilment is bound up with the work of conserving and focusing those powers, and the exercise of this work is meant to be one of the things that holds us in Paradise and makes it possible to resist temptation. The implication is that an attitude to work which regards the powers of nature as simply a threat to be overcome is best seen as an effect of the Fall, a sign of alienation. And, as the monastic scholar Aelred Squire, points out (*Asking the Fathers*, p.92), this insight of Augustine, quoted by Thomas Aquinas, is echoed by Aquinas himself in another passage where he describes humanity as having a share in the working of divine Providence because it has the task of using its reasoning powers to provide for self and others (*aliis*, which can mean both persons and things). In other words, the human task is to draw out potential treasures in the powers of nature and so to realise the convergent process of humanity and nature discovering in collaboration what they can become. The "redemption" of people and material life in general is not a matter of resigning from the business of labour and of transformation – as if we could – but the search for a form of action that will preserve and nourish an interconnected development of humanity and its environment. In some contexts, this will be the deliberate protection of the environment from harm: in a world where exploitative and aggressive behaviour is commonplace, one of the "providential" tasks of human beings must be to limit damage and to secure space for the natural order to exist unharmed. In others, the question is rather how to use the natural order for the sake of human nourishment and security without pillaging its resources and so damaging its inner mechanisms for self-healing or self-correction. In both, the fundamental requirement is to discern enough of what the processes of nature truly are to be able to engage intelligently with them.

And all of this suggests some definitions of what unintelligent and ungodly relation with the environment looks like. It is partial: that is, it refuses to see or understand that what can be grasped about natural processes is likely to be only one dimension of interrelations far more

complex than we can gauge. It focuses on aspects of the environment that can be comparatively easily manipulated for human advantage and ignores inconvenient questions about what less obvious connections are being violated. It is indifferent, for example, to the way in which biodiversity is part of the self-balancing system of the world we inhabit. It is impatient: it seeks returns on labour that are prompt and low-cost, without consideration of long-term effects. It avoids or denies the basic truth that the environment as a material system is finite and cannot indefinitely regenerate itself in ways that will simply fulfil human needs or wants. And when such unintelligent and ungodly relation prevails, the risks should be obvious. We discover too late that we have turned a blind eye to the extinction of a species that is essential to the balance of life in a particular context. Or we discover too late that the importation of a foreign life-form, animal or vegetable, has upset local ecosystems, damaging soil or neighbouring life-forms. We discover that we have come near the end of supplies – of fossil-fuels for example – on which we have built immense structures of routine expectation. Increasingly, we have to face the possibility not only of the now familiar problems of climate change, bad enough as these are, but of a whole range of "doomsday" prospects. Martin Rees's 2003 book, *Our Final Century*, outlined some of these, noting also that the technology which in the hands of benign agents is assumed to be working for the good of humanity is the same technology which, universally available on the internet, can enable "bio-terror", the threat to release pathogens against a population. This feels like an ultimate reversal of the relation between humanity and environment envisaged in the religious vision – the material world's processes deliberately harnessed to bring about domination by violence; though, when you think about it, it is only a projection of the existing history of military technology.

[AS Byatt](#)'s novel *The Biographer's Tale* tells the story – or rather a set of interconnected stories – of a writer engaging with the literary remains of a diverse collection of people, including Linnaeus, the great Swedish botanist. Late in the book (pp.243-4), Fulla, a Swedish entomologist, holds forth to the narrator and his friends about the varieties of devastation the world faces because of our ignorance of insect life, specifically the life of bees. "She told fearful tales of possible lurches in the population of pollinators (including those of the crops we depend on for our own lives). Tales of the destruction of the habitats by humans, and of benign and necessary insects, birds, bats and other creatures, by crop-spraying and road-building...Of the need to find other (often better) pollinators, in a world where they are being extinguished swiftly and silently. Of the fact that there are only thirty-nine qualified bee taxonomists in the world, whose average age is sixty...Of population problems, and feeding the world, and sesbania, a leguminous crop which could both hold back desertification, because it binds soil, and feed the starving, but for the fact that no one has studied its pollinators or their abundance or deficiency, or their habits, in sufficient detail." It is a potent catalogue of unintelligence.

Earlier in the book (p.205), Fulla has said that "We are an animal that needs to use its intelligence to mitigate the effects of its intelligence on the other creatures" – a notable definition in the contemporary context of what the Levitical call to redemption might mean. We cannot but use our intelligence in our world, and we are bound to use it, as Fulla's examples suggest, to supply need, to avoid famine and suffering. If the Christian vision outlined by Aquinas is truthful, intelligence is an aspect of sharing in God's Providence and so it is committed to providing for others. But God's Providence does not promote the good only of one sector of creation; and so we have to use our intelligence to seek the good of the whole system of which

we are a part. The limits of our creative manipulation of what is put before us in our environment are not instantly self-evident, of course; but what is coming into focus is the level of risk involved if we never ask such a question, if we collude with a social and economic order that apparently takes the possibility of unlimited advance in material prosperity for granted, and systematically ignores the big picture of global interconnectedness (in economics or in ecology).

Ecological questions are increasingly being defined as issues of justice; climate change has been characterised as a matter of justice both to those who now have no part in decision-making at the global level yet bear the heaviest burdens as a consequence of the irresponsibility of wealthier nations, and to those who will succeed us on this planet – justice to our children and grandchildren (this is spelled out clearly in Paula Clifford's new book, *Angels with Trumpets. The Church in a Time of Global Warming*). So the major issue we need to keep in view is how much injustice is let loose by any given set of economic or manufacturing practices. We can't easily set out a straightforward code that will tell us precisely when and where we step across the line into the unintelligence and ungodliness I have sketched. But we can at least see that the question is asked, and asked on the basis of a clear recognition that there is no way of manipulating our environment that is without cost or consequence – and thus also of a recognition that we are inextricably bound up with the destiny of our world. There is no guarantee that the world we live in will "tolerate" us indefinitely if we prove ourselves unable to live within its constraints.

Is this – as some would claim – a failure to trust God, who has promised faithfulness to what he has made? I think that to suggest that God might intervene to protect us from the corporate folly of our practices is as unchristian and unbiblical as to suggest that he protects us from the results of our individual folly or sin. This is not a creation in which there are no real risks; our faith has always held that the inexhaustible love of God cannot compel justice or virtue; we are capable of doing immeasurable damage to ourselves as individuals, and it seems clear that we have the same terrible freedom as a human race. God's faithfulness stands, assuring us that even in the most appalling disaster love will not let us go; but it will not be a safety net that guarantees a happy ending in this world. Any religious language that implies this is making a nonsense of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament and the urgency of the preaching of Jesus.

But to say this is also to be reminded of the fact that intelligence is given to us; we are capable of changing our situation – and, as AS Byatt's character puts it, using our intelligence to limit the ruinous effect of our intelligence. If we can change things so appallingly for the worse, it is possible to change them for the better also. But, in Christian terms, this needs a radical change of heart, a conversion; it needs another kind of "redemption", which frees us from the trap of an egotism that obscures judgement. Intelligence in regard to the big picture of our world is no neutral thing, no simple natural capacity of reasoning; it needs grace to escape from the distortions of pride and acquisitiveness. One of the things we as Christians ought to be saying in the context of the ecological debate is that human reasoning in its proper and fullest sense requires an awareness of our participation in the material processes of the world and thus a sense of its own involvement in what it cannot finally master. Being rational is not a wholly detached capacity, examining the phenomena of the world from a distance, but a set of skills for finding our way around in the physical world.

III

The ecological crisis challenges us to be reasonable. Put like that, it sounds banal; but given the level of irrationality around the question, it is well worth saying, especially if we are clear about the roots of reasoning in these "skills" of negotiating the world of material objects. I don't intend to discuss in detail the rhetoric of those who deny the reality of climate change, except to say that rhetoric (as King Canute demonstrated) does not turn back rising waters. If you live in Bangladesh or Tuvalu, scepticism about global warming is precisely the opposite of reasonable: "negotiating" this environment means recognising the fact of rising sea levels; and understanding what is happening necessarily involves recognising how rising temperatures affect sea levels. It is possible to argue about the exact degree to which human intervention is responsible for these phenomena (though it would be a quite remarkable coincidence if massively increased levels of carbon emissions merely happened to accompany a routine cyclical change in global temperatures, given the obvious explanatory force of the presence of these emissions), but it is not possible rationally to deny what the inhabitants of low-lying territories in the world routinely face as the most imminent threat to their lives and livelihoods.

And what the perspective of faith – in particular of Christian faith – brings to this discussion is the insight that we are not and don't have to be God. For us to be reasonable and free and responsible is for us to live in awareness of our limits and dependence. It is no lessening of our dignity as humans, let alone our rationality and liberty as humans, if we exercise these "godlike" gifts in the context of bodies that are fragile and mortal and a world that we do not completely control. A couple of weeks ago, I suggested that the current financial crisis had more to do with pride than with greed – understanding pride as the attempt to forget or obliterate our sense of living within limits and lacking total control. Intelligent life in these circumstances is not the triumphant imposition of human will upon a defeated natural order, but the reasoned discovery of how we live in such a way as not to destroy a balance in the natural order which we sense rather than fully grasp. It is to turn away from denial – from all those denials of our finite condition that were summed up many years since in a famous book by Ernst Becker, *The Denial of Death*, in which he identified the basic pathology of the human mind as the fantasy of being "self-created."

Such denial is not properly understood as deliberate refusal of the truth; it is in large part a consequence of the perceived complexity of the global situation, a complexity that produces both paralysis in some areas and a stubborn adherence to failed or outdated paradigms. Jonathon Porritt, in his magisterial essay on *Capitalism as if the World Matters*, ascribes the "continuing, utterly perverse denial on the part of politicians" to a failure to grasp that much of the very complexity which makes people stick to policies they think they understand is itself the result of "the dominant paradigm of progress through exponential economic growth" (p.215). Unfortunately, he goes on, too few politicians who have grasped the issue have worked out carefully enough what "transitional strategies" would be possible for the reimagining of a broadly capitalist practice (i.e an economic practice that values risk and innovation and enables increased collective wealth through trade) that was not systematically disastrous for the environment. His book attempts to offer some starting points for such work – noting, soberly, that denial of a different kind afflicts many Green movements, whose campaigning style allows them to be dismissed or at best patronised by actual decision-makers. Among the strategies

discussed is the crucial call to alter the way in which we calculate cost and profit so as to include some sort of monetary valuation of the depletion of natural capital and also some way of assessing impacts on individual and social well-being. One consequence of taking this seriously would be one or another form of carbon taxation. In the same way, more positively, we need ways of redefining business excellence in terms of sustainability and deliberate encouragement of low-carbon technologies (ch.14). An economic world in which environmental responsibility was rewarded, was assumed to be a routine aspect of practice that was both ethically defensible and profitable, would have a very different flavour from what we have generally seen for most of the last couple of centuries. And it is also an area in which the pressure of the "ordinary" consumer can make a perceptible difference. More broadly, Porritt rightly underlines the close connection of all this with what we ought to be saying about "political virtue". We must find ways of opening up a proper discussion of how to restore a sustainable democratic politics in a world where unbridled economic liberalism has in many contexts eroded the authority of elected governments and led some to believe that there is no alternative to current global capitalism but economies of the most static and protectionist kind.

All these proposals illustrate what an intelligent response to the environmental crisis might look like. Porritt is clear that this needs grounding in carefully defined common values and in the renewal of civil society through the articulating and promoting of such values – including the recognition of the interdependence of all things and of the equal significance of diverse kinds of "capital" – social and human as much as material or natural (see p.293 for a summary of the argument of Part II of his book). In other words, intelligence comes to life when a kind of empathy and imagination is stirred by a new vision of things: intelligence alone does not generate new vision, and bare argument does not on the whole change things; but vision displayed in new forms of human life and engagement can renew intelligence in the sense I have been giving to the word. And this is where the significance of the perspectives of faith is most obvious.

IV

Renewing the face of the earth, then, is an enterprise not of imposing some private human vision on a passive nature but of living in such a way as to bring more clearly to light the interconnectedness of all things and their dependence on what we cannot finally master or understand. This certainly involves a creative engagement with nature, seeking to work with those natural powers whose working gives us joy, as St Augustine says, in order to enhance human liberty and well-being. But that creative work will always be done in consciousness of costs, seen and unseen, and will not be dominated by fantasies about unconditional domination. It is a vision that, in the Christian context, is founded on the idea of humanity as having a "priestly" relationship with the natural order: the human agent is created with the capacity to make sense of the environment and to move it into a closer relation with its creator by drawing out of it its capacity to become a sign of love and generosity. This entails so using the things of the earth that they promote justice between human beings – making sense so as to make peace, equity and so on, using the skills of negotiating the environment in order to alleviate suffering and spread resources. Used in this way, the raw material of the environment is seen as serving human need – but only by being used in awareness of its own integrity and its own constraints. It remains itself, but in its use for the sake of healing or justice becomes "sacramental" of the

infinite gift from which it originates. The "face" of the earth becomes an aspect of the face of God. And a good many theologians have started from here in explaining what the actual sacraments of the Church mean – especially the Eucharist – as the firstfruits of a world of material things that has been given meaning in the context of communicating divine generosity.

All this echoes what St Paul touches on in Romans 8: creation is in some sense frustrated so long as humanity is "unredeemed". The world is less than it might be so long as human beings are less than they might be, since the capacity of human beings to shape the material environment into a sign of justice and generosity is blocked by human selfishness. In the doomsday scenarios we are so often invited to contemplate, the ultimate tragedy is that a material world capable of being a manifestation in human hands of divine love is left to itself, as humanity is gradually choked, drowned or starved by its own stupidity. The disappearance of humanity from a globe no longer able to support it would be a terrible negation of God's purpose for a world in which created intelligence draws out the most transformative and rich possibilities in its material home. As is true in various ways throughout the whole created order, humanity and its material context are made so that they may find fulfilment in their relationship. Without each other they are not themselves. And the deliberate human refusal of this shared vocation with and within the material order of things is thus an act of rebellion against the creator.

Which is why Christians are bound to set all this discussion in the context of that divine practice which decisively redeems humankind. God restores relationship with himself through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: he shows his face to us and – as St Paul says in II Corinthians – our own faces are "unveiled" as we advance towards God. We are revealed for who or what we are. And in this event we become able to reveal what the entire material world is for, to display it as a sign of love by our loving and just use of it – and by our contemplative respect for it and our capacity to let it be. The grace set free in Christ's work allows us to be liberated from the murderous anxiety that drives us to possessive models of engagement. Liberated ourselves, we become able to act liberatingly towards the world we inhabit and whose materiality we share and depend upon. Our own redemption is the re-creation of our intelligence.

The contemporary Greek theologian, Christos Yannaras, has developed a rich and complex metaphysics of relation, stressing that Christian theology sees the human person as purely abstract if cut off from relation with God and others and the material world. He diagnoses the malaise of modern Western society (in politics, philosophy, art and [religion](#)) very much in terms of a loss of relation and what goes with it, a loss of the sense of vocation to a sort of "artistic" transformation of the world. Technology, Yannaras argues, is toxic when it forgets this artistic and transformational dimension – that is (in the terms I've been using here) when it loses its proper human intelligence. But it is a particular image used by Yannaras that perhaps expresses most simply what a Christian account of responsibility in our environment comes down to. In his book of meditations, *Variations on the Song of Songs*, he speaks of how love compels you to see things differently – to love "the landscapes we have looked at together." And so if we fall in love with God, even fleetingly, all the sense impressions of this world become part of such a common "landscape" (p.67). We love what we see together with God; and – as I have argued before – if God sees the world he has made as "very good", I must begin to see it with his eyes and so to sense in it the promise of his beauty. It becomes, in Yannaras's vocabulary, "a gift of erotic joy" – an encounter with something that generates desire beyond utterance or final fulfilment.

Now it may be a long way from the technicalities of recalculating economic gains in terms of environmental cost to the experience of "erotic joy" in relation to God. But the distinctive Christian approach to responsibility for our environment has somehow to hold these two languages together. Finally, our care for the world we inhabit is not simply a duty laid upon us but a dimension of life made whole: a redeeming activity grounded in the character of our own redemption, a revelation of the true "face" of creation as we ourselves undergo the uncovering of our own human face before God. Going back to the root meaning of the Hebrew word, what we're asked to undertake is in fact a conversion – a turning – towards the truth: towards the God who is eternally active and giving in ways beyond our concepts, towards the hidden depths of who we ourselves are – and thus towards the face of the earth, seeing it freshly in its unfathomable interrelatedness. As Ps 104 (vv 29-30) has it, when God hides his face, creation is locked in fear and slips towards death; when he breathes on creation (when he "sends his spirit"), creation happens all over again, and the face of the earth is renewed. That turning of the Spirit towards the earth is the movement that carries our love and intelligence in the same direction, so that we can properly make answer for, be responsible for, our world.

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2351>

March 26, 2009

God 'will not give happy ending'

God will not intervene to prevent humanity from wreaking disastrous damage to the environment, the Archbishop of Canterbury has warned.

In a lecture, Dr Rowan Williams urged a "radical change of heart" to prevent runaway climate change.

At York Minster he said humanity should turn away from the selfishness and greed that leads it to ignore its interdependence with the natural world.

And God would not guarantee a "happy ending", he warned.

Dr Williams has often spoken out about environmental issues.

'Ultimate tragedy'

Speaking on Wednesday he said just as God gave humans free will to do "immeasurable damage" to themselves as individuals it seemed "clear" they had the same "terrible freedom" as a human race.

"I think that to suggest that God might intervene to protect us from the corporate folly of our practices is as unchristian and unbiblical as to suggest that he protects us from the results of our individual folly or sin," he said.

"God's faithfulness stands, assuring us that even in the most appalling disaster love will not let us go - but it will not be a safety net that guarantees a happy ending in this world."

Without a change of heart, Dr Williams warned, the world faced a number of "doomsday scenarios" including the "ultimate tragedy" of humanity gradually "choked, drowned, or starved by its own stupidity."

The poorest and most vulnerable and our children and grandchildren would pay the heaviest price for climate change, he added.

A Greenpeace spokesman welcomed the speech: "Hundreds of thousands of people are dying every year because we haven't taken the necessary steps to stop climate change.

"Whilst there's nothing wrong in hoping for a miracle, relying on one does seem to be more than a bit reckless.

"We need to all do what we can now, or we're giving up on this world."

Friends of the Earth's executive director, Andy Atkins said: "Humans are responsible for escalating climate change. We have a choice as to how we respond, but we and future generations will live with the consequences of this generation's choice."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the British Humanist Association said: "The fact that god is not going to help us handle climate change will come as no surprise to many.

"But nor will the reinterpretation of ancient texts to be about stewardship rather than dominion, or indeed any faith in some non-human support.

"What may help us to manage it is human reason and the application of technology, and a recognition that we are on our own on this earth and must handle our own problems."

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7964880.stm

March 26, 2009

Religion's View from Appalachia: Only God Should Move Mountains

By Stacy Morford

In Appalachia, there is a growing struggle between two formidable forces – the coal industry that provides jobs in this impoverished region and the religious leaders who knit its rural communities together.

As with everything here, the mountains and the coal they hold are at the heart of the conflict.

When the mines were underground, faith and mining could co-exist. But then the coal giants found a cheaper way to get at the wealth: They began blowing the tops off mountains and scrapping out the coal, contaminating streams and ravaging the landscape in the process.

“God put humanity in the garden to care for and cultivate it. We forget that,” says Father John Rousch, who takes anyone willing to listen to witness the devastation.

Rousch's Catholic Committee of Appalachia is one of several religious groups that have begun speaking out in Appalachia's churches, communities and state capitols against a practice they see as an outrage against creation: mountaintop removal.

Half a dozen major religious denominations have issued statements opposing mountaintop mining in recent years, but the strongest voices in this fight are coming from the local churches.

Unlike activists who sweep in from the cities, these religious leaders belong to coal country. They have the trust of the people, and they understand that when it comes to jobs here, coal is still king.

The Challenge of Poverty

The war over mountaintop mining is tightly intertwined with the region's extreme poverty.

In McDowell County, W.Va., a leading coal producing county, the poverty rate is nearly 38 percent. Coal is a big employer, and mining taxes contribute 8 percent of West Virginia's general fund, so lawmakers are loath to oppose the industry. The same scene plays out in the eastern Kentucky and parts of eastern Tennessee.

Coal's economic hold on the region makes it difficult for many people – even those victimized by mining – to speak out. If they oppose coal, they threaten their neighbors' jobs and, in some cases, their own safety. They can't count on their political representatives – most are coal-industry funded and staunchly pro-coal in their votes.

The strongest voices, then, have become a few brave victims and the preachers who speak for those who can't.

“Coal is so intertwined in the economy, people feel like it's coal or nothing. People are nervous about pulling the last bit of rug they have left,” explains Allen Johnson, founder of Christians for the Mountains, a leading voice in the fight to protect the mountains.

The industry's pressure to stay quiet about the destruction wrecked by mountaintop mining is intense, says Truman Hurt, who leads the Kodak Church of the True and Living God outside of Hazard, Ky.

Hurt, whose own wells have been contaminated by mining "overburden", used to offer his church as a meeting hall for Kentuckians for the Commonwealth in their fight against mountaintop removal. But church members asked him to stop for fear they would lose their jobs.

“They’ve seen it’s a possibility they may have to shut down or change things grossly, and they don’t want to. They’re fighting,” Hurt says of the industry. “Coal pushes against anything that we do. The ones with jobs are getting a lot of pressure from their fellow workers. The only people who can speak out are those who don’t depend upon coal.”

Others who have spoken out have been physically threatened. Maria Gunnoe, who became an activist against mountaintop mining after her West Virginia property was devastated, says her son was beaten up at school and two of her family’s dogs were killed – one at the corner where her daughter catches the school bus. Larry Gibson, another victim and activist, says his home has been shot at.

Mary Ann Hitt, deputy director of the Sierra Club's coal campaign, recognizes the dangers: “Most of the people who are outspoken are doing that at great risk to themselves and their families because people on the other side see their paycheck as directly threatened, and the industry knows how to exploit that.”

In the past few weeks, there have been encouraging signs from outside Appalachia that pressure on the coal industry could be increasing to move away from mountaintop mining. Three coal-buying states are considering banning purchases of mountaintop coal, the Obama EPA promised to more closely review mountaintop mining permits, and Congress is considering stream-protection laws that would greatly limit mountaintop removal.

People are beginning to see that while mountaintop mining may provide jobs in the short term, the practice is destroying the region for future generations and damaging communities in the process.

Heavy metals from the “overburden” that mountaintop mining pushes into stream beds leach into the water and poison wells and cause deformities in fish. Once-safe properties now flood because of the changed landscape. The valley fill process is even threatening some of the top white water rivers in the country – West Virginia’s New and Gauley Rivers, says Johnson, who spent last week in Washington, D.C., lobbying for the federal action to both stop mountaintop mining and to replace it with better jobs in a sustainable green economy.

“There won’t be anything left for economic development” if mountaintop mining continues, Johnson says. “And the legislatures are letting it happen.”

Pushing Legislation to Save the Mountains

Across Appalachia, religious groups including the West Virginia Council of Churches, Catholic Committee of Appalachia, Christians for the Mountains, and the Lindquist-Environmental Appalachian Fellowship (LEAF) have all started publicly advocating mountain protection.

LEAF picked up the flag of mountain protection four years ago as ridge mining began encroaching on the northeast corner of Tennessee. Today, the group is leading the legislative charge, lobbying Tennessee lawmakers to restrict mining above the 2,000-foot elevation and

anywhere within 100 feet of a stream. A bill that would do both is up for a committee vote on Tuesday.

In theology, there is deep vein of religious belief running back to St. Augustine and the Old Testament that humans have a responsibility to care for all of God's creations, including the Earth. That belief in creation care was pushed aside by economics during the Industrial Age, but it is welling up again as people watch mountaintop mining lay waste to Appalachia in the name of cheap energy.

Creation care resonates in faith communities, particularly in the conservative churches that anchor rural communities throughout Appalachia, says LEAF co-founder Pat Hudson.

It gives people who are wary of politics a foundation for action that is rooted deep in their own beliefs, and with national religious leaders such as Rick Warren beginning to support it, the faithful and their ministers are becoming more comfortable identifying with its message.

"If you show people a path they can support without having to change everything about themselves, people will step up," Hudson said. "Scripture is absolutely full of references to the need to respect the land and treat it carefully and hand it down to future generations in as good or better shape than we found it.

"It's not something you can look at and say, 'oh never mind'."

Father Rousch spends his Sundays traveling to churches throughout Appalachia and giving guest sermons that often involve creation care. He says he occasionally sees people walk out when the topic turns to mountaintop mining.

As a guest speaker, though, Rousch can upset people's view of mountaintop mining. He provides cover for the local ministers by raising the subject in a way that the local ministers can then step in and start a deeper discussion based in theology.

Coal's Attempt to Co-opt the Message

Detractors have also tried to harness the power of religion to advance their own motives, but when it comes to mountaintop mining, they have a tough battle.

The ultraconservative Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, headed by talk radio voice Richard Land, joined the economic argument against a federal cap on greenhouse gases, telling listeners that the proof for man-made global warming is a "questionable science." But even Land still recognizes that Christians "should take every reasonable step to care for God's creation.

The coal industry has tried issuing its own religious talking points, as well. From the Kentucky Coal Association web site:

“We’ve learned some religious leaders are railing against mountaintop mining and, as we hear it, invoking the Almighty to bring an end to the mining method.

“While these folks are certainly within their right to do so, it made us wonder, should we call for the same help to continue this mining practice, which is, after all, a temporary use of the land?

“We, therefore, even though reluctant to inject them into the debate, enter this scriptural citation for reflection: “Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all mankind shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 40:4-5, (New American Bible).

That didn't sit well with Johnson of Christian for the Mountains.

He points out that Martin Luther King, Jr., used that passage in his "I have a dream" speech – it's about social justice. "To carry out the horrendous destruction of God's creation for profit and then try to use scripture to justify is unconscionable," he said.

Roush has gone toe-to-toe with coal executives before, and he has a standing invitation to anyone in the industry to debate him on that any time.

“There are certain methods that are inherently wrong, and mountaintop removal is such an exaggerated destruction of the ecosystem," he said.

"Obviously they have the formal legal arguments on their side, property rights. But I would say to them: You are in danger of losing your spirit if you continue to be impervious of the suffering that you are inflicting on these people and onto creation. Know that coal is ultimately a sundown industry. There is no way that you can clean coal so that children don't get asthma and it doesn't pollute our rivers and streams.”

<http://solveclimate.com/blog/20090326/religions-view-appalachia-only-god-should-move-mountains>

March 26, 2009

Moral aspect of climate change can't be ignored

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

And James Leape, Director General, WWF International

This Saturday, hundreds of millions of people around the world will join together in what's being described as a vote for the planet. From New York to Beijing, from Cape Town to Paris, citizens will turn their lights off for 60 minutes to demand action on climate change. Earth Hour is a unique opportunity for us all to send a message to the world's leaders that 2009 is the year for a global deal to tackle global warming.

We are used to seeing climate change discussed in both environmental and economic terms. The impacts on the planet are all too obvious: melting polar ice caps, drought and rising sea levels have become the depressing staple of our daily news for several years.

More recently, talk has turned to the economics of climate change, the costs of keeping it manageable and the costs if we don't. The trillions of dollars in stimulus packages now being put in place are seen as a chance to invest in sustainable green technologies and production, which will not only help build a low-carbon future but will kick-start growth and safeguard jobs.

But there is another dimension to the climate change debate that does not tend to get as much attention as the environmental and economic impacts — and that is the moral imperative we all share to prevent a massive humanitarian crisis. Global warming is not just an ecological and financial dilemma, it is an ethical one that opens up unsettling questions about justice, fairness, responsibilities and obligations.

When the world's leaders meet in Copenhagen in December to agree on a global climate deal to replace the weak Kyoto Protocol, they will know that the eyes of the world are upon them. We expect them to do the right thing. That means agreeing on a deal that is ambitious, achievable and also equitable. A fair deal in Copenhagen must be based on the "polluter pays" principle: those most responsible for climate damage must accept their obligations and bear most of the cost.

We believe the moral obligation we all bear for finding a sustainable and equitable solution to climate change is as compelling as the economic and environmental arguments.

Climate change undermines livelihoods and widens the gulf between rich and poor. You only have to look at those who are and will be worst affected by global warming to realize this is an issue of social justice, poverty and human rights.

Climate refugees are already a reality. Witness those in the coastal communities in the Indian state of Orissa who have been forced to abandon their homes and fields because of rising sea levels, or the victims of extreme weather events like Hurricane Katrina. Failure to keep global warming below the crucial 2°C threshold will see many more examples of climate refugees. Last year global crop failures and spiralling food prices were exacerbated by — among other things — drought linked to climate change.

Nearly half the world's population lives within 100 kilometres of the coast. Where will they go when sea levels rise as a result of global warming? As is so often the case, the developing world will be hardest hit.

To be equitable, a global climate deal must also be effective. That means bold and quantifiable emissions reductions to protect vulnerable people and places from the worst impacts. The good news is that we already have the technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by nearly half in the next 30 years by investing in energy efficiency, moving to renewable energy supplies such as wind and solar power, and stopping the destruction of the world's great forests. What's more,

the costs of moving to a low carbon economy are affordable, especially compared with the costs of not doing anything.

A recent study by McKinsey & Company identified more than 200 opportunities spread across all regions and in all sectors of industry that would help keep us under the critical 2°C threshold if they were all implemented. What is currently lacking is the political will to implement the necessary measures.

We are hopeful that the political will to enable a global climate deal is changing. When the world's leaders sit around the negotiation table this December, they will have to come to grips with three powerful truths:

- As a matter of science, it is clear that if we fail to curb our emissions, we are heading for catastrophic climate change.
- As a matter of economics, we can afford to meet the challenge.
- And as a matter of simple justice, we must act boldly to protect the most vulnerable among us.

Between now and December, the challenge for all of us is to ensure our demand for action is heard — and that challenge starts with Earth Hour.

<http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/608603>

March 28, 2009

Imams call for green awareness

By Azlan Othman
Borneo Bulletin

Shrinking pristine forests, which bring catastrophe to mankind, came under the spotlight by imams yesterday.

In a Friday sermon, imams said Islam stresses the importance of preserving the **environment**, which has come under assault.

Humans should not destroy pristine forests and create pollution, they said, adding that Allah dislikes those who bring about destruction to Earth.

Destruction to the **environment** is now becoming more rampant, perpetrated by irresponsible communities.

Of late, deforestation has resulted in **global warming**, rise in water level, extinction of species, destruction of natural habitats, and creation of unexpected weather patterns.

Natural disasters threaten mankind, and Brunei is no exception.

With the destruction of forests, continuous heavy downpours cause landslides and flash floods, which lead to big losses, including lives and properties.

"We must be grateful in that such disaster is not as bad in the Sultanate as in other countries," the imams said.

Scientists have said the drastic loss in the forest, resulting in the imbalance in ecology and the **environment**, consequently causes natural disasters.

The unsystematic management of forest and the exploitation of greenery for one's greed while ignoring their side effects were also touched on during the sermon.

The imams said, "The forest is diminishing at a rapid pace. We must be aware that humans cause such destruction and calamity."

Meanwhile, acknowledging the importance of forest resources to the country's socio-economy, His Majesty's Government, through the Forestry Department, has instituted a policy to preserve the lush rainforest, which should continue to be enjoyed by the future generations.

As part of the government's continuous commitment to enhance public awareness, Brunei Darussalam joined other world communities in observing the World Forestry Day, themed "Forest Prevents Climate Change", on March 21.

The theme underscored the need to preserve and restore the forest as the best option against climate change and **global warming**.

The imams, therefore, called on the people to become more aware of the efforts made in upholding the country's precious resources.

Firm support, they said, is paramount to ensuring the country's green jewel continues to guarantee the welfare of the people.

The imams concluded by calling on the people to pray to Allah for the country to enjoy peace and prosperity while being continuously protected from natural calamities.

<http://naturealert.blogspot.com/2009/03/imams-call-for-green-awareness.html>

March 28, 2009

The first globalized ritual Earth Hour may well be a 'liminal space.' In other words, a potent opportunity for change

Stephen Bede Scharper
Special to the Star

This year, Earth Hour promises to involve approximately one billion people in 1,000 cities the world over, all flicking the switch in synchronized solidarity. In the words of Earth Hour director Andy Ridley, it is a collective "vote for the Earth."

Yet Earth Hour is more than a communal "vote;" it represents, rather, one of the first globalized rituals for the Earth, adding further non-fossilized fuel for those who argue that environmentalism is a new religion.

And it may well have the transformative power of what social scientists call "liminal space" – a transitional zone leading to change.

Earth Hour has arisen, almost organically, outside of established religious and secular institutions. The fact that churches and municipal governments are now participating is a testament not only to its popularity, but also possibly to its motivational power and persistence, something that places the event in the category of "ritual."

Mainline religions, the customary proprietors of ritual, are in fact Johnny-come-latelys to Earth Hour. They are, however, increasingly keying into the ritualistic and spiritual aspects of this phenomenon. Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu has this year publicly endorsed Earth Hour, claiming, "The threat of climate change is the greatest natural crisis facing the world today..."

"Earth Hour is an opportunity for every man, woman and child from all corners of the globe to come together with a united voice and make a loud and powerful statement on the issue of climate change."

Here in Canada, KAIROS, the Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, is not only encouraging member churches to hold services during Earth Hour, but has also distributed a worship guide for the evening. It is also urging congregations to host a "PowerDown Day" as a prelude.

For faith communities that get really turned on by turning off the lights, KAIROS suggests the "Carbon Sabbath Initiative," designed for those who want "to reduce their carbon footprint by a few sizes." According to KAIROS spokesperson Sara Stratton, "hundreds" of Canadian churches and faith communities will participate this year, as opposed to more than 60 in 2008.

Why are religious groups like KAIROS embracing Earth Hour?

For Stratton, Earth Hour is akin to a Sabbath, "taking time to pause and reflect on our lives, and how to mend our ways and our relationship with the Earth. KAIROS is involved not so much because turning off the lights for one hour is going to make a huge difference for climate change; it's not. What is going to make a difference possibly is that moment of reflection" that collectively leads to "personal, spiritual transformation."

Victor Turner (1920-1983), the celebrated anthropological theorist on ritual, noted that ritual can provide a liminal (deriving from the Latin "limen," meaning "threshold") space. As Turner explained in *The Ritual Process* (1969), liminal spaces are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by laws, custom, convention and ceremony. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols." Turner claimed that a liminal space is a type of "twilight zone" where, through the collective power of the group ceremony, persons leaving the ritual are different from when they entered.

University of Toronto professor Hilary Cunningham, in her 1995 ethnography *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, examines the U.S. Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s (in which religious groups broke the law to harbour Central American refugees) as a liminal space, which led to religious critiques of U.S. foreign policy and immigration law, and challenges to church-state policy.

Earth Hour might well be creating such a liminal space, engendering an Earth ritual that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. While cynics may chide the effort as both ephemeral and ineffectual, social scientists who have studied liminal spaces know that they are highly unpredictable – one cannot know the ultimate outcome, and for this reason they can be powerful and transformative spaces.

Earth Hour combines a spiritual quest, a moral mandate and a communal practice into a unique and truly global event. It can thus be considered a transcultural action of moral responsibility for the planet, a statement that "another world is possible." It is not driven by brands, consumerism or corporate logos. Earth Hour is not Coca-Cola teaching "the world to sing in perfect harmony," nor Nike telling us to "Just Do It." It is, rather, approximately one billion people entering the threshold of a different relationship with both the planet and the cosmos.

And it's anyone's guess what can happen when that many people place their faith in the dark.

Stephen Bede Scharper is an associate professor at the Centre for Environment, University of Toronto, and the Department of Anthropology at U of T Mississauga. He is co-author of The Green Bible (Lantern Books).

<http://www.thestar.com/SpecialSections/article/608967>

April 1, 2009

In Virginia seminary lecture, Liverpool bishop calls for common ethic within faith communities

At the second annual [Kreitler Environmental Lecture](#) at [Virginia Theological Seminary](#) March 30, [Church of England](#) Bishop James Jones of the [Diocese of Liverpool](#) called for faith communities -- especially Jews, Christians and Muslims -- to work together in a common ethic for the future of the earth. Jones was invited to give the lecture at a crucial time when the engagement of America is critical in achieving an international agreement on climate change.

For the last five years, the bishop has been working with religious leaders in the U.S., helping to change hearts and minds about the environment.

Jones stated that "the future stability of the world depends upon the fostering of good relationships between the faith communities internationally and locally ... We are aware of new possibilities of dialogue about Jesus and the earth with Islam and Judaism where the concept Son of Man (Ben Adam and Bani Adam) is neither strange nor aggressive."

The bishop quoted a variety of academic sources and conversations with other faith leaders that showed how a consensus could be found through Jesus' declaration that he is "Son of Man" with its roots in Adam and Adamah, meaning the earth. He proposed that "Jesus' exclusive self declaration in the context of the ecological crisis might provide new bridges between the faiths at a time when each is becoming more aware from their own sacred texts of the responsibilities that all the children of Adam have for the earth."

The bishop reaffirmed his convictions about the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus but stated that "it may just be that these are not the first things to be discussed as we enter into a dialogue of friendship with our Jewish and Muslim neighbors and seek an ethical concensus on the current ecological crisis."

Jones became Bishop of Liverpool in 1998 having been Bishop of Hull since 1994. Over the last 14 years he has been deeply involved in Urban Regeneration. He chairs the governing body of the faith-based St. Francis of Assisi City Academy jointly sponsored by the Catholic and Anglican dioceses. It is the first academy to take the environment as its speciality. He broadcasts regularly on the BBC's "Thought for the Day" and has written a number of books including Jesus and the Earth (SPCK 2003) which looks at the relationship between Christianity and the environment.

The Kreitler Environmental Fund, established at VTS in 2006, aims to empower clergy and the church with a strong environmental ethic in order to help conserve and preserve the environment.

The full text of Jones' lecture is available [here](#).

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/78650_106625_ENG_HTM.htm

April 2, 2009

Love the Earth? Bless the Sun

Julie Wiener
The Wall Street Journal

According to Talmudic calculations, every 28 years the sun is in the exact position it occupied at the time of Creation. As it happens, that moment falls on Wednesday, April 8, of this year, at sunrise -- just hours before Passover begins. There is a brief blessing for the occasion, too. It is

called Birchat Hachamah, Hebrew for "blessing of the sun." But the sun is a hot topic these days, not least because of global warming, and this time around the blessing, in itself, is not enough: A whole environmental message is being attached to what was once a simple ceremony.

Thus Jews who wish to mark the occasion will find a variety of options, including a Manhattan rooftop service that supplements the blessing with yoga sun salutations and environmental speeches; a beachfront "mystical" service in Seattle; and an arts, music and "healing" festival in Safed, Israel. This year's ritual has even inspired two Facebook groups: The "Birkat HaChama" group had 256 members at last count, while the "Birchat HaChama" one had 165. There is also a commemorative T-shirt being sold online, available in two colors and styles, emblazoned with the words: "Here Comes the Sun."

One can also participate in a "Birkat Hahammah Art Contest" or sign on to a "Birkat Hahammah Covenant of Commitment" pledging to "hasten the day of environmental healing, social justice and sustainable living for all." The art contest and covenant (which has 73 signatories so far) are sponsored by 15 institutions, including the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, the Jewish National Fund, the Reform and Conservative movements' rabbinical associations -- and Arava Power, a kibbutz-founded company that says it is "bringing Solar Power in massive quantities to both Israel and Jordan."

The Hebrew blessing itself -- the English translation is "Blessed are You, King of the Universe, who makes the works of creation" -- is quite brief, its text the same as the blessing one is commanded to say upon seeing a natural wonder like lightning or the Grand Canyon. At its last scheduled recitation, back in 1981, Birchat Hachamah was virtually unheard of outside the Orthodox community. While approximately 300 "neo-chasidic" and "renewal" Jews, led by Orthodox rabbis Zalman Schachter and Shlomo Carlebach, commemorated the moment atop the Empire State Building, the event generated little media coverage, and most people who recited the blessing simply did so as a postscript to daily morning services in Orthodox synagogues. In 1953, according to Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, the ritual didn't even garner a mention in "The American Jewish Yearbook."

But that was before global warming became a household word, before the advent of a Jewish movement that has spawned "environmental bike rides," Jewish environmental curricula, Jewish organic farms, Jewish community-supported agriculture groups and even free-range, organic kosher poultry.

"There is no question that our relationship to the physical world and the sun is different than it was 28 years ago, let alone 2,000 years ago," says Nigel Savage, whose Jewish environmental group, Hazon, is organizing a sunrise ceremony on the roof of the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan. The Hazon event will also officially launch the Jewish Coalition for a Sustainable Upper West Side, a campaign pushing for more pedestrian- and bike-friendly policies in the neighborhood.

For Mr. Savage and other Jewish environmental activists, it makes sense to connect "blessing the sun with the power of the sun and with some understanding of how the sun's rays are affecting the planet in the 21st century."

The Teva Learning Center, a group that teaches about Judaism and the environment at Jewish day schools, summer camps and Hebrew schools, has dispatched a special "Birchat HaChama" bus. Running solely on reused vegetable oil, the bus has been visiting synagogues and Jewish community centers along the East Coast and in Ohio, sharing information not just about the sun blessing but also about a variety of environmentally friendly technologies, such as solar-powered ovens.

Teva's director, Nili Simhai, says the blessing provides an "opportunity to celebrate the abundance the Creator has given us and to appreciate the glory of the world we live in and to say, 'What are we doing with that abundance? Are we really using it wisely?'"

All of this is "a little bemusing" to Rabbi J. David Bleich, a Yeshiva University Talmud professor whose scholarly tome "Bircas HaChammah" was published in 1981 and re-released this year by the Orthodox Jewish publishing company ArtScroll Mesorah. According to Rabbi Bleich, environmental concerns are "issues in and of themselves and are totally unrelated to the blessing of the sun." He sees the blessing as an occasion to acknowledge the wonder of God's creations, not a political statement. "I suppose you can connect anything," he says. "You can draw dots and lines; you don't have to be logical."

But Brandeis's Mr. Sarna points out that the environmentalist remaking of the sun blessing mirrors the transformation over the past few decades of Tu b'Shvat, the Jewish "birthday of the trees," from a Zionist holiday to a sort of Jewish Earth Day. "Some will be unhappy with that, and others will understand that's a process as old as ritual itself," Mr. Sarna says. "When one looks at Jewish history, one finds there are rituals and practices that one generation discarded suddenly take on wonderful significance for a new generation."

Of course part of the modern appeal of this particular blessing is that it occurs so infrequently: only two or three times in a lifetime. Says Mr. Sarna, "It's far easier to observe a once-in-28-year ritual than a daily one."

Ms. Wiener writes "In the Mix," a column on interfaith relationships, for The New York Jewish Week.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123872560930985495.html>

April 4, 2009

US believers going green, hold media fast for Lent

By Virginie Montet

WASHINGTON (AFP) – From giving up their cars to abandoning their Facebook pages, many US Christians are being called on to help reduce global warming and turn their backs on Internet distractions over Lent.

"It's an insult to God, it's a sin to spoil the environment, to hurt creation," said Episcopalian pastor Reverend Sally Bingham, who is coordinating "The Regeneration Project," an interfaith group of some 4,000 congregations looking for a religious response to global warming.

During Lent, which began this year on February 25 and will end on April 11 the day before Easter, Christians are called to observe sacrifice and penance marking the time Jesus endured temptation when he wandered for 40 days in the desert.

The idea of a "green" Lent was launched last year by two British Anglican bishops, who called for a "carbon fast," Bingham told AFP.

"We sent an email to the 30,000 people on our mailing list and we suggested tips to try to be as environmentally friendly as you can be," she said.

Among the tips: giving up your car, turning down the heat or buying local.

"This year, I gave up meat. Last year, I turned off my heat. I had to wear a ski parka inside my house. My children would not visit, they thought I'd gone crazy," Bingham said.

Another Catholic group, the St Paul Newman Center in Fresno, California, is organizing a "Lent program on global warming."

"Lent is a time we focus on how we can really connect to God's presence in our life and do something that is sacrificial. For us, it's a look at how we care for the environment while sacrificing some comforts for ourselves," said Mary Hetherington, who helps teach the program.

The courses promote a "low-carbon diet" to reduce carbon emissions by 5,000 pounds (2,268 kilograms) in 40 days.

Among the lessons: dry your clothes on a clothesline instead of in a dryer, thus saving the equivalent of 100 pounds (45 kilograms) of carbon emissions.

"Try a media fast," suggests The Regeneration Project. "It can be very rewarding to turn off TV, computers and radios a few nights a week and sit down to a board game with your family."

An Italian bishop in Modena has called for giving up texting during Lent in order to "detoxify from the virtual world and become one again."

Across American universities, students are also giving up social networking websites like Facebook.

"The fundamental idea is to say if something is a distraction from prayer and fasting then to the extent possible, it should be given up," explained Paul Griffiths, a professor in Catholic theology at Duke Divinity School.

"It's not a sin, it's a distraction," he told AFP, adding that cyber asceticism is part of the traditions of the Catholic church, even though the Vatican has a YouTube channel and a website in eight languages.

The online discussion group "Give up Facebook for Lent" gives tips on how to avoid going online without missing virtual visits by "friends" on the 75 million-strong social networking website.

Nola Bozeman, a 42-year-old housewife in Apex, North Carolina, used to log on to Facebook every morning.

"It was becoming an obsession," she acknowledged. But she has now decided to deprive herself of the Internet.

"I thought if I spent half the amount of time I spend on Facebook in prayer or service, it would draw me closer to God."

<http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20090404/afp/lifestyleenvironmentusreligion>

April 8, 2009

The Carbon Tax: A Moral Issue

Father Paul Mayer
The Huffington Post

The recent announcement of two pieces of important clean energy legislation in the Congress have put the carbon tax versus cap-and-trade debate on the national front burner. This disagreement as to the most effective remedy to confront the climate change crisis may seem like just another controversy among Washington energy wonks. It is, in fact, a vital moral question that could help decide whether our planet's fate is life or death. Even in the midst of economic meltdown this crisis of our irreplaceable earth must be confronted.

The time has come for the communities of faith and for all those concerned about ethics to grasp the value of the carbon tax from this perspective. Exacting a financial penalty from those who are responsible for the scorching of the earth seems to be a requirement of any elemental morality.

The earth is sending us ever more insistent messages about its threatened future, messages that can no longer be ignored. All reliable scientific data is signaling with ever greater clarity that the global warming crisis is moving faster than previously believed and much faster than our leaders are willing to admit. Recently even scientists were alarmed that ocean levels are rising twice as quickly as previously predicted. Dr. James Hansen, Director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies of NASA and our nation's leading climate expert, insisted that we must reduce carbon emissions by the radical number of 80% by 2050 or face "global cataclysm" with rampant coastal

flooding, more powerful hurricanes, drought followed by famine, wholesale species extinction and tens of millions of environmental refugees.

One may still wonder how the seemingly mundane matter of paying a price for the emission of carbon dioxide can help defuse the greatest ticking time bomb of planetary history. This question is linked to the fact that never before has human activity been able to transform and disrupt the very chemistry and geology of planet earth -- perhaps irreversibly . It is this very activity, only stemming back a mere 250 years to the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, which must now be confronted, checked and paid for.

The dramatic moment has come when the human species because it is responsible for most of this damage, must radically reconsider its activity in the name of its own survival, along with that of millions of other life species. While the rapid reversal of this destructive human activity must include creating a green economy and clean energy strategy, it has to begin by stemming the carbon emissions at their source. Unless "homo carbonus" can be persuaded or compelled to cease and desist from the release of these poisonous emissions into our burdened atmosphere, all will be lost for future generations.

The primary producers of carbon are the coal and oil corporations, but include all the users of fossil fuel. American society leads the pack with the dubious distinction of representing less than 5% of the earth's population while being the locust-like consumers of more than 20% of global energy. It is here that this historic crisis must confront the question of levying a carbon tax on such dangerous -- perhaps criminal -- activity.

Some would argue -- and these include people of good will -- that these destructive emissions can be halted by a strategy passing under the elegant nomenclature of "cap-and-trade". This strategy has as many variations as the proverbial chameleon. Strange to say, most of them are based on the principle that the carbon perpetrators are not necessarily required to reduce their deadly activity. Rather they are given the option in a variety of forms of avoiding responsibility for their misdeeds by paying off another entity -- corporation or geographical area, often in a poor and desperate part of the earth -- to decrease their carbon production as their proxy.

Such a bizarre arrangement would seem to violate the most fundamental ethical principle of taking responsibility for one's own hurtful actions , first of all, by ceasing from them and then, where possible, making reparations. We teach this basic moral principle to our children that if, for example, they are hitting other children in the sand box, they must stop their actions and apologize to those hurt. It would not be acceptable to have them pay off one of their, perhaps poorer, playmates to lessen their violent activity against the kids on the playground in their stead.

The cap-and-trade idea also recalls the sale of indulgences by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, which was seized on by Martin Luther and became a major catalyst of the Protestant Reformation. It allowed the thief, the adulterer, the murderer and the defrauder of the poor to secure forgiveness of his sins by buying his way out of the allegedly purifying flames of Purgatory rather than demanding a radical change of his life to a true "path of righteousness". This mechanical financial transaction, rather than an authentic conversion to a life of goodness, fueled the righteous wrath of Luther and the other Reformers. The practice also unfairly favored

the rich, who could more easily afford to buy their way into Heaven. (Strangely enough, the Vatican has been talking about reviving indulgences.)

This same shell game informs many of the cap-and-trade practices as opposed to the simple moral principle that he who does the harm to the earth must also pay for it directly. In place of such a direct penalty this moral obligation cannot be traded or auctioned off to some other entity, including poor developing countries, who are paid off to proportionally reduce their carbon production in place of the original carbon perpetrators. As Archbishop Tutu recently wrote: "The polluter must pay."

A direct penalty fee or tax, on the other hand, let us say \$50 for every ton of carbon dioxide emitted, is a just way of reversing the destructive carbon path. It represents the environmental version of making up with all the bullied smaller kids in the global sand box. Instead of the questionable method of paying off another company or even bribing poor people to carry the load of the fossil fuel addiction of "developed" societies, the proceeds of such a tax could be equitably redistributed to the general public. The beneficiaries of the tax would include low income people, the elderly, single parents, the disabled and the middle class. It comes as no surprise that poor people and people of color have been strong supporters of a carbon tax over cap - and - trade solutions. Such a tax would also leap frog over the lobbyists and carbon traders whom cap - and -trade would make millionaires.

A carbon tax also has numerous practical advantages. These include a certain simplicity ,which would facilitate implementing such a tax rapidly and without protracted rule making. We cannot afford delays as we fight the environmental clock. It is also transparent, whereas a cap - and - trade process is more subject to manipulation and becoming another Ponzi scheme keeping the bottom line hidden from the public. The tax is also predictable, which offers great advantages to the business and commercial community. One hopes that these advantages will outweigh the misgivings, which legislators have about anything with the word "tax" in it as they consider the new bills before them.

The primary contributors to such a carbon fee would be the oil and coal companies and even enterprises indirectly dependent on fossil fuel . They would also include a hopefully more enlightened citizenry who would in effect be paying for their own emissions at the gas pump and the check out line but would also be benefiting by the proceeds. They would come to understand, as in many other countries, that higher gasoline prices will encourage the use of public transportation, bicycles and a more sustainable life style. We do so in the name of the earth and for our children and grandchildren. To them we might still leave a restored verdant earth home instead of a sterile moonscape planet devoid of life and hope.

One is moved by the beauty and prescience that Gerard Manley Hopkins, the mid - nineteenth century poet, left us in his magnificent "God's Grandeur". His words depict the stark impact of the Industrial Revolution on the natural world and yet leave us with hope in the power of the earth to restore herself:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

Father Paul Mayer
Co-Founder/Climate Crisis Coalition

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/father-paul-mayer/the-carbon-tax-a-moral-is_b_183823.html

April 8, 2009

Brazilian faces retrial over murder of environmental activist nun in Amazon

David Batty
The Guardian

A Brazilian court has ordered the arrest and retrial of an Amazon rancher acquitted of orchestrating the murder of American nun and rainforest activist, Dorothy Stang.

Para state's highest court threw out last year's verdict, which found Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura not guilty of the 2005 shooting of Stang, 73, who campaigned for 30 years to save the Amazon rainforest from the interests of wealthy landlords.

"We're elated and we are convinced we will get a guilty verdict in the new trial," said prosecutor Edson Souza.

Souza said Moura was charged with ordering Stang's murder but he had yet to be arrested.

Stang was shot six times at close range with a revolver in the small jungle city of Anapu. The nun, from Dayton, Ohio, spent three decades on the Amazon's wild frontier, working to preserve the rainforest and defend the rights of poor settlers whose lands were seized by powerful ranchers.

Her death prompted Amazon activists – more than 1,000 of whom have been murdered in the last 20 years – to demand Brazil's government crack down on the illegal seizure and clearance of the rainforest to graze cattle, raise soy crops and harvest timber.

"I am excited that perhaps Dorothy will find justice," David Stang, the nun's brother, wrote in an email to the Associated Press.

He has travelled from his home in Palmer Lake, Colorado, to Brazil several times to witness the trials. "All of us who love Brazil today are so proud of this great country, as would Dorothy be proud today," he wrote.

Prosecutors said Moura and rancher Regivaldo Galvao hired gunmen to kill Stang over a disputed plot of land.

Galvao, who denies the charge, was arrested in 2005 but was freed on bail in 2006.

Moura has already been tried twice in the case as Brazil has no double jeopardy law. He was found guilty by a state court in 2007 and sentenced to 30 years in prison. That ruling was overturned last year after the man who confessed to shooting Stang recanted his earlier testimony, insisting he had acted alone. Gunman Rayfran das Neves Sales was sentenced to 28 years in prison.

The court ruled yesterday that Moura and Sales must be retried because a video that Moura's defence showed the jury was inadmissible.

That video depicting Amair Feijoli da Cunha, who was jailed for 17 years for acting as the middleman between the gunman and the ranchers, was made while he was in prison and without a judge's approval.

The video, made by the defence team, showed Cunha saying that Moura had nothing to do with the case. He had testified earlier that Moura paid the hired gunmen.

Para court officials said no date had been set for the trials of Moura or Sales.

More than 1,100 activists, small farmers, judges, priests and other rural workers have been killed in land disputes in the last two decades, according to the Catholic Land Pastoral, a Brazilian watchdog group.

Of those killings, fewer than 100 cases have gone to court. About 80 convicted suspects were hired gunmen for powerful ranchers and loggers seeking to expand their lands, according to federal prosecutors and the watchdog.

About 15 of the men who hired them were found guilty but none of them are serving a sentence today.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/08/brazilian-murder-dorothy-stang>

April 10, 2009

Eco-Christians are wary of carbon sin

Market Place -- Public Radio

A group of Christians staying vigilant over their carbon footprint for Lent is just one example of what the religious sect is doing to stay conscious of their eco-impact. Jennifer Collins reports on

the effectiveness of a carbon fast. Listen to this story:

http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/04/10/am_eco_christians/

TEXT OF STORY

Steve Chiotakis: And on this Christian holy day, this weekend marks the end of Lent. It's a time when many Christians stay away from meat, sweets or alcohol. But some have gone on a 40-day eco-fast. From the Marketplace Sustainability Desk, Jennifer Collins reports.

Jennifer Collins: For lent this year, Mary Hetherington went on a carbon fast. She bought organic produce, she paid for a high-level cleaning of her furnace, and she learned a lesson:

Mary Hetherington: It's a little bit more expensive sometimes to be more conscious of what you're buying.

Hetherington also helped lead a class of more than 20 people at her parish in Fresno, Calif. Instead of just cutting out meat on Fridays, they tried to trim their carbon emissions everyday. She's one of many Christians around the globe going eco-friendly for Lent this year.

Businesses are starting to notice. Marketing consultant David Almy says Christians are talking much more about sustainable consumption:

David Almy: Any time you hear about any group getting ready to go green it's exciting. So does that mean priests will start hearing: Bless me father for my carbon footprint is too large?

Hetherington: I don't know that I would actually count that as one of the things that I would go into confession on at this point.

But Hetherington says she plans to make the carbon fast a permanent part of life.

I'm Jennifer Collins for Marketplace.

http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/04/10/am_eco_christians/

April 10, 2009

Tax on carbon emissions could speed development of alternative energy

By Paul H. Carr

Dr. James E. Hansen, speaking at New Hampshire Statehouse on April 2, put it this way: "We have to figure out how to live without fossil fuels someday. Why not now, before we have destroyed the creation?"

Hansen, director of the NASA Goddard Space Science Institute and professor at Columbia University, spoke as private citizen.

He showed a photo of Lake Mead, which is only half full. The Colorado River, like other great rivers of the world, such as the Ganges, is fed by melting snow from glaciers, which have been receding due to global warming. These glaciers will disappear in 50 years, leaving hundreds of millions of people worldwide without fresh water.

The ice cover of Greenland is melting more each year. If it melts completely, sea levels will rise 20 feet, flooding Portsmouth and other coastal cities.

Warmer temperatures are caused by increases in carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels, which could reach a point of no return. Within decades, CO₂ could reach 450 parts per million. Above this level, Antarctic ice will be on its way to disappearing completely. The Antarctic was ice-free millions of years ago, when sea levels were hundreds of feet higher than now.

Coal burning is the biggest contributor to increases in carbon dioxide levels. A moratorium on building new coal plants without carbon sequestration and a phasing out of present ones will enable our earth to recover a sustainable CO₂ level of 350 ppm.

New Hampshire is presently considering spending \$457 million on a scrubber to remove air pollutants from its coal-fired electricity plant in Bow. If this were installed, the plant would still emit 3.7 million tons of carbon dioxide annually, which is 20 percent of New Hampshire's total emission. Following Hansen's plan to save our planet, we should phase out the plant. By 2012, New Hampshire will have an equivalent capacity of 711 megawatts available from new hydro, wind and sustainable wood-burning plants.

Each year, several hundred thousand people in the world die of air pollution from coal. If that many people died from a nuclear plant malfunction, we would shut them all down.

To make Hansen's plan to save our planet economically viable, he urged levying a tax on carbon emissions with a 100 percent dividend. All the dividend money from the tax will be returned to the public, equal shares on a per capita basis. This will motivate conservation so that the money individuals receive from the dividend will exceed the added cost of energy from fossil fuels. There will be no price increase on sustainable energy sources, including nuclear.

Such a tax will give economic incentive to speed the development of wind and solar resources. They are non-polluting, free and will last until the sun burns out billions of years from now. Installation and maintenance will create new jobs. There is enough solar energy falling on the deserts of the Southwest to power the whole United States.

In response to a question about nuclear power, Hansen advocated research on fourth generation nuclear plants. Present ones use only 1 percent of the potential nuclear energy available. The waste has to be stored for centuries. He also recommended research on the sequestering coal-generated CO₂. Right now, there is no such thing as "clean coal."

More information is available on Hansen's Web page, www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/. Clicking on "Tell Barack Obama the Truth – The Whole Truth" is recommended.

Bedford resident Paul H. Carr, Ph. D., is an emeritus member of the AF Research Laboratory.

<http://www.cabinet.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/NS/20090410/BEDFORD04/304109982/-1/bedford04>

April 14, 2009

Eco-Islam: Malaysia's Imams to preach against poaching

Malaysia's Muslim preachers have been enlisted in the fight for wildlife conservation, using passages from the Koran to raise awareness and help protect some of the world's most endangered species.

After a successful campaign last year, when more than 400 mosques in the state of [Terengganu](#) held sermons focusing on turtle conservation issues, WWF decided to extend the project to support efforts to tackle poaching.

The conservation group is running workshops for local imams, explaining the importance of wildlife protection.

“There are several passages within the Koran which talk about the responsibility of humans in protecting our environment and wildlife,” said Umi A’ Zuhrah from the [Tiger Conservation Programme at WWF-Malaysia](#).

“Religious leaders are very influential and greatly respected in this community, so they are the best people to carry this message across.”

The Malaysian peninsula is home to some of the world's most amazing and threatened wildlife including the [Sumatran rhinos](#), [Malayan tigers](#) and [Asian elephants](#). But these, and many other species in the region, are under increasing threat due to poaching and the demand for their body parts in the illegal wildlife trade.

All created by God

Poaching is arguably the biggest threat to tigers in Malaysia, with the current population estimated at about 500, down from 3,000 almost 50 years ago. Tigers are poached for their parts, which often end up in traditional chinese medicine shops and exotic meat restaurants in Malaysia and other neighbouring countries.

The newly modified sermons will be read at 21 mosques in the district of [Jeli, Kelantan](#), in June this year and will talk about the need to stop illegal hunting and reduce human-wildlife conflict using specific passages from the Koran

“We hope that religious-based initiatives such as these will complement our monitoring and anti-poaching efforts to conserve Malaysia’s endangered wildlife,” Umi A’Zuhrah said.

Questionnaire surveys developed by WWF-Malaysia for those who heard the previous sermons indicated an increase in their levels of concern for turtle conservation.

“In Islam, the conservation of the environment is based on the principle that all individual components of the environment were created by God, and that all living things were created by the Almighty Creator,” Mawil Y. Izzi Deen says in an essay called ‘Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law and Society’.

“In fact, we are encouraged not to exploit the non-human world (natural environment and animals).”

http://www.panda.org/wwf_news/news/?162082/Eco-Islam-Malaysias-Imams-to-preach-against-poaching

April 18, 2009

Survey finds pastors split politically on global warming

By Christopher Quinn
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Christian ministers are sharply divided over global warming along conservative and moderate to liberal lines just as they are in politics.

A poll of more than 1,000 ministers conducted last October by Southern Baptist-connected LifeWay Research shows a significant difference, with 75 percent of mainline pastors, such as Presbyterians and Methodists, saying global warming is real and caused by man. Only 32 percent of pastors serving conservative churches believe that.

Another poll by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life shows the division is less distinct in the pew. Forty-eight percent of white, mainline Protestant members believe global warming is real and caused by man, but only 34 percent of white evangelicals and 39 percent of black Protestants do.

About the same percentage of more liberal (19 percent) and conservative (17 percent) white Christians believe global warming is real, but is part of a natural pattern. Ed Stetzer, the director of Lifeway Research, pointed out a parallel with political affiliations.

“Mainline clergy answer the question with similar numbers to self-identified Democrats and liberals in surveys of the general public. Evangelical clergy answer the question in similar percents to Republicans and conservatives,” Stetzer noted in a written statement.

www.pewforum.org

<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/printedition/2009/04/18/warming0418.html>

April 19, 2009

Climate refugees in Pacific flee rising sea

Kristina Stefanova
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

MELBOURNE, Australia | Rising sea levels blamed on climate change are taking a toll on island nations in the South Pacific, with the world's first climate refugees beginning a migration that is likely to continue for decades to come.

Inhabitants of parts of New Guinea and Tuvalu have already been forced to moved from low-lying areas.

New Zealand has agreed to accept migrants from Tuvalu, which experts think will be completely submerged by the middle of the century. Canada is funding the relocation of residents from parts of Vanuatu affected by global warming.

Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization warned in a recent report that the Pacific region is particularly vulnerable.

It warned of coastal communities already being inundated by rising seas, the loss of wetlands and coral bleaching, as well as an increase in disease and heat-related mortality resulting from climate change.

"Communities all over the Pacific are alarmed at coastal erosion and the advancing sea levels," said Diane McFadzien, the South Pacific's regional climate change coordinator with the World Wildlife Fund. "We are already seeing signs of whole villages having to relocate ... or important cultural sites such as burial grounds in Fiji being eroded."

The Pacific islands comprise 22 nations with 7 million residents.

The rising sea and eroding beaches caused the recent forced displacement of the people of the Carteret Islands, about 70 miles northeast of Papua New Guinea. The islands' 2,500 residents are moving to one of Papua New Guinea's larger towns, Bougainville.

Extreme weather has increased in frequency and ferocity in recent years in Papua New Guinea. A flood in Oro Province in November 2007 killed 70 people and destroyed nearly all roads and bridges.

In the Indian Ocean, the Maldives, a chain of 1,200 islands and coral atolls that sits about 6 feet above sea level, has long been a favorite honeymoon destination. Estimates released at the Copenhagen International Climate Congress in February say the sea could swallow most or all of the islands by the year 2100.

The world's first climate refugees are thought to be the 500,000 inhabitants of Bhola Island in Bangladesh, who were left homeless after half of the island became permanently flooded in 2005.

Inhabitants of another island in the Bay of Bengal, Kutubdia, are now homeless after the island lost almost 4 square miles of land, shrinking it from its original size of almost 10 square miles, according to the Equity and Justice Working Group, an environmental organization.

The group recently said that some 30 million people in 19 of 64 districts along the southern coastline of Bangladesh have already been exposed to extreme weather, rising sea levels and river erosion.

Equity's estimates are more dire than the U.N.-backed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which estimates that 22 million people in Bangladesh will be forced from their homes by 2050 because of climate change.

A migration of such magnitude can have real-life implications for national budgets, international law and immigration policies.

India is building a fence along its porous 2,500-mile border with Bangladesh, hoping to stop the flow of migrants, many displaced by changes in climate.

Semantics has become part of the equation, as politicians debate what to call victims of global warming - refugees or migrants. Governments tend to prefer migrants, while international aid and environmental groups opt for refugees.

The debate over the definitions has real consequences, said Kathleen Newland of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington.

"This distinction between the obligation owed toward a refugee in contrast to other people who are in trouble - even desperate trouble - is why the terminology matters," she said.

It will be difficult for wealthier countries with lots of space to open their doors to people running from climate change, Ms. Newland added.

"I think it is much more likely that, if the rich do anything, they will try to work through governments and international organizations to meet their humanitarian needs in the short run

and to help people adapt to the changed circumstances in the long run," she said. "If climate change is very rapid and extreme, these efforts are likely to be far from adequate."

Activist groups argue that wealthy countries have a moral obligation because they produce the most greenhouse-gas emissions, which most, but not all, scientists say causes global warming.

Pacific island nations contribute less than half a percent of global emissions, yet they are three times more vulnerable to climate change than other countries, according to the IPCC.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/apr/19/rising-sea-levels-in-pacific-create-wave-of-migran/>

April 20, 2009

Stewards of Creation: A Catholic approach to climate change

William S. Skylstad

Earth Day, April 22, will mark the unveiling of "The Catholic Climate Covenant," an initiative of the three-year-old Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, which represents 12 organizations, one of which is the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The covenant includes what is being called the St. Francis Pledge to Protect Creation and the Poor, inspired by the saint's "Canticle of the Sun," which praises creation in the form of earth, water and creatures. St. Francis of Assisi is an important model for another reason as well: he uniquely links care of creation and care of the poor.

"God's creation is good and it is one," Pope Benedict said last August in Australia at World Youth Day, as he introduced the theme of protecting God's creation. Benedict declared that sustainable development and care for our environment are "of vital importance for humanity." Then he framed the moral dimensions of environmental justice and care for creation in the form of a challenge to the "brutal consumption of creation," where the whole is treated merely as "our property" that we consume "for ourselves alone." Benedict cautioned that effective initiatives to prevent the destruction of creation can be developed and implemented, but "only where creation is considered as beginning with God."

In the United States, a growing awareness of climate change and its consequences can be seen in private and public efforts to conserve energy. State governments are introducing bills and forming policies to reduce fossil fuel emissions and are crafting incentives for homeowners and businesses to conserve and to consider renewable energy alternatives. The president and Congress are making similar proposals at the national level, setting off a major debate over how best to respond to the complexities of climate change. In a debate dominated by environmental groups, scientists and alternative energy entrepreneurs on the one hand, and by utilities, agribusiness, coal and oil companies and others with vested interests on the other hand, the Catholic Church and Christian interfaith leaders are lifting up the moral and human dimensions of climate change. Our Christian faith calls us to bring together the biblical mandate to care for

the “garden” (Gn 1:28-30) and also to care “for the least of these” (Mt 25). As our nation deliberates about future policies, American Catholics offer a distinctive position that combines care for God’s creation with protection for those who are poor and vulnerable.

The church is by no means setting itself against science on this issue. Rather, the church relies on scientific research. “With increasing clarity, scientific research demonstrates that the impact of human actions in any one place or region can have worldwide effects,” Pope Benedict wrote in a letter to the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (Sept. 1, 2007). The pope went on to note that the consequences of disregard for the environment “always harm human co-existence” and “betray human dignity and violate the rights of citizens who desire to live in a safe environment....” The U.S. Catholic bishops have expressed similar views in their own statements; on climate change the bishops accept the scientific evidence and conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Climate change is largely a consequence of the way the world has undertaken industrialization, used and abused natural resources for energy (transportation, heating and cooling) and neglected the resulting pollution and other adverse effects on the fragile ecosystems of the planet. Its adverse effects are global. The nations, particularly the industrialized nations, must now find remedies.

Pope Benedict’s sophisticated understanding of these issues is apparent in the same letter, where he discusses a responsibility that industrialized countries and those becoming more industrialized share. “While it is true that industrializing countries are not morally free to repeat the past errors of others by recklessly continuing to damage the environment,” he wrote, “it is also of the case that highly industrialized countries must share ‘clean technologies’ and ensure that their own markets do not sustain demands for goods whose very production contributes to the proliferation of pollution.”

Climate change is already affecting the planet and its people in very real ways. And the adverse effects could make life more difficult for those least able to cope with the consequences of climate change (see the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report, available online). While not every weather-related natural disaster can be directly linked to climate change, it is clear from those who are studying climate change that weather disruptions—prolonged droughts, more intense rains, melting glaciers, and so on—will become more common.

Two years ago, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change held a hearing at the request of the Alaskan bishops. An elder from the Inuit village of Newtok told the participants how his village now regularly floods in the fall because the sea ice is forming later and later, allowing stormswells up the nearby river. State and federal funds are being used to relocate the village to higher ground. But think of all the places on earth where such resources are not available. What happens to those people, their livelihoods, their families, neighbors and friends?

Many scientists warn that African nations now feel the brunt of the negative impact of climate change and that they will continue to do so. In Ethiopia, nearly one-fifth of the population (12 million people) is currently receiving food aid due to chronic drought. Breaking the cycle of

drought and starvation has always been difficult in this part of the world, but new and more plentiful resources will be needed to respond to humanitarian crises like this—mitigating the impact of climate change—and also for adaptation efforts that help poor nations cope in the long term with an altered climate.

These examples highlight the need to reduce the level of our own greenhouse gas emissions through new technology and energy efficiencies and to share these new ways with the poorest countries around the world. Our nation must demonstrate leadership in helping developing nations grow their economies in more environmentally sustainable ways.

Working Behind the Scenes

Since the moral and human dimensions are often neglected or missing in the dialogue over how to respond to climate change, the Catholic community and its interfaith partners have a duty to speak for the voiceless and to bring together issues of social justice and environmental stewardship. This is the mission of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Environmental Justice Program and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment.

On this issue the Catholic community took an early lead. Seven years ago, the U.S. Catholic bishops adopted an unprecedented statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*. In it the bishops insisted that responses to climate change be guided by the following: prudence, which requires wise action now to address problems that will grow in magnitude and consequence; “bold and generous action on behalf of the common good,” rather than in compliance with narrow interests; and a clear priority for the poor, who bear the greatest burdens and pay the greatest price for the consequences of climate change.

“At its core, global climate change is not simply about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures,” the bishops wrote. “Rather, global climate change 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 U.S.C.B is leading efforts with other members of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment to help shape the climate change legislation before Congress. Without that collective voice, key provisions that address the poverty dimensions of climate change would have been weakened or eliminated from the first climate change legislation to be debated (but not adopted) by the Senate. The partnership is still working to ensure that the new legislation includes provisions to protect poor people in the United States who face rising energy costs, and also provisions to assist developing countries in adapting to the negative effects of climate change. In mid-February hundreds of Catholic leaders went to Capitol Hill as part of a Catholic Social Ministry Gathering to make this specific case with their senators and representatives.

The Covenant and the Pledge

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, as noted above, is also launching a practical education and action initiative. Individual Catholics, families, parishes, schools, religious

communities, dioceses and other Catholic organizations are invited to take the St. Francis Pledge and join The Catholic Climate Covenant. The covenant provides concrete ways of responding to Scripture and Catholic teaching, while demonstrating a concern for both the planet and its people. Through a new Web site, video and ad campaign with outreach to dozens of cooperating national organizations, Catholics are being asked to take the pledge and agree to: *pray and reflect* on the duty to care for God's creation and protect the poor and vulnerable; *learn about and educate* others on the moral dimensions of climate change; *assess our participation*—as individuals and organizations—in contributing to climate change; *act to change choices and behaviors* that contribute to climate change; and *advocate Catholic principles and priorities* in discussions and in decision making on climate change, especially as it affects the poor and vulnerable. A new Web site (<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate>) will provide concrete ways for Catholics to fulfill their pledge.

With Pope Benedict's strong voice, with clear leadership by the U.S. Catholic bishops, by joining together in The Catholic Climate Covenant and the St. Francis Pledge, and by reclaiming our ancient traditions of caring for creation and for God's people, especially the poor, the Catholic community will play an increasingly important role in addressing climate change. It is one way of demonstrating true solidarity with our brothers and sisters on a finite yet abundant planet.

Bishop William S. Skylstad *is the bishop of Spokane, past president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and a current member of the bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace.*

http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11600

April 21, 2009

Catholic Climate Covenant seeks aid for world's poor

By Jonathan Hiskes

Citing dual obligations to care for God's creation and the world's poor, a broad coalition of Catholic groups today announced a new commitment to take action on climate change.

The "St. Francis Pledge," named after the patron saint of animals and ecology, urges Catholics to pray for those affected by climate change, learn about the problem, and take steps to reduce their own consumption and advocate for climate legislation that protects the world's most vulnerable people.

"Our cars and power plants, more energy consumption and waste—we're leaving a bigger carbon footprint," reads a statement on the [website of the umbrella group](#), the Catholic Climate Covenant. "Scientists tell us that means more climate change. Here and around the world, it is the poor who will be hit hardest. With more droughts, floods, hunger and joblessness. As faithful Catholics, we have a moral obligation to care for both Creation and the poor. Pope Benedict XVI

insists, ‘Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions’ to curb climate change.”

The group printed a similar message in [an ad](#) [PDF] on the *New York Times* op-ed page today. The campaign’s participants include the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Catholic Charities; the Catholic Health Association of the United States; Catholic Relief; the National Catholic Education Association; and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

“What brings all these groups together are the Biblical call to be stewards of God’s creation and Jesus’ mandate to care ‘for the least of these,’” Bishop William Skylstad, the campaign’s honorary chair, said in a prepared statement. “This prophetic connection in the life and example of St. Francis has fresh meaning for our response to the crisis of global climate change.”

The pledge does not endorse specific legislation or suggest specific personal actions, although it seeks to include measures to protect the world’s poor in U.S. climate legislation. (Check out the campaign’s video [on its site](#) or below.)

Neither does the campaign mention birth control, long a contentious issue between Catholic leaders and those environmentalists who believe population growth must be curbed. A reporter asked about population control during a conference call with organizers today. Bishop Skylstad said the global population was less important to the earth’s climate than the amount of resources humanity uses.

While environmental stewardship has deep roots in the [Catholic Social Teaching](#) tradition, evangelical Christians have made more news in recent years in [advocating for](#) and [against](#) action on climate change. (Grist’s 2006 special series on [God & the Environment](#) found much more hubbub on the issue from evangelicals.)

The emphasis in today’s announcement on the “least of these” who will be most harmed by climate change also jibes with Pope John Paul II’s widely quoted [message](#) from 1990:

“When the ecological crisis is set within the broader context of *the search for peace* within society, we can understand better the importance of giving attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us: namely, that there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations. I wish to repeat that *the ecological crisis is a moral issue.*”

Pope Benedict XVI [mentioned](#) “disturbing climate change” among his concerns in his Easter message to the world last week.

Grist’s Kate Sheppard contributed to this story.

For the video version of the campaign announcement, visit:

April 21, 2009

Catholics Organize Against Climate Change

By Cornelia Dean
New York Times
Dot Earth Blog

American Catholics should “live our faith confronting the impact of climate change,” especially its impact on the world’s poor, Bishop William S. Skylstad of Spokane said Tuesday. He was announcing the creation of the Catholic Climate Covenant, a coalition of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and other Roman Catholic organizations that have pledged to work on the issue.

Speaking in a conference call, Bishop Skylstad said the coalition unites “two fundamental principles and two religious obligations: to care for God’s creation and to do so in ways that care for the poor and vulnerable.”

Participants in the call said the group hoped to accomplish that by encouraging the nation’s Catholics to take the “St. Francis Pledge” to pray for those affected by climate change, reflect on environmental stewardship, reduce their own energy use and to lobby elected officials for action.

John Carr, who heads the Conference of Bishops’ department of justice, peace and human rights, said the new coalition does not support any specific legislation but rather insists that whatever action is taken include relief for poor people in this country and abroad. For example, if a cap-and-trade system for carbon is enacted, he said, perhaps 7 to 10 percent of the revenue produced “could go to international mitigation and adaptation.”

John Zogby, a polling official who took part in the call, said a new survey of 1,001 American Catholics showed that they accept that climate change is “an important problem” and that “we need to act now before it is too late.”

He added, “Catholics are a very large swing vote, and it is apparent that Catholics have swung on this issue.”

Other than lobbying legislators, there was little discussion of practical steps that individual Catholics might take to lesson their carbon footprints.

Elaine Bauer, vice president for planning at the Catholic Health Association of the United States, said the group would work to reduce energy use at its hospitals and other facilities. In general, she said, medical facilities use twice as much energy per square foot as office buildings.

Population is expected to grow most in the world's poor countries, even as people there aspire to adopt the energy-intensive practices of the industrial world. Yet Bishop Skylstad rejected the idea that the Church's opposition to birth control would be a roadblock to effective action on climate change. "The problem is not the number of people," he said, but rather that countries like the United States "consume a disproportionate share of the Earth's bounty."

<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/21/catholic-post/>

April 21, 2009

A New Genesis: Getting World Religions to Worship Ecologically

By Tom Jacobs
Miller-McCune

In 1967, historian Lynn White wrote an influential [essay](#) in which he argued religion — and Christianity in particular — bore fundamental responsibility for the sad state of the natural environment. Christianity, he wrote, "insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" — a mission that humans have enthusiastically carried out over the centuries with ever-increasing technical sophistication.

"Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious," White concluded, "the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not."

Forty-two years later, many prominent spiritual leaders — including the current pope and his [predecessor](#) — have taken up White's challenge, forcefully declaring that protecting the environment is a moral issue. But in spite of their pronouncements, the state of the environment seems even more perilous, with ecologists warning of decreasing [biodiversity](#) and the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change. Living green may now be part of official doctrine, but the message hasn't quite made it from the pulpit to the pew.

So are the world's religious traditions — which define and shape the fundamental mythologies humans live by — a help or a hindrance in the fight to save the Earth? Two prominent scholars, who have studied the subject in depth, have different views. [John Grim](#), co-coordinator of Yale University's [Forum on Religion and Ecology](#), is optimistic. [Bron Taylor](#), editor of the [Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature](#) and a professor of environmental studies at the University of Florida, is considerably less so.

"Individuals who have been working with environmental issues for decades — both scientists and those working at it from a policy angle — are asking why we haven't seen a transformation in the larger populace," Grim said. "Although people identify themselves as environmentally concerned, this often doesn't show up (in changed behavior such as) reduced consumption or energy use. Some deeper motivation is needed to make the turn. Religions can play a role in terms of this transformation of consciousness."

“There is reason to believe that religion is a significant and negative variable contributing to the degradation of ecosystems globally,” said Taylor. “I’m as yet unconvinced that these traditions can be changed enough, and rapidly enough, to ameliorate the current rapid decline in the genetic and species variety of the planet.”

The underlying issue was probably best defined by poet and essayist [Robert Bly](#), who has been writing about man’s ravenous relationship with the environment for decades. “We’re still living a mythology of abundance,” he said in a recent interview. “Now it turns out we have found out the limits of the world’s resources, so we need a different mythology — a mythology of preservation.”

That will require the major faith traditions to shift their focus, at least in part, from the hereafter to the here-and-now. The notion that man is uniquely made in God’s image and thus set apart from nature will have to be abandoned. For all its disputes with Darwinism, religion will have to evolve.

Grim has devoted much of his life to facilitating that process. Along with his wife, fellow Yale scholar [Mary Evelyn Tucker](#), he organized a series of 10 conferences on religion and ecology in the late 1990s, later publishing the resulting papers in a series of books. Last year, the couple traveled to China, where they laid the framework for doing similar work in that rapidly developing (and extremely polluted) nation.

“We had conversations with Pan Yue, China’s vice minister for the environment,” Grim said. “He put it to us this way: ‘We have the environmental laws on the books, but we’re not able to enforce them because there is no environmental culture in China.’ He sees that it’s not going to be possible to bring in an ethics from the West. It needs to come out of the local soil. The seeds are there.”

Taylor isn’t so sure. “The greening of religion is much more pronounced in the Western world than in Asia, despite the stereotypes of some that Buddhism or Taoism are innately environmentally friendly,” he said. “There is no evidence of that.”

In contrast, Taylor notes there is a long-standing tradition in the Western faiths that man should be good stewards of the earth. (Think of St. Francis of Assisi.) “There are biblical passages that do express delight and wonder at nature,” he said. “So the interesting question is why this has so seldom animated participants in these religions.”

Part of Grim’s mission has been to tease out those eco-friendly biblical verses — and similar passages from other sacred texts — and find ways to apply them to today’s reality. He cites three examples of progress in aligning spiritual with ecological impulses:

- The Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, of the Greek Orthodox Church has coined the term “[ecological sin](#),” referring to a deliberate act of despoiling the environment.

- Hindus in India consider certain heavily polluted rivers sacred, and this paradox — how do you perform sacred rituals using unclean water? — has generated environmental activism.
- In the U.K., and increasingly in the U.S., evangelical Christians "have begun to use language within their tradition" to address the issue of environmental [creation care](#).

Taylor agreed that "green evangelicals" are beginning to have some impact lobbying like-minded legislators on environmental issues. He said some make the argument that the story of Noah's ark reflects God's belief in the importance of biodiversity. (Remember, he considered it essential to get every species on board, even if it meant killing off quite a few humans in the flood.)

Taylor cautions, however, that evangelical ecological awareness is a "fledgling" movement, and notes that "in one way or another," all the major religions "are about divine rescue from this world" and define the religious worldview as one in which "the most sacred place is otherworldly rather than earthly, which fundamentally devalues, if implicitly, the biosphere."

"The deeper question about remedies is not whether ancient religious forms can reform and thus provide these remedies, but whether new forms of nature-related spirituality might emerge that cohere with a modern evolutionary/ecological worldview, and could provide a basis for environmental concern and action," he said. "I believe there is strong evidence that such religion is emerging and gathering strength."

Taylor will explore this emerging movement in his book *Dark Green Religion*, which will be released by the University of California Press in the fall.

"I'm agreeing with Bly (on the need for a new mythology), but I'm more optimistic than he is about the emergence of mythic forms that cohere with modern, empirical understandings of the origin and diversity of life on the planet — one that would recognize our interdependence with one another and all of these different organisms," he said. "I see this happening outside the traditional religions, but I see this kind of thinking and feeling influencing some within those religions."

Taylor believes these "post-Darwinian religious forms" will look a lot like the traditional religions that flourished before the Judeo-Christian traditions, such as [animism](#) (which views the natural world as enspirited) and [pantheism](#) (which considers the biosphere "part of a divine intelligence"). "All over the world, people are articulating, developing and promoting such spiritualities, sometimes without even knowing it — just by doing the work they do," he said.

But can this shift in thinking occur quickly enough to move us off of our current, potentially tragic trajectory? Probably not, according to Taylor, who paints a dark picture of a 21st century marked by environmental catastrophes and resulting refugee crises.

"It may take this tragic scenario for people to conclude that these ancient wisdom traditions are not up to the task of helping us figure out how to live in a humane and prosperous way, and we need a new world view," he said. "But the intellectual work on this new world view is well under way."

Grim sees this transformation occurring within existing spiritual structures, as traditional religions reclaim a realm they abandoned long ago.

"Many of the traditions, in their ancient expressions, (focused on three) mediations: human to human, human to divine and human to earth," he said. "But in the Western traditions especially, the human-to-earth exchange was overwhelmed by the emergence of science and technology. The understanding of reality was subsumed by science, and religion retreated from that realm.

"I believe what we're seeing today is the re-entry of religion into the understanding of cosmology. Religions are beginning to re-engage that question of 'What is the nature of reality?'"

Taylor believes that question can be satisfyingly answered by a new spirituality that conforms with the truths revealed by science. As he sees it, this new or reformed religion would "consider nature sacred in some way; view all life forms as having intrinsic value, and being worthy of reverence and defense; and generally express a kinship ethic — a sense that all organisms are related.

"We should be careful not to assume that myth or religion will be the decisive variable that will change behavior," Taylor cautioned. "It may be the fundamental material conditions of life that will be the most decisive."

"Religions are necessary for many who are making the transition to a more sustainable lifestyle, but religions in themselves are not sufficient," Grim agreed. "They need to be in dialogue with environmental science and policy communities."

But Taylor added that, in the long run, a new or reformed sense of spirituality could have "an important and salutary influence" on the future of our species and our planet. St. Francis — who White praised as "the greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history" — would surely agree.

http://www.miller-mccune.com/culture_society/a-new-genesis-getting-world-religions-to-worship-ecologically-1157A

April 23, 2009

Catholics Go Green

John Zogby
Forbes.com

Any researcher worth their salt will tell you that a person's values form the basis for their opinions on most public issues. That's why it is very important to pay attention when a large religious group expresses consistent majority positions on public policy issues. It tells us that these views are firmly held and unlikely to change.

So it is with Catholics and climate change. In a survey of Catholics timed to coincide with the April 22 celebration of Earth Day, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change contracted Zogby International to do a telephone survey of 1,001 Catholics. We asked 60 questions, and found convincing evidence that Catholics see climate change as a serious problem and say they are prepared to act in ways that solve the problem.

The political/electoral key here is not that Catholics hold these views per se. I don't really see being Catholic as a very good predictor of voter behavior. However, the largest segment of Catholics is made up of ethnically European whites, and it is a significant swing vote. Another 20% of Catholics are Hispanics, the nation's fastest-growing ethnic group, and the group in our sample most likely to agree on the need for action on climate change.

Here are some of the key findings of this poll of Catholics:

--59% agree that human activity is contributing significantly to global climate change.

--58% say global climate change is an urgent problem that must be addressed now, and 66% say we should act now even though we don't know everything about climate change.

--42% say climate change will negatively affect themselves and their families, and majorities say that the poor in the U.S. (53%), poor people around the world (60%) and future generations (66%) will be negatively affected.

--Majorities make the connection between their faith and their attitudes and actions on climate change. For example, 85% say their faith calls on them to care for God's creations. Also, 60% say their faith requires that they consider how their actions and choices may contribute to climate change, and 51% say their faith calls on them to support public and government policies that address its causes and impacts.

--Large percentages agree that God calls on them to be good stewards of creation (76%) and that they show respect for God by taking care of God's creations (83%).

These are positions that follow the current teachings of Catholic leaders. However, our survey found that specific statements by those leaders did not seem to be the reason Catholics hold those views. Only 31% were aware of statements on the environment made by Pope Benedict XVI or Pope John Paul II, and 35% knew about similar statements by their pastors or other pastors.

What are the political ramifications of these views, both in terms of public policy and within the church? As noted, Catholics are part of a large swing vote, and they have swung on this issue. They make up approximately 27% of the electorate as measured in national exit polls.

The other implication is within the Catholic Church. Our data shows Catholics are ready to be led on this issue, especially the young, who are the most likely to care about the environment. If church leaders want to bring them into the pews, they would do well to emphasize climate change over sexual issues such as homosexuality, birth control and abortion.

In terms of how these pro-environmental attitudes actually impact the course of climate change, talk is of course cheap. However, we are seeing real changes in behavior. Look no further than all of the "go green" retail marketing and product creation.

As far back as 2005, our Zogby polling found that 39% of all respondents said it was important to them that a product be environmentally friendly. In 2007, as cited in my book, *The Way We'll Be*, we found majorities taking these measures: turning off lights when leaving (89%), lowering the heat and air conditioning (86%) and using less water (60%). We have every reason to believe those numbers are increasing.

Looking at the bigger picture, environmental concerns fold neatly into the new American paradigm of wanting to live a simpler, more meaningful and sustainable life in a world we hope will share those values. There is a huge political and consumer market for those ready to appeal to these values, and Catholics are among the most eager buyers.

All this issue needs is leadership and a call for a higher purpose.

John Zogby is president and CEO of Zogby International and the author of [The Way We'll Be: The Zogby Report on the Transformation of the American Dream](#). He writes a [weekly column](#) for Forbes.

<http://www.forbes.com/2009/04/22/catholics-climate-change-opinions-columnists-john-zogby.html>

April 27, 2009

Prince Charles discusses environment with pope

By Frances d'Emilio
The Associated Press

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI and Prince Charles discussed their mutual concern for the environment as the heir to the British throne brought his campaign to fight climate change to the Vatican on Monday.

Charles, accompanied by his wife, Camilla, looked relaxed but the Duchess of Cornwall appeared less so in a private meeting in the pope's private library. The couple sat across a wooden table from Benedict for the 15-minute conversation in English.

It was Charles' first visit with the pontiff since Benedict was elected pope in 2005. The prince and his late wife Diana had met with John Paul II, whom Benedict succeeded.

Charles and Camilla postponed their wedding by a day in 2005 so he could attend John Paul's funeral in St. Peter's Square.

"He was a wonderful man," Charles told the pope as he left the library. "We miss him terribly."

Both Charles and Benedict have made several appeals in recent years on the need to protect the environment.

"The cordial discussions provided an opportunity for an exchange of views on certain questions of mutual interest, including the human promotion and development of peoples, environment protection and the importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue for furthering peace and justice in the world," Vatican spokesman the Rev. Federico Lombardi told reporters after the talks.

"The pope often speaks of responsibility for the environment," Lombardi told reporters. Last year, the Vatican installed solar panels on the roof of its main audience hall to save energy.

Charles has campaigned from Latin America to Asia as well as Western Europe to encourage efforts to battle climate change.

The Vatican statement on the meeting did not elaborate on "interreligious" dialogue.

But Britain, with its Anglican royals, seems to be entertaining moves to reach out to Roman Catholics. Prime Minister Gordon Brown's government recently said British monarchs should be allowed to marry Catholics, endorsing the lifting of a ban on Catholic royals.

Just before meeting with Benedict, Charles, in a speech to a select audience in a hall in the Chamber of Deputies, said that our "grandchildren will never forgive us" if the efforts to save the environment failed.

For the Vatican appointment, Charles wore a double-breasted, dark blue suit with black tie and polka-dot pocket handkerchief. Camilla wore all black except for a pearl necklace: black silk dress, stockings, pumps and lace veil. Benedict wore simple white robes.

Charles gave the pope 12 ceramic dessert plates with hand-painted flowers from his estate at Highgrove, saying he hoped they would be "of use" to Benedict. The couple also gave Benedict a signed photo of themselves.

Benedict gave the standard gift of medals of his pontificate and an etching of St. Peter's Basilica. Charles thanked him, saying: "I am most touched."

In his appearance in the Chamber of Deputies, the home of Italy's lower legislative chamber, Charles appealed to Italy to use its leadership of the Group of Eight nations to fight climate change. Italy will host the annual G-8 summit of leading industrialized nations this July.

Chamber of Deputies President Gianfranco Fini praised Charles for rejecting the use of genetically modified crops.

Charles was scheduled to participate later Monday in an event on "sustainable agriculture and climate change" at the British ambassador's residence in Rome.

For Tuesday, his last day in Italy, the prince has scheduled an appearance at Confindustria, Italy's politically influential business lobby, to discuss the role of business in the fight against climate change.

After Rome, Charles and Camilla will head to Venice, where they will visit La Fenice opera house and meet with local business leaders on Tuesday.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/27/AR2009042700953.html>

May 1, 2009

Global warming strongly divides Christian clergy

By Bob Smietana
The Tennessean

When the Rev. James Merritt wants to talk about the environment, he does what any good Baptist preacher would do. He picks up the Bible.

"The first assignment that God gave to Adam was to take care of the Garden," said Merritt, who was president of the Nashville-based Southern Baptist Convention from 2000-02. "As far as I know, that job has never been revoked."

While most Christian ministers agree that human beings are to care for creation, they disagree on the details. That's especially true about the topic of global warming.

A new survey from Southern Baptist-owned LifeWay Research found a split between mainline ministers, like Episcopalians and Methodists, and evangelicals like Southern Baptists. Mainline ministers believe that climate change is manmade and want to take action. Evangelical ministers, on the other hand, remain skeptical.

People in the pews disagree, according to a new poll from the public policy group, Faith in Public Life. It found that "over 60 percent of Americans, including majorities of white evangelical Protestants and Catholics" want to tackle climate change now.

Next month, Merritt will host a green evangelical gathering at Cross Pointe Church in Duluth, Ga. Called the Flourish Conference, it's part of the so-called Creation Care movement.

Merritt says evangelicals have been too slow to act on environmental issues, just as they were slow to act on civil rights. "Once again we've been the caboose instead of leading the train," he said.

The Flourish conference, organized by Merritt's son, Jonathan, will focus on theology, not the politics or causes of global warming. Instead, they'll talk about biblical ethics and caring for the earth.

"We are really going to focus on the theology of ecology," Merritt said. "If anybody should be sensitive about the world and taking care of God's creation, it ought to be believers.

Focus is personal action

Gary Hawkins, a member of the Green Team at Belmont United Methodist Church in Nashville, agrees. Hawkins and other church members launched a Web site, www.belmontgreenteam.org, with green tips, articles on stewardship and spirituality. There's also a carbon calculator. Using that calculator helps people see how daily living might affect climate change, said Hawkins.

"Even people who thought they were green are surprised," he said. "They're shocked by their carbon footprint."

Jim Deming, interim pastor of First United Church in Nashville and former director of Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light, says making a personal connection is key. When he talks to churches, he tries to stay away from guilt and instead focuses on personal action.

"We all have to stand before our maker someday and give account for how we lived our lives," he said.

Deming admits he's shied away from talking to evangelicals, and focused on mainline churches instead. That might be a mistake, he said. Deming suspects that evangelicals are less open to green theology. "You go where you think you'll get a hearing," Deming said.

Getting a hearing in evangelical circles, or at least with evangelical ministers, can still be a challenge. That's, in part, a result of the broader culture wars. Global warming has been labeled an issue for liberal Democrats, said Merritt. Since conservative evangelicals already distrust Democrats on issues like abortion, that distrust bleeds into global warming.

"I call it the Al Gore effect," he said.

Susan Bratton, professor of environmental science at Baylor University, says the way congregations govern themselves also plays a role. Bratton, who has a degree from an evangelical seminary as well as her science doctorate, has been teaching about faith and the environment for decades.

Baptist churches value independence. Each church sets its own policies, and calls its own ministers, with no denominational hierarchy looking over their shoulder. That independence also can make Baptists skeptical of government solutions.

"Baptists don't want other people telling them what to do," she said.

By contrast, mainline churches and Catholics have a more institutional approach, she said, and may be more open to governmental suggestions.

For Catholics like Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Coalition for Climate Change, being green means following the Pope's example.

Misleh's group recently launched a project called the "Saint Francis Pledge," to get Catholics to embrace green issues. It asks them to pray and learn, then assess, act, and advocate for policies to deal with climate change.

"Most Catholics believe that climate change is real," Misleh said. "They want to know what they can do as Catholics to respond."

Pope Benedict XVI is leading the way, said Misleh.

"The Vatican is on its way to becoming the first carbon-neutral nation," he said.

David Neff, editor of *Christianity Today* magazine, says evangelicals are drawn to more pragmatic issues — like clean air and clean water. Evangelicals tend to embrace more hands-on sciences, like engineering, and are results driven.

"You can take action on clear water and see concrete results," he said. "You can't see that with global warming."

Schools tap into green

If evangelicals are skeptical of global warming, Bratton says, environmental groups bear some blame. Many of them have written off evangelicals.

"I think environmental groups should get off their high horse and talk to people," she said.

She says that environmental groups might be surprised to see how green religious schools are. Lipscomb University, a Churches of Christ-related school in Nashville, for example, runs a green MBA program, and uses geothermal energy to heat and cool two buildings on campus.

Baylor, the largest Baptist school in the United States, is buying wind power, said Bratton, and has an extensive recycling program.

The school also has a number of climate scientists on campus, and its environmental science intro courses attract as many as 400 students. Baylor also has research projects on using woodchips and even manure to create biofuels.

The programs have not created any controversy.

"Nobody's upset that we have recycling at the Baylor football games," she said.

May 4, 2009

Bishops: Don't go near the (bottled) water

Posted by Joel Connelly

Episcopal bishops from the West have defined a new secular commandment: Stay away from bottled water, and don't bring it into the church's upcoming General Convention in Anaheim, Calif.

"We urge you to encourage delegates not to buy bottled water, but instead to bring metal or ceramic water bottles that can be refilled with tap water," said a letter signed by 12 bishops from six Western states.

The two diocesan bishops in this state, the Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel in the Diocese of Olympia and the Rt. Rev. James Waggoner in the Diocese of Spokane, signed the letter. So did a pair of other Washington-based bishops serving temporary duty in Oregon dioceses, Bishops Nedi Rivera and Sandy Hampton.

The thumbs-down on bottled water was contained in a passionate, quite political and politically correct post-Easter message on global warming and a needed response by the faithful.

"We urge you to vote for political candidates who will help our country make a swift transition to clean, safe and renewable energy," the bishops wrote.

The prelates also supported the so-called Genesis Covenant, an initiative whereby the Episcopal Church commits to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from every facility it maintains by a minimum of 50 percent in 10 years.

It is an ambitious goal, particularly for a denomination that has lost members and recently reported a drop in church attendance.

In a recent report, only 10 dioceses in the United States -- mainly conservative and traditionalist strongholds -- reported more people in the pews.

With bishops of the West, however, global warming is an urgent concern, not only here but in the Third World.

"We must act quickly and decisively if we are to avert catastrophic and irreversible changes to life on this planet," they wrote. "Climate change is already affecting people around the world, particularly those living in or near poverty."

In Armageddon-style prose, the prelates added:

"We know what is ahead if we don't find a way to change course quickly: more droughts and floods around the world, more severe storms, a rise in infectious diseases, desperate shortages of fresh water, millions of environmental refugees, and, as one study recently reported, a possible sea level rise of seven feet within the century."

The bishops gave a brief theological grounding for their statement, remind the faithful that they are "faithful stewards of God's creation."

"As faithful witnesses to the power of the Risen Christ, we need to work together to become healers of God's Creation and to do everything in our power to reduce the world's output of greenhouse gas pollution."

The bishops asked each congregation to form a "faith and environment group", to determine "your church's carbon footprint" and "educate each other about sustainable living."

They urged households to use public transportation, buy fluorescent bulbs, and to "re-use, recycle, and buy products that are recycled."

Since electing a former oceanographer, the Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, as the church's Presiding Bishop in 2006, the Episcopal Church has seen its colors change from ecclesiastical purple to green.

In her 2008 Easter message, Jefferts Schori gave far more ink to climate and environmental issues than to the risen Christ.

The Presiding Bishop delivered carbon footprint speeches during a Seattle visit last year.

Since his election in 2007, Bishop Rickel has stressed environmental issues. He has undergone training in how to carry forward messages in former Vice President Al Gore's Oscar-winning film, "An Inconvenient Truth."

In the Diocese of Olympia, which covers Western Washington, the global warming message is carried forward by the Bishop's Committee for the Environment.

Curiously, both action and reaction to global warming has come from Episcopalians in America's coldest state.

The ambitious Genesis Covenant is a brainchild of the Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston, a former Episcopal Bishop of Alaska who is now serving as suffragan (assisting) bishop in the Diocese of California.

The loudest skepticism toward the Northern Climate Impact Assessment -- a report on global warming in the Arctic produced by 300 scientists from northern countries -- came from a fellow Episcopalian, Rep. Don Young of Alaska.

<http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/archives/167949.asp>

May 4, 2009

Conservative Christians launch green awakening

By Yonat Shimron
Staff Writer

WAKE FOREST - For years, some conservative Christians regarded environmentalists as little more than nature worshippers. But on Friday, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary will host its first conference on what it calls "creation care," or honoring God's good Earth.

The one-day "Creation Care Symposium" is the seminary's first effort to go green, and, no surprise, it comes two days after Earth Day.

Southeastern President Danny Akin said his denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, needs to do more to combat pollution and the degradation of the planet. But he added, "We're not jumping on the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Al Gore bandwagon. We're using a more cautious, responsible approach."

That Southeastern is even interested in caring for the planet represents a milestone in the environmental movement. While mainline Protestant Christian denominations, Roman Catholics, Jews and Muslims have made strides in raising awareness among adherents of the challenges of climate change, pollution and degradation of natural resources, conservative denominations have thus far relegated the issue to the back burner.

Only two years ago, Southern Baptists passed a resolution urging the government to "reject mandated reductions in greenhouse gas emissions," and to "proceed cautiously in the human-induced global warming debate in light of conflicting scientific research."

Last month, Richard Land, president of the denomination's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, urged Baptists to write their U.S. senators to oppose global warming legislation that would tax firms for global emissions.

And in a recently released poll, only 47 percent of Protestant pastors said they believe global warming is real and man-made. Among evangelical denominations, only 32 percent of pastors agreed.

Yet a group of younger evangelicals is challenging those views and pushing churches to audit their energy use, analyze their impact on the environment and adopt cost-saving measures.

Leading the charge is Jonathan Merritt, a graduate of Southeastern and the son of former Southern Baptist President James Merritt. Now an Atlanta-based writer, Merritt said the environment is no longer the exclusive domain of the liberal left.

"In the last few years we've seen many conservatives say this is a moral issue, and Christians have an answer for it," Merritt said.

He points to pastors such as Rick Warren, the Southern Baptist megachurch minister who has shown an environmental awareness. And he notes comments by Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the House, who in the latest issue of Newsweek calls for energy independence from foreign oil. (Although Gingrich approves of drilling in Alaska.)

Catholic covenant

On Tuesday, Roman Catholics launched a new effort called the Catholic Climate Covenant, intended to bring together individuals and families, parishes and schools, religious communities, colleges, hospitals and other Catholic organizations to care for the environment and the poor.

Beyond the rhetoric, much more is being done. Raleigh's Umstead Park United Church of Christ recently received recognition for its environmentally friendly building design. The church, which shares a space with an architectural firm on Brownlee Drive, may be the only congregation in North Carolina to receive the so-called Gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) status, given by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Another Raleigh church recently built a 9,800-square-foot addition that will be cooled and heated by a geothermal heat pump -- a first for a Triangle church. For Pullen Memorial Baptist Church - - which is not a member of the Southern Baptist Convention -- environmentalism may be the single biggest issue church members are concerned about.

The saved are saving

And though it may be late to the party, Southeastern is beginning to take seriously efforts to save water and electricity on its Wake Forest campus. The seminary recently bought a \$1.1 million generator it runs during peak hours in the summer to save electricity. It has installed compact fluorescents instead of incandescent lights, as well as low-flow toilets. In the next academic year it will also start a recycling program.

Another sign of the seminary's commitment: It has already announced that it will follow up on Friday's symposium with another meeting in August and a full-fledged conference on Creation Care in October.

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<http://www.newsobserver.com/news/story/1497152.html>

May 6, 2009

British Church leaders unite to save the environment

By Matt Cresswell

Both the Anglican Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury have put their weight behind an ecumenical initiative campaigning to halt global warming.

On behalf of Operation Noah, the Rt Rev Richard Chartres will journey on an 'ark on the Thames' accompanied by children and animals in a highly visible climate change campaign.

At the end of his trip and near the Palace of Westminster, the bishop will call on the UK government to exhibit 'brave' leadership when a UK delegation travels to the crucial Copenhagen climate summit in December.

Later in the year Dr Rowan Williams will echo the bishop of London's message when he gives the annual Operation Noah lecture at Southwark Cathedral, weeks before the delegation leave.

The Archbishop of Canterbury will give a 'contemporary reflection' on the Genesis account of Noah and the flood entitled 'Lessons for the Twenty First Century'.

Mark Dowd, Operation Noah's Campaign Strategist, said: "You could say that Noah was the first character in the Bible to be challenged by dramatic changes to the climate."

He added: "The story touches on leadership, obedience to God and human responsibility to safeguard creation.

"Operation Noah is delighted to have these two 'giants' from the Church of England adding their voices and support.

"In this year of the Copenhagen summit, it is imperative that we focus on this 'make or break' moment for humanity and our relationship with the rest of the natural world."

Environmentalists believe the approaching summit is almost a 'last-chance saloon' for parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) who signed up to the 2012 Kyoto Protocol.

Representatives from 170 countries will attend the meeting from from December 7-18, 2009, to negotiate a treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol.

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=4392>

May 7, 2009

Eco-friendly houses of worship spring up

10 congregations in U.S. have elite LEED status; 54 more have applied

The Associated Press

EVANSTON, Ill. - When it rained, water filled the basement a foot high, flooding the preschool room at least once a year. The air conditioner wouldn't work in two rooms at the same time. The Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation desperately needed a new synagogue.

As members planned their new building, they decided it should reflect the belief, shared by many faiths, that God calls them to be responsible stewards of the earth.

They decided to go green from the ground up.

Cypress wood reclaimed from barns in upstate New York was used for the new synagogue's exterior, white cinder blocks from the old building were crushed and recycled, and brown cabinet doors made from sunflower husks were hung in the offices.

As Americans are becoming more environmentally conscious, more religious groups are looking to make their worship spaces sustainable. The efforts range from small country congregations using energy-efficient bulbs to megachurches complying with complex green-building codes.

"It was about making a sacred statement," Rabbi Brant Rosen said of the synagogue in Evanston, a Chicago suburb. "If we were going to talk the talk, we needed to walk the walk. The whole process forced us to look at our values in a deeper way."

The \$9 million synagogue opened in February 2008 and in September became the only house of worship in the country to receive the highest green-building rating from the nonprofit U.S. Green Buildings Council, whose standards are considered the benchmark for environmentally friendly buildings.

10 LEED houses of worship

Since 2005 just 10 congregations have received the council's certification for environmentally friendly buildings, called the Leadership Energy Environmental Design, or LEED, certification. Another 54 congregations have applied.

Among the applicants are seminaries, chapels, sanctuaries, monasteries, student centers and church offices. They are Jewish, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Wesleyan and Lutheran.

"They believe that God calls them to become better environmental stewards and they see this as a way to express that," said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, chairman of Green Faith, an interfaith group in New Brunswick, N.J., dedicated to the environment. "And they want to make good and responsible use of their congregation's financial resources."

By going green, most worship buildings can cut their energy costs by 30 percent, said Jerry Lawson, of the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Congregations program. About 2,000 of the nearly 310,000 houses of worship in the U.S. participate in the EPA program.

"That's a lot of money that can go back into the mission," he said. "Why waste the money the members of the congregation have donated to operate and maintain your building?"

Houses of worship often have specific environmental needs, he said. For instance, stained glass windows could be insulated from weather and pipe organs protected from humidity, but this would require additional expense up front before any energy savings could be realized.

The green efforts of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation added \$750,000 to the cost.

Church halved its gas/water budget

In Plano, Texas, the 27,000-member Prestonwood Baptist Church worked with Energy Star Congregations to halve its annual \$2 million bill for gas and water, executive pastor Mike Buster said.

"We're to be good stewards of our resources, our financial resources as well as the Earth's resources," Buster said. "We take the dollars we were spending with utility companies and now spend them on ministry and missions."

Green building wasn't on the congregation's radar when Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Ark., started construction in 2005. But once church members learned about it, they took to the idea. Now the LEED-certified church has a green section in its newsletter, where members have been asked to bring in their electronics, like computers and DVD players, for recycling.

"It's taken on its own life," said Jan Meyer Swindler, who was on the church building committee. "We sold recycled grocery bags. The plastic foam cups have gone away. Little by little you see changes and that's what it's all about."

In Evanston, the Reconstructionist congregation is encouraging every member to adopt environmentally friendly practices at home, too.

The Rev. Elaine Strawn of Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Wayne County in Wooster, Ohio, said her 123-member congregation outgrew their old building and decided to go green for the new one. Congregants see having an environmentally friendly space as a reflection of their spirituality.

"We're caretakers," said Strawn, whose church is also LEED certified. "It's respecting other life and trying to reduce our impact so future generations have some Earth left to live on."

The interest in having environmentally sound religious spaces is just beginning, Harper said.

"There's a long-term trend that's very powerful and unmistakable," Harper said. "The only financially responsible way for religious groups to build is to pay attention to green building."

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30481083/>

May 14, 2009

Churches to probe impacts of Canadian oil sands

By Jeffrey Jones

CALGARY, Alberta (Reuters) - A coalition of church leaders will fan out across northern Alberta next week for a fact-finding mission that will help formulate an official stance on the environmental impact of oil sands development.

Officials with Kairos, a multidenominational social justice group, joined by some aboriginal leaders, will talk with oil sands developers, labor organizations, local authorities and congregations about the impact of the massive energy projects, an issue garnering global attention.

Kairos's work could prove controversial as many members of faiths that are part of the organization work in, or benefit from, the oil sands industry while others oppose it, Sara Stratton, education and campaigns coordinator for Kairos, said on Thursday.

"That's why you spend a lot of time talking and thinking it through, and why you don't make decisions from an office in Toronto," Stratton said.

The delegation includes leaders from the Anglican Church of Canada, Mennonite Central Committee, Presbyterian Church of Canada, United Church of Canada, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, among others.

Alberta's oil sands represent the largest deposits of crude outside Saudi Arabia, and are seen as a major source of secure energy supplies for the United States.

Environmental groups have mounted major campaigns to spotlight the impact of mining and processing on air, land and water.

They have concentrated on high emissions of greenhouse gases, deforestation and toxic tailings ponds, where more than 1,600 ducks were coated with oil sands residue last year and were killed.

The industry has responded with its own campaign to emphasize efforts to reduce environmental impacts of the massive resource by cutting fresh water use, reclaiming oil mine sites and studying carbon capture and storage.

The Kairos delegation, which will also include officials with the Dene Nation in Canada's north, Gitksan First Nation in British Columbia and Oil Watch International in Nigeria, aims to eventually develop an ecumenical consensus on a series of points.

"But the individual churches, they will also develop their own policies, probably, as a result of this trip," Stratton said.

"So the United Church, for example, would probably have a period of reflection based on its experience, and the Catholic Bishops would have a similar conversation. Depending on the structure of the church, that would filter down or go into a larger dialogue."

The delegation visits Fort McMurray, Edmonton and aboriginal communities between the two centers, as well as Fort Chipewyan to the north from May 21 to 27.

(Editing by Frank McGurty)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUSTRE54D5E720090514?feedType=RSS&feedName=environmentNews>

May 18, 2009

CofE Environment Adviser on new Government task force

David Shreeve the Church of England's Environment Adviser has been selected as one of the 16 members of the new Third Sector Task Force on climate change, the environment and sustainable development. The appointment was made by Environment Secretary Hilary Benn and the group meets for the first time this week.

The group members have all been chosen for their individual expertise and the networks which they link to. David Shreeve is the CofE's Environment Adviser taking a lead on the Church's national Shrinking the Footprint campaign and has co-written two books for churches on the environment with Claire Foster: *How many lightbulbs does it take to change a Christian?* and *Don't Stop at the Lights*. He is also the Director of The Conservation Foundation which he co-founded with David Bellamy in 1982.

The aim for the new task force is to develop a vision and action plan for wider third sector involvement and to identify how Government and the third sector can best work together and contribute their expertise, experience and the ability to reach people. The action plan will help identify and recommend long lasting and relevant actions on environmental issues for organisations that work across the third sector all levels of communities.

The Bishop of London the Rt Revd Richard Chartres Chair of Shrinking the Footprint said: "With his huge experience, David Shreeve will be able to make it clear that climate change is not just an economic problem to be solved by technology but that it is also profoundly a spiritual challenge involving doing justice to some of the most vulnerable communities in the world".

Commenting on his appointment David Shreeve said: "It is encouraging to be given the opportunity to involve the Church in this sort of initiative. I hope it will help show how the

Church is concerned about these issues at all levels and that it wants to be involved in positive action to benefit the whole community. Like the Government the Church of England is committed to shrinking its footprint by reducing its carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 becoming the 20% Church.

Notes for editors

For more information:

Shrinking the Footprint the Church of England's national environmental campaign was set up in 2006 on Environment Day and celebrates its third anniversary next month with an event for all Church of England dioceses at Lambeth Palace.

www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org.

www.conservationfoundation.co.uk

For full list of Task Force members see www.defra.gov.uk

Both books published by www.chpublishing.co.uk

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr5509.html>

May 25, 2009

Carmelite NGO Promotes a Faith Reflection on Climate Change

TUCSON, AZ - The Carmelite NGO announces a Faith Reflection on Climate Change in observance of World Environment Day, June 5, 2009. The focus of the Day of Prayer, with the methodology of a Faith Reflection on Climate Change, is to call attention to the spiritual challenge of the ecological crisis.

The Carmelite NGO is inviting people to join together in prayerful reflection on World Environment Day in June. According to "Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action," a publication of the UN environment program, the ecological turmoil of our time draws us back to our religious traditions, to reflect on and celebrate the natural world in its most profound sense of mystery as a manifestation and experience of the sacred.

A booklet entitled "A Day of Prayer- A Faith Reflection on Climate Change" designed specifically for use on June 5th is being made available at no charge for anyone interested. The booklet provides a series of short reflections and suggested action plans.

To obtain a copy of the "A Day of Prayer" booklet, email jremson@carmelitengo.org with your name and mailing address. Copies can also be downloaded from the website of the Carmelite NGO (carmelitengo.org).

The Carmelite NGO was affiliated to the Department of Public Information of the United Nations in December 2001. It is the representative body to the United Nations for the men and women around the world who are members of the Carmelite Order of the Catholic Church and the Order's ministries.

Contact: Carmelite NGO

<http://carmelitengo.org> AZ, US

William Harry - Director of Communications, 520 - 481-4617

<http://www.catholic.org/prwire/headline.php?ID=6826>

May 30, 2009

Churches study oilsands impact

John Cotter
The Canadian Press

EDMONTON – Canadian church leaders are considering asking the federal government to conduct an independent review of how Alberta's oilsands are affecting people and the environment.

A delegation representing eight church denominations has returned from a week-long tour of northern Alberta – including visiting aboriginal communities downstream of the projects.

The tour has given the churches that make up the Kairos social justice group plenty to consider as they begin working on a consensus position on the oilsands that could be presented to Ottawa as early as this fall.

"We need independent cumulative impact studies on the effects of the tarsands development on water, air, health – the environment in general," said Mary Corkery, executive director of Kairos.

"As citizens and as Christian communities we need to ask hard questions and we need to ask them openly and publicly. We need to keep raising the hard questions in our communities and in our churches. And we will bring them to politicians."

During the tour, leaders representing the Anglican, Christian Reformed, Lutheran, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Quaker, Roman Catholic and United churches strived to get a balanced look at the oilsands.

The delegation met with oilsands critics, including Greenpeace, as well as major corporate players in the region, such as Suncor Energy Inc.

Church leaders visited Fort Chipewyan, where some aboriginal people blame the oilsands for high cancer rates. They also sat down with Alberta government officials for briefings on how the province is balancing the need to develop the resource with protecting the environment.

There were also meetings with people who make their living working at the plants and union officials.

Corkery said the delegation appreciates that Canadians across the country are helping to drive the demand for the energy that is being produced by the oilsands.

But she said the tour left Church leaders with the impression that the oilsands are being developed too extensively and too quickly, without enough information on the long-term environmental consequences.

"The next point we agreed on is there is a need to slow down the pace," she said.

"We didn't define what that would mean, but we did say that there is tremendous pressure to explore and develop as much as possible."

Church leaders are to share their impressions of the trip with their congregations this summer.

Kairos plans to hold meetings with its member churches this fall to forge their thoughts into a formal advocacy position they can all agree on before approaching Ottawa.

"People were very moved," she said. "We want to take our concerns to the highest levels."

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/643145>

May 30, 2009

Indian spiritual leaders go green

The Times of India

NEW DELHI: Indian spiritual sects are using their wide reach to promote green causes, using the fact that preservation of natural elements is at the country's spiritual core.

Less than a week ago, nearly 1,000 Buddhist monks, nuns and followers set off on a 400-km spiritual trek from Kardang in Lahaul Valley in Himachal Pradesh to Leh in Ladakh across five high Himalayan passes to promote protection of environment and sustainable lifestyles in the region.

The 40-day trek is to say no to plastic bags, a major pollutant in the fragile ecological zone.

The trekkers, led by the head of the 800-year-old Tibetan Drukpa Buddhist sect, Gyalwang

Drukpa, will distribute canvas bags to more than 100,000 villagers along the way as a symbolic gesture to shun plastic bags and switch to carry-bags made of cloth and other eco-friendly material.

The marchers will also raise funds - \$30 per km - to spread education and sustainable eco-friendly lifestyle awareness in the Himalayan villages.

"This year, we wanted to promote something that purges pollution. Since plastic litter is one of the major eco-concerns in the region, we decided to teach the villagers healthy alternatives. We are in the wheel of a revolution and the way to carry it forward is to lead a clean life.

"Thousands of disciples who visit my monastery in Hemis in Ladakh every year from Europe and Japan requested that we do something in a sustained manner to turn the wheel of revolution so that more people can identify with the spiritual movement and can make their lives better," Gyalwang Drukpa, the head of the sect, said on telephone from Manali before flagging off the march.

The sect has also been given land along the Indus river on the way to Ladakh to create new woodlands by planting trees.

The trekkers will also champion the cause of "balanced education for children of the Himalayas" for sustainable livelihoods at the Drukpa sect's eco-friendly "Druk White Lotus School" in Ladakh that has won international acclaim as the best green school building in Asia.

"We want more children to study in our school and learn to lead balanced lives without losing touch with their culture and environment," the spiritual leader said.

"A clean environment is the cornerstone of a clean, healthy and strong India," says Ramdev, co-founder of the Patanjali Yog Peeth near Hardwar.

Ramdev is leading a campaign to clean the Ganga from its source in Gangotri to Ganga Sagar where it drains into the Bay of Bengal. He is working under the banner of Ganga Raksha Manch.

"The government has granted the Ganga national heritage status after our efforts for almost a year," the seer said. Ramdev, along with representatives of at least 25 religious organisations, is also opposing unplanned industrialisation along the river.

The Ganga - the ninth longest river in the world - is contaminated almost throughout its 2,500-km course. The campaign has managed to mobilise nearly 700,000 youths at the district level.

The cause has helped the Patanjali Yog Peeth identify itself to potential new disciples, especially the youths living in the villages along the Ganga, sources in the organisation said. "Most villages have Patanjali yoga and fitness cells," he said.

Protection of environment and mitigating the effects of global warming also tops the agenda of spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of the Art of Living, which has a global following.

"The only way to check environment pollution is to spread awareness. Many people in this world live without the knowledge of climate. They are immune even to changes in the cycle of seasons. They have to be educated," Sri Sri said.

The seer, who hosted a national environment summit in his retreat in 2008, has been campaigning against global warming and agri-pollution by promoting "organic farming", plantations and traditional farm technologies.

Youngsters identify with the campaign, says the guru, whose Art of Living Foundation headquarters on the outskirts of Bangalore is a model for sustainable ecological conservation and traditional farming.

Mystic and yoga expert Jaggi Vasudev, head of the Isha Foundation, a spiritual organisation in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, is known as a global tree planter.

His foundation entered the Guinness Book of World Records in 2006 for an eco-conservation campaign, "Project Greenhand", which has planted 7.5 million trees in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Most of the foundation's members are young professionals.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Earth/Spiritual-leaders-go-green/articleshow/4597673.cms>

June 5, 2009

Orthodox Patriarch Urges Defense of Planet

Writes Message for Today's World Environment Day

ISTANBUL, Turkey ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- No one is exempt from the "indisputable obligation" to protect the planet, says the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople.

Bartholomew I affirmed that climate change is the biggest threat for all types of life on earth in a message for today's World Environment Day, sponsored by the United Nations Environment Program.

The Orthodox patriarch urged people "independently of their religious origins, to take the ecological crisis into consideration," L'Osservatore Romano reported.

"Today more than ever there is an indisputable obligation for everyone: that of realizing that environmental considerations on our planet are not just romantic ideals of a small group," he said.

Bartholomew I affirmed that there is a direct correlation between the protection of the environment and economic and social life.

"Nature is part of creation and has a sacred character," the patriarch contended, "such that to abuse it and destroy it is a sacrilege and a bad act, a defiance of the work of God the Creator."

He added: "To care for and protect creation is the responsibility of everyone, in an individual way and collectively."

Bartholomew I acknowledged that it falls to political authorities of every nation to "evaluate the situation and propose actions, means and other norms."

But he added that "individual responsibility is important, not only in personal and family life, but also in their function as active citizens."

The patriarch concluded with an appeal for "a deeper sense of vigilance for the protection of nature and creation."

<http://www.zenit.org/article-26095?l=english>

June 5, 2009

Anglican Head Urges Churches to Pray, Act Now for Environment

Aaron J. Leichman
Christian Post Reporter

LONDON – The head of the worldwide Anglican Communion has issued an appeal to churches to pray and act for the environment ahead of key UN talks on climate change later this year.

Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams is urging churches to use Environment Sunday on June 7 as an opportunity to pray for the planet and the campaign for climate change to ensure that the best deal is reached by government leaders at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

"Whilst it will be for governments meeting in Copenhagen in December to agree a successor to the Kyoto regime for global reductions in carbon emissions – and we all want those to be both ambitious and deliverable – we have a part to play," he said.

"Governments need to know that people want them to be ambitious. They need a mandate," the church leader added.

According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2009 is a crucial year in the international effort to address climate change.

This year, two working groups will be operating in full negotiating mode to advance work toward meeting their respective mandates while important ongoing work under the Convention will also be taken forward in 2009.

The year will culminate with the Dec. 7-18 summit in Copenhagen, where an ambitious international response to climate change that was shaped by parties in 2007 will be agreed upon.

Currently, a second round of negotiations is taking place in Bonn, where the first meeting had also taken place March 28 to April 8. The second meeting concludes June 12 after having started on June 1.

In his appeal, Williams, who is considered “first among equals” in the Anglican Communion, said that climate change was “probably” the most important issue the world is facing today and stressed that it was a matter of justice as well as caring for the environment.

“As usual, the poorest are likely to suffer the most though the richest have contributed most to pollute the atmosphere and accelerate global warming,” he said.

“So we can pray that a proper sense of responsibility – not least to the generations who will follow us – and of justice guides the hearts and the minds of the politicians who will meet in Copenhagen.”

The archbishop urged Christians to get involved with events and campaigns taking place between now and the Dec. 7-18 climate change summit.

Williams plans to be in Copenhagen to support last minute campaigns for a suitable deal to emerge from the talks.

Christian Today reporter Jenna Lyle contributed to this article from London.

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20090605/anglican-head-urges-churches-to-pray-act-now-for-environment/index.html>

June 7, 2009

The eco evangelist

While recovering from a brain haemorrhage, Craig Sorley had an epiphany – to spread the environmental word using the Bible. He took his green gospel to Kenya – now crop yields are up, the monkeys are back and even the Church is won over

Xan Rice
The Observer

In God's fields rats are the problem. They crawled under the old maize stalks that Paul Kiongo Thuo carefully placed on his soil as mulch, as the missionary had shown him, and ate the seeds he had planted in neat rows the day after the rains came. Thuo killed seven of the rodents, but more have moved in. Perhaps it is best to let the seeds germinate first before laying down the mulch, his wife Grace suggests as they stand in the middle of their four-acre farm, where they

also grow beans, bananas and cabbage. Thuo bobs his white beanie in agreement. Craig Sorley, a 6ft 3in American with a shaved head, Levis, a lumberjack shirt and muddy boots, listens and thinks for a moment. He has already sought advice on the rat problem from Christian colleagues in Zimbabwe who pioneered Farming God's Way, which uses biblical teachings to encourage a practice known as [conservation](#) agriculture. In reply, his colleagues had asked why raptors had not eaten the rats. But here, on the eastern edge of the Great Rift Valley in central [Kenya](#), where small-scale farmers have traditionally struggled to grow enough food even to feed their families, virtually all the indigenous trees have been chopped down for firewood. The few exotic eucalyptus trees scattered around the farms are not suitable for nesting.

"You mess with one part of God's creation and you'll pay for it another," Sorley says, examining a handful of soil from Thuo's bean patch.

Sorley is a self-proclaimed environmental missionary. He represents the Baptist General Conference on the "conservative side of the evangelical movement" in the US. For many (perhaps most) of his church colleagues back home, the environment barely registers on the scale of challenges facing the world today. Climate change is still widely regarded as a myth, while creationism trumps evolution.

But for Sorley, 41, who discovered his calling after being diagnosed with a potentially fatal brain tumour two decades ago, global warming, environmental degradation and food and water shortages are some of the greatest threats to mankind today, particularly in the developing world. An easy-going, mild-mannered man who signs off his emails with "Blessings", Sorley becomes exasperated when trying to explain his church's reluctance to recognise the urgent need to protect God's creation.

"The deeply embedded view is that Christ is returning soon, so why should we care for the environment? Well, what if I had a child with leukaemia and I said to my wife, 'We don't need to give him food because he's going to die anyway'? Man, it's the same thing!"

In Kenya, where Sorley has chosen to test his pioneering mission work, it is clear that the natural resources are dying. A fast-growing population is putting huge pressure on both wildlife and the land. In April, a study revealed losses of hoofed animals such as giraffe, warthog and hartebeest of up to 95% in the famous Masai Mara reserve between 1979 and 2002, mainly due to human settlement around the park. The Mau Forest, the largest water catchment area in the country, whose rivers feed Lake Victoria and the Masai Mara, has lost a quarter of its trees since the early 1990s. In total, Kenya may once have had 8% of closed forest cover, scientists say; now it has less than 1.7 per cent. The resultant soil erosion is a major problem; the UN estimates that the dollar value of the soil lost each year is more than \$2.5bn - more than three times the annual tourist income. Throw in increasingly erratic rainfall, apparently due to global climatic change, and decreasing agricultural yields and the prognosis is dire.

To Sorley, it is also an affront to God - especially in Kenya, where the clergy enjoys great respect and exercises significant moral influence. More than two-thirds of Kenyans are Christian, and church attendance is high - particularly in rural areas, where on Sundays families can be seen

walking on the roadside in their finest clothes, Bibles in hand. Preachers offer a mostly conservative message of [Christianity](#), with the gospel of salvation the main theme.

When not bumping along dirt roads in his 17-year-old red Land Cruiser, trying to persuade people to plant trees, harvest water and rejuvenate their soil in God's name, Sorley holds theological workshops. He often begins by asking whether anyone has ever heard a sermon about the environment. Faced with a sea of shaking heads, he then reels off the biblical verses that make his case, from Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden in Eden to work it and care of it", through to Revelations 4:11: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Even the biblically illiterate should be able to understand the message of caring for the environment, Sorley says.

"You've got Noah's Ark - talk about an endangered species programme. For animal stewardship you have the Good Shepherd. And everybody knows about the Garden of Eden."

Sorley spent much of his youth in east Africa. His father, a doctor, was a medical missionary and the family lived in Ethiopia until they were chased out during the Marxist revolution in the 70s. Later, they lived in Uganda during the rule of Milton Obote, where child soldiers with AK-47s occupied checkpoints and the Aids epidemic emerged with devastating effect. Sorley, who learned to appreciate nature while on long drives to boarding school near Nairobi, became aware of another impending crisis. "Even then it was visible that the forests were coming down and wildlife was on the retreat," he says.

After school, Sorley moved to Minnesota to attend a Christian college. He began getting recurrent headaches. The doctor ordered a CAT scan, which revealed a highly malignant brain tumour. He had immediate surgery, radiation treatment and chemotherapy. While waiting for the results of the treatment, he picked up a Bible. He says he opened it randomly to Psalm 103, which talks about praising the Lord who heals diseases, keeps one from the grave, and enables one to "stay young and strong like an eagle".

"It was the most spiritual moment of my life," Sorley says. "All my fears seemed to melt away, and my health reports have been good ever since."

At the same time, he says, "God laid a burden on my heart, to do with the environment."

While recuperating in Kenya for a few months, Sorley told a close friend that he wanted to pursue environmentalism, using the church to carry the message. His friend claimed that Christians didn't care about the environment. "It was an accusation, a challenge," says Sorley.

While studying environmental science at the University of Minnesota, Sorley sought evidence that would prove his friend wrong. He found none.

He became even more dismayed about the church's stance when looking at the mounting scientific evidence that climate change was caused by man, a conclusion he agreed with. He also accepted that the universe was billions of years old - "A testament to God's eternity" - rather than less than 10,000 years old, as creationist teaching suggests.

"Within the conservative church we really commit hypocrisy on this issue by the selective acceptance of science," Sorley says. "We reject the findings of climatologists and astronomers yet we would go to an oncologist - even an atheist, Buddhist or Hindu one - to get cancer treatment without batting an eyelid."

He saw it as his Christian duty to do something to help the victims of climate change. The Bible was the only weapon he needed.

Limuru, a 30-minute drive from the Kenyan capital Nairobi, was one of the favourite spots for the British settlers in the late 19th century. More than 2,100 metres above sea level, it has misty mornings, abundant rain; ideal conditions for growing tea. Among the emerald tea fields today sits Brackenhurst, a Baptist-owned conference centre that occupies 100 acres of land. So abundant are the trees and so rich the birdlife that visitors sometimes make reference to the Garden of Eden, which pleases Sorley.

He has his office and an indigenous tree nursery on the grounds, and also rents a small colonial-era house, where he lives with his wife, his two young sons, his dog and an augur buzzard, which he took in after it was found with a permanently damaged wing.

After moving to Brackenhurst in 2003, Sorley spent one year learning about Kenya's forests, and was deeply concerned by what he found. While there are more than 1,000 indigenous species in Kenya, their volume was dwindling due to deforestation caused by farmers seeking land to grow crops, or by people looking for firewood. Of the new trees being planted the vast majority were exotic species. Not only was this reducing the overall diversity of tree and plant species, but also the range of bird, mammal and insect species.

At Brackenhurst, a programme that started in 2000 to clear more than 12 acres of exotic trees planted for their timber and replace them with indigenous trees was already yielding promising results. Within a few years the number of bird species counted had tripled, Sorley says, while duikers, mongoose, monkeys and genet cats had all returned to the young forests.

In 2005, Sorley started up his own organisation, Care of Creation Kenya, to try to replicate that success elsewhere. He now grows 20,000 trees a year from 72 different indigenous species. The young trees are donated or sold for between 40p and £1.60 to local communities, schools and churches.

One chilly morning we drive to the All Saints Church in Limuru, a beautiful old stone building. The church purchased 50 young trees from Sorley two years ago, which now stand head high behind the graveyard. Weavers had built nests in several of the trees. At the Ngecha Primary School, a short drive but an economic light year away in a densely populated part of town, headmaster Joseph Mathenge escorts us around the school grounds where 600 of Sorley's trees

had been planted since 2007. As kids in threadbare jerseys and battered shoes kick footballs made of rags, Mathenge explains how before, where there had been no shade for the 800 pupils to sit under; soon there would be a "forested park" outside the classroom block.

Kenya's most famous tree planter is the environmental activist Wangari Maathai. She attended one of Sorley's workshops just weeks before she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, and was impressed by his approach. She had previously tried to persuade the church to champion the environmental cause, without success.

"People in Kenya are religious, but often in a superficial way. They look at God like he's a magician... rather than a God who wants us to use and protect the tools he has given us," she told me.

"Craig was talking about the environment from a biblical perspective, which I never heard anyone doing before. I thought at the time that if we could get that sort of language coming from the pulpit on Sundays then we would start to see all Christians looking to protect the planet."

Elizabeth Nyanga Mugo looks pleased. The soil beneath her toes is wet from the previous night's downpour, the biggest of the year. Earlier rains have been poor; farmers who planted seeds saw them rot due to the lack of follow-up rain. Now, in the early afternoon in Ndeiya, a 30-minute drive west of Limuru, the clouds are bruised and plump with precipitation again.

"We are very hard-working people," says Mugo, 48. "But only God can bring the rain."

Mugo owns 10 acres of land where she grows maize, beans, potatoes and bananas, some for her family, and some for sale. Her husband herds cattle.

Theirs has not always been a content existence. In Kenya the small-scale farmer occupies the lowest rung in society, "sometimes even below the lowest rung, in their minds", Sorley says. Though the farmers' toils feed most of their countrymen, they are regarded as peasants, people not to be emulated.

"After independence, to be seen as a modern African you had to be educated and get a job as a government clerk," says James Shikwati, director of the Inter Region Economic Network, a think-tank in Nairobi. "In my village if you farmed it was assumed that you failed at school."

Sorley says that when he meets farmers such as Mugo, they are often filled with despair at their decreasing yields and lowly place in the community. And while the ultimate aim of Sorley and his project manager, Francis Githaigah, a jovial 49-year-old ex industrial chemist, is to increase agricultural productivity through soil rejuvenation, first they try to repair the farmer's sense of self-worth through biblical teaching.

Githaigah, who navigates the dusty roads to Ndeiya on a Honda motorcycle, conducts discipleship classes for farmers, using Sorley's chosen biblical verses to build up esteem and provide theological reasons for environmental stewardship. Githaigah began planting trees

around his mother's home near Mount Kenya in the 90s after seeing her struggle to find firewood, and describes farmers like Mugo as "my friends and disciples".

"Today, I feel strong in my heart about farming," says Mugo, who often has baboons and antelope wandering past her house. "We live here through the wonder of God - this land is our paradise."

Yet it is a paradise that is offering less to its custodians by the year. Sorley says that many farmers report yields of only a quarter of those achieved 25 years ago. Erratic rainfall is partly to blame but the main reason is that the soil is exhausted after decades of continuous farming using the same methods that extract nutrients from the earth but put nothing back.

As the pressure grows on farmers to produce more - Kenya is again facing a food crisis this year - local and multinational agricultural companies are trying to cash in. A better seed can improve yields, and companies have realised that the millions of small-scale farmers in Kenya represent a lucrative market. Shikwati, the economist, says that some firms have bought land alongside the main rural roads to showcase the effectiveness of their seeds.

But to Sorley seeds are not the answer. For starters, the seeds being hawked are mostly hybrids. The plants that grow will not produce seeds of the same quality, so farmers are locked into buying new seeds each year rather than saving their own. What's more, many of the seeds require fertiliser to be effective, Sorley says, which is too expensive for many poor farmers.

Sorley has set up his own demonstration plots to convince farmers like Mugo and Thuo that by caring for their land, in accordance with God's will, output can increase significantly. Conservation Agriculture, a method promoted by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation, calls for crop rotation and minimal soil disturbance, since tilling or ploughing can lead to a destruction of organic matter. The third key element is permanent soil covering - essentially putting down a layer of mulch that encourages micro-organisms to grow in the soil and which will eventually break down the mulch into a natural form of fertiliser.

On a quarter-acre plot next to Sorley's house he has been growing beans, maize, broccoli and potatoes using these techniques. In the maize patch the soil is barely visible under the rows of old maize stalks; for the other vegetables grass clippings and pine needles are the mulch. Last year his maize yield was more than double that of other local farmers, Sorley says. "Farming God's Way is based on science, and it makes sense for economic reasons. But small farmers are still reluctant to set aside land to experiment with - it's a risk for them - and they usually use the maize stalks that we would use for mulch as feed for their cows after the harvest. It is only when you add the biblical and moral mandate of good stewardship to the economic interest that there's a good chance of getting people to give it a try."

This year, for the first time, five farmers in Ndeiya have created their own test plots, including Thuo and Mugo. And while Thuo's rat problem has been a setback, the early signs elsewhere are positive. Mugo says that her neighbours have come around to examine the "crazy thing" she is doing to produce such an impressive crop. "One day soon we will be able to get electricity here,"

she says proudly. "Jeremiah chapter 17: He who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by the riverside."

This fusion of God and Green, especially coming from the conservative evangelical base, could be expected to sit uncomfortably with some leading environmentalists. George Monbiot, the activist and Guardian columnist, says that much of the opposition to climate-change science that characterised the George W Bush administration came from the conservative Christian base with ties to the big business agenda.

"There was also a refusal to accept that man could have an effect on the environment," he says. "It was 'God is in charge and omnipotent, so bugger off and leave us alone.'"

But Monbiot has no objection to evangelicals moving to the side of the greens, especially as they already have a large constituency that they can potentially influence in a positive way.

"We are facing a global crisis and we must use every tool at our disposal in preventing climate breakdown and a food and water crisis. I don't mind how the message reaches people or who is doing it," Monbiot says.

There are signs of a change in direction within the US church, driven in part by a realisation that the world's poor will suffer most from global warming, however it is caused. Last year a coalition of Southern Baptists, among the most conservative denominations in the US, issued a declaration on the environment and climate change, calling for a "unified moral voice".

"Our cautious response to these issues in the face of mounting evidence may be seen by the world as uncaring, reckless and ill-informed," the Southern Baptist Environment and Climate Initiative said. "We can do better. To abandon these issues to the secular world is to shirk from our responsibility to be salt and light. The time for timidity regarding God's creation is no more."

Still, it is just a small step forward. And in Kenya, where Sorley wants all seminaries and Bible colleges to teach mandatory courses in creation care, the top religious leaders have yet to show any strong intent to help tackle the steep environmental challenges facing the country.

Wangari Maathai says: "There are still few people of God going up on to our mountains to see how the natural forests are being cut, and how the rivers run red with silt."

Sorley acknowledges that a change in the broader church mentality will take some time yet. In the meantime he dreams of opening Care of Creation offices across East Africa, and more in Kenya, too, but says that church funding is far more difficult to obtain than if he were running a project for Aids orphans or street children. "This is still a new frontier for mission work."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jun/07/eco-evangelist-craig-sorley>

June 16, 2009

John B. Cobb Jr. issues challenge to the UCC

Written by Staff Reports

The Rev. John B. Cobb Jr., foremost known as the lead proponent of "process theology", has called on the United Church of Christ to lead all Christians in a mission of ecological and social transformation. Cobb made his remarks before the annual meeting of the UCC's Southern California – Nevada Conference on June 5, 2009.

In Cobb's own words, his challenge consists of "proposing that the United Church of Christ take as its mission working with God for the salvation of the world."

He says the UCC is uniquely positioned among Protestant denominations because of its embrace of progressive theology that sees Christian mission as inclusive of spiritual, personal, social and ecological care.

The progressive Christian project, Cobb says, theologically addressed and repented for a religion that had "acquiesced in outrageous racism [and found] that our inherited form of the Christian faith was anti-Jewish, patriarchal, religiously exclusivist, anthropocentric, and demeaning of our bodies and their sexuality."

Because the UCC, through the actions of the General Synod, "has worked through the conflict about homosexuality" and made other strides in the work of progressive Christianity, Cobb asserts the denomination is unrivaled in its ability to "give wholehearted attention to the still more fundamental problems facing the world."

The entire text of the address is [available online](#) and readers are invited to join "[The Cobb Challenge](#)" myUCC group to discuss the implications and implementation of this challenge to the church.

The Rev. John B. Cobb Jr. is emeritus professor at [Claremont School of Theology](#) and founding co-director of the [Center for Process Theology](#).

<http://www.ucc.org/news/cobb-challenge.html>

June 17, 2009

Alberta bishops raise ethical concerns about nuclear power

By Jamie Hall
EdmontonJournal.com

EDMONTON — Alberta's Catholic bishops have entered the political fray over nuclear power, saying serious ethical questions must be addressed before any decision can be made about whether or not to establish nuclear reactors in the province.

“Much of the discussion so far has focused on scientific issues, cost issues, technological issues, all of which are very important,” Archbishop Richard Smith, president of the Alberta Conference of Catholic Bishops, said Wednesday.

“But what we would like to suggest as well is that there are other ethical questions that really ought to be brought into the discussion.”

Smith said the bishops’ involvement was triggered by the ongoing polarized debate about the feasibility of a nuclear power plant in the Peace River area, combined with what seems to be a narrow scope of public consultation.

He said at a meeting last week bishops decided to compose a statement of “pastoral reflections” outlining some of their concerns based on the principles of Catholic teaching, among them the stewardship of creation and resources, as well as the protection of human life.

“When we speak about nuclear energy, one of the key questions that keeps coming up is the nuclear waste and how that’s going to be handled,” said Smith.

“That raises questions for us as to whether we’re being effective stewards of creation if that waste were to be stored for hundreds of thousands of years. Are we thinking about people into the future and our responsibility toward them?”

Environment Minister Rob Renner said he shares many of the bishops’ concerns.

“The decisions we make today will have a huge impact on future generations,” agreed Renner.

“We will absolutely take into account the opinions of Albertans, the science, the environment, the social issues related to nuclear. Ultimately, that process is being led by the minister of Energy. And I’ll defer on the specifics to the minister of Energy to deal with the specific issues. But let me reiterate that as minister of the Environment, my responsibility is to protect the environment and to ensure we make decisions today that future generations will be proud of.”

Smith also brought up concerns bishops had about adequate consultation, citing a month-long online government survey which garnered only 3,500 responses from the public.

He called on the provincial government to conduct a “broader and more substantive dialogue” to ensure Albertans are well informed, recommending that more meetings be held with stakeholders and with the public, through town hall meetings and even televised debates.

“We’re not saying we don’t like the idea of nuclear energy,” said Smith.

“In fact, the church in principle supports the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. That doesn’t necessarily translate into automatic support for any sort of project that comes along.

“So what we’re saying is now that the possibility of a project has come before this province, let’s weigh all of the risks and all of the benefits and make sure the people of the province are well informed.”

The bishops are the spiritual leaders of five Roman Catholic dioceses and one Ukrainian Catholic eparchy, representing 940,000 Catholics in the province.

Earlier this year, Bishop Luc Bouchard of the Catholic Diocese of St. Paul criticized future oilsands development in a letter, saying it “constitutes a serious moral problem” and goes against God’s teachings.

Bouchard called for a moratorium on further oilsands development until environmental and social concerns were addressed.

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<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Life/Alberta+bishops+raise+ethical+concerns+about+nuclear+power/1705522/story.html>

June 18, 2009

For Cizik, it’s suddenly a lot easier being green

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Fellow evangelicals long have criticized Richard Cizik, who resigned under pressure from the [National Association of Evangelicals](#) in December, for being a little too green.

Emerging from a self-imposed media blackout, Cizik is back, and he’s wearing the label of converted conservationist even more comfortably now.

“I have become a conservative who, by some people’s definition, has become a liberal,” Cizik said during a meeting on climate change in May. “I am not a liberal. I am a conservative who, of all things, believes that some people should become conservationists.”

These days, Cizik said, he has more speaking engagements than when he worked as the NAE’s point man in Washington, and he’s making plans for a new evangelical organization that will address issues as “broad as God’s concerns are broad.”

“I’m just going to create an entity that will enable young evangelicals to be more effective as advocates for change,” said Cizik, who was hired earlier this year as a senior fellow by the Washington-based [United Nations Foundation](#), founded by media mogul Ted Turner.

Cizik, 57, abruptly left the NAE, an evangelical umbrella group, after an interview with National Public Radio in which he signaled support for same-sex civil unions and admitted voting for President Obama in the Virginia primary despite Obama's support of abortion rights.

At the time, NAE President Leith Anderson said his organization decided Cizik, who had been with the group for more than a quarter century, "cannot continue as a spokesperson for NAE."

Although he declined to discuss his relationship with NAE, Cizik seems ready to move on and to resume his high-profile role in the nation's capital. He's building on his long-term interest in getting evangelicals of all ages involved in issues ranging from the environment to religious persecution.

Anderson, who hopes to announce a successor to Cizik within weeks, said he's not surprised his colleague of 30 years plans to pursue a wider range of evangelical causes.

"These are his interests and these are his issues," he said. "The difference is that when he was with NAE, he was connected to a broader constituency, and he'll speak now as an individual rather than for an organization."

E. Calvin Beisner, national spokesman for the [Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation](#) and a frequent Cizik critic, said he welcomes the transition because he believes Cizik went beyond the statements NAE member organizations adopted in a "For the Health of the Nation" document.

That document "said essentially nothing about global warming and yet he continued to make public statements hundreds of times, failing to explicitly express that this was his personal opinion and not representative of NAE," said Beisner.

Although Cizik is prepared to address issues beyond climate in a future organization, the man who was once photographed appearing to walk on water in the pages of *Vanity Fair* says "creation care" appears to be what people want him to talk about.

"That is my perceived expertise, but that's a bit of a misnomer," he said. "I'm no less concerned about the broader array of issues."

He's lectured on "Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth" at an interfaith gathering and appeared alongside House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at an Earth Day news conference to push clean energy legislation.

As Cizik has discovered, there is no such thing as bad publicity, and there's always a second act in Washington.

"I have more (speaking engagements) now than I had before, maybe in part due to some of the controversy associated with my name," Cizik said. "It's also true that some people have told me 'You're too controversial, and we'll invite you next year.'"

In his speeches, Cizik often cites passages from the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, which depicts God “destroying those who destroy the Earth.”

Eventually, he said, mankind’s mistreatment of the planet will be questioned as much as silence about the rise of Nazism and toleration of slavery. He calls climate change “the civil-rights issue of the 21st century.”

Citing a report from the relief agency [Christian Aid](#) of Britain that 1 billion people could be negatively impacted by climate change by mid-century, Cizik said: “If the civil rights campaigns of the late 20th century were aimed at restoring the voting rights of African-Americans, a new kind of civil rights campaign is needed to protect the lives of a billion of our fellow human beings.”

Even so, he acknowledged that he still has an uphill battle in winning over skeptical fellow believers. A [LifeWay Research](#) poll shows Protestant pastors are evenly split, at 47 percent each, on whether global warming is “real and man-made” or just a myth.

“It just reveals that there’s a lot of work yet to be done to ... convince the unpersuaded,” Cizik responded. “Nobody ever said it was going to be easy.”

But as he continues his work on going green for God, Cizik tells audiences evangelicals will need to build bridges with other faiths, just as they have on other issues. He recalls working with Tibetan Buddhists on religious freedom legislation, with Jews on Sudan’s troubled Darfur region and with Muslims on climate change.

“They’re not giving up their values, their commitment to Scripture or the rest,” he said of “new evangelicals” like himself. “But they do know that they do have to partner with others who don’t share their views in order to save the planet.”

http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=9700&Itemid=53

June 22, 2009

Empty chairs at climate talks 'will symbolise' those who can't speak

By Stephen Brown

When international talks about climate change open in Copenhagen in December, there should be three empty chairs at the conference table, a Church of Sweden expert on sustainable development has urged.

Lutheran pastor the Rev. Henrik Grape wants three chairs left empty at all future talks on climate issues to symbolise non-participants - the poor, future generations, and creation itself.

"Climate change has become a question of survival, especially for the poor and vulnerable, who will be the first to suffer," said participants at a 17 June meeting in Brussels about the ethical dimension of climate change, where Grape made his proposal about the empty chairs.

The Brussels meeting brought together members of European churches and representatives of the 27-nation European Union. The gathering is one of a number of events taking place in the run up to the United Nations-organized Copenhagen talks which open on 7 December.

"Our overwhelming problems, such as environmental pollution, pollution of seas, contaminated food supplies, the squandering of energy sources and climate change ... are issues that concern the human rights of future generations," said Metropolitan Athanasios of Achaia from the (Orthodox) Church of Greece, a participant in the meeting.

The Rev. Rüdiger Noll, director of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches - which gathers 120 mostly Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox churches - underlined the importance of justice and responsibility for developed countries "to save the harmony of creation".

The U.N. Copenhagen meeting is intended to reach an accord on combating climate change, to take effect in 2013. This would be after the expiry of the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol, a U.N.-brokered agreement aimed at limiting emissions of greenhouse gases that lead to climate change.

"An effective response to climate change requires both political leadership and ethical reflection and debate," said the Rev. Piotr Mazurkiewicz, secretary general of the Commission of the (Roman Catholic) Bishops' Conferences in the European Communities.

"These are essential in order to win over not only minds but also the hearts of citizens and to make change effective," Mazurkiewicz said at the meeting, which included reports of the latest scientific information concerning climate change.

Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, the vice-chairperson of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, warned that the EU's existing emissions reduction target will not be sufficient to keep global warming below a rise of two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

A two degrees Celsius temperature rise above pre-industrial levels is seen by international conservation organizations as the trigger for dramatic changes in ecosystems and potential species extinction.

"We, the European Union, have not only to assume our responsibility but also to be the leader for the rest of the world," said Karl Falkenberg, director general for the environment at the European Commission, the EU's executive arm.

Still, Falkenberg noted, "The outcome of Copenhagen will be positive only if we manage to convince other large emitters like China, India or Russia to join our commitment to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Source: [Ecumenical News International](http://www.melbourne.anglican.com.au/main.php?pg=news&news_id=20852&s=157)

http://www.melbourne.anglican.com.au/main.php?pg=news&news_id=20852&s=157

June 25, 2009

Sikhs in Collaboration with United Nations to respond to climate change and Global warming

Punjab Newslite Network

WASHINGTON DC: The Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) has partnered with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to help make the world greener by announcing the launch of a new initiative called EcoSikh.

EcoSikh is the Sikh community's contribution to the UNARC Seven Year Plan project, whose aim is to help the world's major religions create long term plans to improve their relationship with the environment. The plans, in which each tradition celebrates its unique relationship with the environment and puts its teachings on ecology into action, will be launched at a major Event at Windsor Castle this November, and will also be used to inform the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen this December.

"EcoSikh provides an unprecedented opportunity for the Sikh community. Throughout our history, Sikhs have been pioneers in environmental work and continue to be so today. EcoSikh will help the community to connect all that is already being done and will enable us to forge new paths toward the creation of a sustainable and eco-friendly planet," said Dr. Rajwant Singh, Chairperson of SCORE.

SCORE and ARC are hosting a consultation in New Delhi in July to give Sikh community leaders – both in India and in the diaspora – the opportunity to discuss and agree the EcoSikh plan - and establish the infrastructure needed for its implementation.

"The Sikh Five Year Plan is the next historic step in the Sikh communities' commitment to walk faithfully alongside the rest of Creation into a future which they believe they can make both better and greener," said Martin Palmer, Secretary General of ARC.

The plan focuses on five key areas - assets, education, media/advocacy, eco-twinning, and celebration. So, for example, the Sikh gurdwaras in India feed some 30 million of people every day, free of charge. Their energy and food sourcing are therefore highly important as a means of living their commitment for creation and walking lightly on the earth. From this also arises the commitment to define what an eco-gurdwara could and should be.

According to Rajwant Singh, "The whole undertaking is an articulation of a Sikh eco-theology that finds its roots in Guru Nanak Dev Ji and continues through the work of modern day Sikh eco-patrons like Bhagat Puran Singh Ji.

June 26, 2009

How Confucianism could curb global warming

China openly debates the role of Eastern thought in sustainability.

By James Miller

KINGSTON, ONTARIO - Now here's a curveball to secular Western policy experts: China's intellectuals are openly debating the role of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in promoting the Communist Party's vision of a harmonious society and ecologically sustainable economic development.

Nowhere is the question of what to do about the environment more vital than in China, the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases – especially because scientists agree that climate change disproportionately affects the poor and the disenfranchised and that climate change will affect future generations far more than the present.

Yet the general impression of China's role in issues relating to environment is one of foot-dragging because it hasn't bought into a Western model to address it.

But Pan Yue, China's vice minister for environmental protection, is calling for China to capitalize on traditional Chinese religions in promoting ecological sustainability.

He says, "One of the core principles of traditional Chinese culture is that of harmony between humans and nature. Different philosophies all emphasize the political wisdom of a balanced environment. Whether it is the Confucian idea of humans and nature becoming one, the Taoist view of the Tao reflecting nature, or the Buddhist belief that all living things are equal, Chinese philosophy has helped our culture to survive for thousands of years. It can be a powerful weapon in preventing an environmental crisis and building a harmonious society."

And this just might work.

As The New York Times recently reported, China is in the midst of a transformation to cleaner forms of energy.

Although much of China's energy needs are still met by inefficient, coal-fired power stations with poor track records in terms of emissions, China has begun to invest heavily in cleaner coal technology in an effort to improve efficiency and reduce emissions.

Because of this, the International Energy Agency reduced its estimate of the increase in Chinese emissions of global warming gases from 3.2 percent to 3 percent even as the same agency raised

its estimate of China's economic growth. China is managing to increase its economic output at a greater rate than its emissions.

This is good news for everyone.

But buried innocuously in the middle of this report was the startlingly frank statement of Cao Peixi, president of the China Huaneng group, China's largest state-owned electric company.

When asked about his company's decision to invest in more expensive but cleaner technology he replied: "We shouldn't look at this project from a purely financial perspective. It represents the future."

The \$64,000 question facing economists and politicians across the world is how to make decisions that take into account the big picture beyond the "purely financial perspective."

This is a hard question for Western economic and political theorists to answer, because their theories are based on the Enlightenment view of the self as an autonomous, rational individual.

But how are we to make decisions that take into account the interests of those who have not yet been born?

Being respectful to the interests of past and future generations is key to the Confucian view of the self and groups. To the question, "Who am I?" the Confucian answers, "I am the child of my parents and the parent of my children."

Confucianism begins from the proposition that human beings are defined by kinship networks that span the centuries. From this perspective the interests of the individual are bound up with the interests of the kinship group as it extends forward and backward across the generations.

This will be a key factor in the way China handles present and future environmental issues.

Consider the views of Jiang Qing, a leading Confucian intellectual. According to a recent report by Daniel Bell, a political theorist at China's Tsinghua University, Mr. Jiang proposes a political system that can take into account the interests of those who are typically ignored in modern democracies, such as foreigners, future generations, and ancestors.

"Is democracy really the best way to protect future victims of global warming?" he asks.

As China assumes a greater leadership role on the world stage, we can expect the emergence of a variety of models of sustainable development rooted in a plurality of cultural traditions, including Confucianism.

The time when Westernization was the only credible model of development is over.

James Miller is a professor of Chinese studies in the Department of Religious Studies at Queen's University, Kingston. He is currently researching the relationship between religion, nature, and modernization in China.

July 5, 2009

Religion comes to environment's rescue

By Chetan Chauhan
Hindustan Times
New Delhi

Where political leaders have failed to come up with a plan to save the planet from global warming, religious leaders have succeeded.

On July 6, Islamic leaders from over 50 Muslim countries, including heads of states of Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, will meet in Istanbul to sign an agreement on environment conservation.

An announcement is expected on Haj pilgrimage becoming green from next year and environment studies being included in religious schools. Already, a mosque in Leicester, Britain has become the world's first green mosque.

On Saturday, the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) signed a pledge with UNDP, the first Indian religious group to do so, for an initiative called EcoSikh. "We'll reduce emissions from kitchens in gurdwaras around the world by installing solar equipment," Dr Rajwant Singh, chairperson of SCORE told HT.

The Golden Temple in Amritsar has already started using solar energy for cooking. "The green covers you see at the Golden Temple will be replicated all over the world," Singh said.

In a similar environment-friendly move, Sri Venkateshwara Temple in Tirupati and Sai Baba Temple in Shirdi now serve lunch to devotees cooked in solar-powered kitchens, apparently the world's largest.

By November this year, a month before global leaders meet in Copenhagen to discuss a draft agreement on global warming for the next 10 years, religious leaders will have in place an alternative action plan on climate change for religious bodies.

Under this plan, the Bible, Quran and other religious texts will be available on recycled paper, food in gurdwaras will be cooked in solar energy-fuelled kitchens, and places of worship around the world will install waste recycling and water-harvesting systems.

"Religious groups have taken up various projects to fight climate change," said Olav Kjørven, head of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) international policy division on the environment, which is leading the initiative to bring religious leaders together to save the planet.

Pope Benedict XVI is also expected to issue an encyclical — a statement — on environment in a few days, Kjørven said. Churches in England and southern India have come up with seven-year plans to save the environment.

Representatives from 180 countries failed to reach an agreement in Bonn, Germany, last month on how to fight climate change. It's been two years since the negotiations started in Bali. In contrast, religious bodies, which own half of all the schools in the world and 7-8 per cent of the land, have moved on to the fast track in only a year's time.

“Religious bodies are the world's biggest civil society and they can make a huge impact on the fight against climate change,” Kjørven said.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print.aspx?Id=cb3a0662-b810-40ce-8525-647fddb7929>

July 5, 2009

The G8 must lead on emissions reduction

The G8 summit in Italy next week is an opportunity for the rich world to unite in cutting emissions and protecting the world's poor

By John Houghton
The Guardian

World leaders have a unique opportunity this year to lay the essential foundations of a solution to the global climate crisis. At the [G8 summit in Italy next week](#), and at numerous other meetings this year, culminating in the [UN Copenhagen climate talks in December](#), they will be responsible for deciding the future direction of the entire planet and its inhabitants. It is indeed a weighty and urgent responsibility given that so many lives depend upon the outcomes.

It is particularly the voices of the world's poorest that must be heard at these meetings. It is they who will bear the brunt of rising temperatures and the consequent impacts of floods, droughts, rising sea levels and severe water shortages, all of which will lead by mid century to hundreds of millions of environmental refugees.

In the west, we have grown rich over the past 200 years because we have had cheap energy in the form of coal, oil and gas. Those who are poor have not benefited – 1.6bn people (a quarter of humanity) live without electricity and other basic necessities – yet they will be hardest hit. The moral imperative for us to redress past damage and avoid future damage is inescapable.

For many years I have supported the Christian development agency [Tearfund](#) in its work with the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities. Interestingly, it's local churches who are leading the way in adapting to [climate change](#) in many parts of the world, mobilising local communities to find solutions to changing climate trends.

For instance, local church organisations in Niger are working with pastoralists to adapt their farming practices to respond to a changing climate, and in Brazil, we see Christian organisations working to enable people to adapt to the harsh realities of climate change through well-drilling, building cisterns and agro-forestry.

The church is one of the few movements that is both local and global. As an international network it has the ability to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to lobby policymakers. I believe that as well as the valuable work that it carries out in communities, the church must also call out for a global, political solution to climate change through the Copenhagen process.

So far, progress at talks aimed at negotiating a new climate treaty by December this year has been slow, lacking the urgency that is so desperately needed. The most immediate challenge faced especially by the rich nations is that of turning the current year-on-year growth of global greenhouse gas emissions to a reduction year-on-year.

It is increasingly recognised as the scientific evidence grows stronger that a limit needs to be set of no more than two degrees increase in global average temperature above its preindustrial value – a limit first proposed by the European Union Council in 1996. For there to be a good chance of achieving this limit, global emissions must peak within about the next seven years. That implies for developed countries cuts in emissions in the range 25-40% by 2020. Failure to achieve this limit will create severe disadvantage for billions of the world's people.

There is also an absence of any serious offer from rich countries of large scale additional finance for poor countries to adapt to climate change and to help them develop in a sustainable, low carbon way. This is a lynchpin of any agreement – without it, it is difficult to see why developing countries should sign up. The [G8](#) this summer could build trust among developing countries by giving some of the short-term finance for adaptation that is so desperately needed and long overdue, as long as this does not replace longer-term finance.

It is to be hoped that the meetings of the G8 and the [Major Economies Forum](#) can provide impetus towards a tough Copenhagen deal, with developed countries being willing to put more on the table in the way of finance and emissions reductions.

But ultimately a global deal on climate change cannot simply be brokered between the rich and powerful or it will surely fail. It must be an inclusive and visionary deal that involves all nations and puts the needs of poor people at its heart.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/05/climate-change-g8-houghton>

July 7, 2009

Pope proposes new financial order guided by ethics

By Nicole Winfield
Associated Press Writer

VATICAN CITY — Pope Benedict XVI called Tuesday for a new world financial order guided by ethics and the search for the common good, denouncing the profit-at-all-cost mentality blamed for bringing about the global financial meltdown.

In the third encyclical of his pontificate, Benedict pressed for reform of the United Nations and international economic and financial institutions to give poorer countries more of a say in international policy.

“There is urgent need (for) a true world political authority” that can manage the global economy, guarantee the environment is protected, ensure world peace and bring about food security for the poor, he wrote.

The document “Charity in Truth,” was in the works for two years, and its publication was repeatedly delayed to incorporate the fallout from the crisis. It was released a day before leaders of the Group of Eight industrialized nations meet to coordinate efforts to deal with the global meltdown, signaling a clear Vatican bid to prod leaders for a financially responsible future and what it considers a more socially just society.

“The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly — not any ethics, but an ethics which is people centered,” Benedict wrote.

The German-born Benedict, 82, has spoken out frequently about the impact of the crisis on the poor, particularly in Africa, which he visited earlier this year. But the 144-page encyclical, one of the most authoritative documents a pope can issue, marked a new level of church teaching by linking the Vatican’s long-standing social doctrine on caring for the poor with current events.

While acknowledging that the globalized economy has “lifted billions of people out of misery,” Benedict accused the unbridled growth of recent years of causing unprecedented problems as well, citing mass migration flows, environmental degradation and a complete loss of trust in the world market.

He urged wealthier countries to increase development aid to poor countries to help eliminate world hunger, saying peace and security depended on it. He specified that aid should go to agricultural development to improve infrastructure, irrigation systems, transport and sharing of agricultural technology.

At the same time, he demanded that industrialized nations reduce their energy consumption, both to better care for the environment and to let the poorer have access to energy resources.

“One of the greatest challenges facing the economy is to achieve the most efficient use — not abuse — of natural resources, based on a realization that the notion of ‘efficiency’ is not value-free,” he wrote.

Benedict said that the drive to outsource work to the cheapest bidder had endangered the rights of workers, and he demanded that workers be allowed to organize in unions to protect their rights and guarantee steady, decent employment.

Benedict called for a whole new financial order — “a profoundly new way of understanding business enterprise” — that respects the dignity of workers and looks out for the common good by prioritizing ethics and social responsibility over dividend returns.

The Rev. Drew Christiansen, editor of the Jesuit monthly *America* and a leading social ethicist, said he was most intrigued by the pope’s call for a new sector of society to work alongside government, market and civil society: for-profit entities that work for the common good, which Christiansen suggested could include “fair trade” product makers and micro-finance institutions.

“I am not sure these enterprises yet constitute a sector of economic life,” Christiansen wrote on his blog. “But they are harbingers of a different, conscientious kind of economics that would not repeat the mistakes of the last 30 years.”

Kirk Hanson, a business ethics professor at Santa Clara University, said that while the encyclical went into some detail about the rights of workers and the duties of the state in protecting those rights, there was precious little about how an actual CEO leader should go about business.

“It’s almost as if the church has so little trust in business leaders that it speaks to the political leaders urging regulation and the consumers urging voting with their buying power,” said Hanson, who chaired hearings leading up to a similar U.S. Catholic bishops’ statement on capitalism and social justice in the 1980s.

Benedict has written two previous encyclicals in his four years as pope: “God is Love” in 2006 and “Saved by Hope” in 2007.

The pope’s focus on world finance raised questions about the state of the Vatican’s own books.

The Vatican was implicated in the 1980s collapse of Banco Ambrosiano, in which the Vatican’s bank was the major shareholder, and it agreed to pay \$250 million to Ambrosiano’s creditors, while denying any wrongdoing.

At the start of the meltdown in October, a top Vatican bank official assured that its deposits were safe and had no liquidity problems, saying the bank had stayed away from derivatives, the financial instruments blamed in part for the crisis.

Other officials have said 80 percent of the Vatican’s investments are in low-yield government bonds and 20 percent in stocks and that the Vatican does not invest in companies that produce arms or contraceptives.

The Vatican in its annual financial statement issued Saturday said it ran a deficit in 2008 for the second straight year, posting a euro900,000 (\$1.28 million) loss, compared with a loss of euro9.06 million a year earlier.

July 9, 2009

New sins, new virtues

The Economist

As the world heats up and economic dislocation ravages the poor, religious leaders offer up their diagnoses and prescriptions

GLOBALISATION, technology and growth are in themselves neither positive or negative; they are whatever humanity makes of them. Summed up like that, the central message of a keenly awaited papal pronouncement on the social and economic woes of the world may sound like a statement of the obvious.

But despite some lapses into trendy jargon, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), a 144-page encyclical issued by Pope Benedict XVI on July 7th, is certainly not a banal or trivial document. It will delight some people, enrage others and occupy a prominent place among religious leaders' competing attempts to explain and address the problems of an overheated, overcrowded planet.

From photogenic Anglicans like Richard Chartres, the bishop of London (pictured with a Noah's Ark of young climate-change lobbyists), to the Dalai Lama, lots of prominent religious figures have been feeling the need to broaden their message. They are moving away from the old stress on individual failings (stealing, lying, cheating) and talking more about the fate of humanity as a whole.

But Pope Benedict, for all his concern with cosmic issues, is certainly not watering down his insistence on old-fashioned religious virtues, including caution and sobriety. On many big public questions, he proposes a middle course between faith in scientific progress and nostalgia for a simpler past. People cannot expect to avoid the extremes, Benedict rather provocatively adds, when they are looking at the world through purely secular spectacles. "When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes," he argues.

Displaying a better-than-usual sense of public relations, the Holy See released the document on the eve of a world leaders' summit in L'Aquila, east of Rome (see [article](#)). And like many other big pronouncements from moral leaders, it will be seen as staking out ground ahead of the Copenhagen conference on climate change in December.

Encyclicals are the heaviest ammunition in the papacy's intellectual arsenal. This one was delayed for more than two years as the Vatican's thinkers struggled to keep abreast of developments in the world economy. But the original purpose has remained intact: to offer a

Catholic response to a global marketplace that in Benedict's elegant turn of phrase, "makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers."

The document accepts the legitimacy of markets or profits, as long as they are not idolised, or elevated far above the human beings who are affected by economic decisions. But Benedict's proposal for discerning the difference between healthy markets and pathological ones is uncompromising and offers no sops to the secular. An economy, he suggests, is working well when it allows individuals and societies to fulfil themselves in every way—something that in his view can happen only when God is involved.

The encyclical grafts this ideal of development in the service of God and man onto an insistence on Catholic morality in ethics. As Austen Ivereigh, a British Catholic writer, puts it, "the message is that you can't believe in social justice if you also believe in abortion and euthanasia." Giving short shrift to non-believers, the pope also argues that without "truth" in the Christian sense, "there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power." This purist approach may risk narrowing the scope for the sort of tactical co-operation between believers and secularists that is emerging on many fronts, from the fight against malaria to weaning the world off hydrocarbons.

Still, some non-Catholics may agree (and some Catholics may disagree) with one of the pope's more concrete proposals: an overhaul of global institutions—or in plainer language an expanded role for the United Nations or some other authority. The aim of this new structure would be "the management of globalisation". Vatican aides said this was not a proposal for world government—but it did sound a bit like that. Such a body would need to be universally recognised, subject to international law and "vested with the effective power to ensure security for all, regard for justice and respect for rights." Its areas of competence would include managing the global economy, disarmament, food security, the environment and migration. This may alarm those who see global bureaucracies' sloth, pride, envy, greed and gluttony (to name only a few deadly vices) as exemplars of human failing. But the Vatican's longing for a stronger UN goes back to 2003, when it was shocked by the world body's inability to stop the Iraq war.

Do as you would be done by

In any case, Benedict finds the roots of the economic crisis in wickedness. The global recession, he argues, is merely the latest effect of a tendency to confuse happiness and salvation with prosperity. But economic activity "cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic". And the market should not be a place "where the strong subdue the weak".

Throughout the document, leftish ideas about economics nestle alongside the austere moral reasoning that is a hallmark of the German-born pontiff. A conservative American Catholic, George Weigel, has claimed that only certain parts of it—the bits he liked—were written by Benedict; in other sections he detects the influence of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, one of the more radical sections of the Vatican bureaucracy.

In the case of other religious leaders, the message is simpler. The Dalai Lama, for example, has drawn attention to a potential disaster which looms in his home region of Tibet: the melting of glaciers which serve as “Asia’s water tower” by feeding the rivers on which billions of people depend. London’s Bishop Chartres has spearheaded efforts to make England’s established church much greener in its thinking and in its own behaviour. A plan called “Shrinking the Footprint” is intended to slash the carbon emissions of Anglican buildings, from cathedrals to vicarages to church halls.

And in Istanbul this week, dozens of prominent Islamic scholars delved into their tradition for answers to environmental problems. Originating in a land where water is very scarce, the Muslim faith has much to say about the need to use resources in a just and cautious way.

Still, the idea of restraining carbon emissions is not an easy sell in countries that have grown rich from selling hydrocarbons and have enough cash to import water and food. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a Qatar-based Islamic scholar and spiritual guide to the global Muslim Brotherhood, got a rave reception at the Istanbul meeting—but his speech focused more on matters of human hygiene than on the treatment of the natural world.

Another participant, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, is by comparison a trailblazer. Ali Gomaa has agreed to make the institution he heads—an office that issues fatwas, or rulings on ethical questions—carbon-neutral and is searching for carbon offsets in Egypt, a concept which few locals as yet understand. Islam’s ecological message is much more readily grasped in the endangered forests of Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, for example, there are 17,000 madrassas—and a local NGO, the Conservation and Religion Initiative, reports good progress in persuading teachers in those schools to preach and practise good stewardship. As a follow-up to the Istanbul gathering, Muslims and adherents of many other faiths will meet in Britain in November and present plans for greener management of their resources.

While Muslim greybeards deliberated, two leading figures in the eastern Christian world—the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, and the newly enthroned Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow—held a joint service nearby that signalled a warming in their relations and a common commitment to cool and generally improve the world. Patriarch Bartholomew, who is planning to host an eco-symposium in New Orleans in October, called for an investigation of the “deeper spiritual and moral causes” of the planet’s woes. Residing as he does near a narrow strait plied by giant tankers which bring oil from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, the Istanbul-based “green patriarch” was far ahead of the Vatican in calling pollution a sin.

http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14002725

July 12, 2009

Anglican and Roman Catholic leaders say the market is lacking morals

In writings and speeches, church officials suggest that fixing the economy will need to include an ethical element.

By Larry B. Stammer
Los Angeles Times

In the midst of a global recession, religious leaders are looking beyond the recent regulatory fixes and bailouts aimed at repairing an ailing financial system.

They are questioning the underlying assumptions of a market economy that they say has lost its moral bearings.

Last week, Pope Benedict XVI issued an encyclical, a papal pronouncement, that decries the divide between rich and poor.

He said that growing financial interdependence had not been matched by ethical interactions for the good of all and that the United Nations and financial institutions should be reformed so that a "true world political authority" can work for the common good while respecting local decision-making.

"The church does not have technical solutions to offer and does not claim to interfere in any way in the politics of states," the pope wrote. It "does, however have a mission of truth to accomplish. . . . Fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth."

The archbishop of Canterbury, speaking Wednesday in Anaheim at a national convention for Episcopalians, criticized those who profit by manipulating markets and fashioning exotic financial instruments on a house of cards.

"In the last six to nine months, what we have seen in our world is not simply an economic crisis but a crisis of truthfulness," said the Most Rev. Rowan Williams. "We have suddenly discovered that we have been lying to ourselves."

Williams, the leader of the Anglican Communion, said that the world can't return to a "dysfunctional, disabling and destructive" financial system and that the demands of the market are never a satisfactory moral guideline. He called for factoring environmental costs into the equation.

"The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment," he said.

Together, Roman Catholics and Anglicans make up about 58% of the world's estimated 2.1 billion Christians.

The declarations by these and other church leaders came as the world's major economic powers met in Italy to come up with a shared response to the global downturn and to climate change. Only marginal progress was achieved.

Given the initiatives of government and the influence of multinational corporations, one might wonder if religious bodies can have any impact. Will they be heard outside the cloister, or even

by their own congregants, whose lifestyles for the most part are not unlike those of people who are not members? Is anyone really listening?

It would be easy to take a jaded view. Twenty years ago, the Episcopal House of Bishops -- one of two houses in the church's highest legislative body, General Convention -- issued a paper on "Economic Justice and the Christian Conscience." In it, the bishops urged a "fundamental reordering" of human values.

In 1986, Roman Catholic bishops in the United States issued a pastoral letter, "Economic Justice for All," that called for a moral examination of the economy and raised the ire of both the Reagan administration and prominent lay Catholic conservatives.

As for Pope Benedict's latest call, he noted that the idea of a world political authority working for the common good was first broached by Pope John XXIII, who died in 1963.

To be sure, religious groups of all kinds devote money and talent to serving the poor and working to alleviate poverty, racism and economic disparity.

They play a role in founding hospitals, schools, and colleges and often support groups pushing for higher wages for the working poor.

Some say that elected officials who have religious affiliations bring to office a moral grounding that can positively influence public policy.

Richard Parker, a professor of public policy at Harvard University, said that religious voices may have a role to play in shaping responses to the current financial crisis. Popular outrage over Wall Street swindlers and the loss of jobs, homes and retirement savings have again brought moral issues to the forefront of public debate.

"People today are desperately hungry for what I can only describe as moral leadership -- not moralistic leadership but moral leadership," said Parker, the son of an Episcopal priest, in an interview before he addressed a small group at the Anaheim convention.

"We're living in a period of gross, and one might even say grotesque, market failure," he said.

Speaking in a similar vein, Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori joined Williams, the archbishop, at a forum on the Christian faith in during the global economic crisis on the first night of the convention, which runs through Friday.

"We are in the midst of a crash course in economic inter-connectedness," said Jefferts Schori, adding that the excesses unveiled by the economic crisis "have been biblical in scale."

"We have overlooked the greed that engendered this crisis, we have participated in it ourselves through investment policies. . . . We have ignored the abundance with which God has blessed us and been unwilling to share what we know and what we have," she said.

Williams told the session, attended by several hundred people, that the implicit lies leading to the economic crisis require a moral response.

He also said those untruths included a belief in unlimited growth on a planet that has limits.

Individual lifestyles and government policies must change to show respect for a finite material world and for the common good, Williams said.

"The task before us is not simply to restore financial stability," the archbishop said. "It certainly is not to get our international financial life back to normal. There is no normal anymore."

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<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-beliefs13-2009jul13,0,1563619.story>

July 12, 2009

Catholicism as Antidote to Turbo-Capitalism

By Carter Dougherty
New York Times

MUNICH — The collapse of Communism in the East two decades ago did not provide much of an opening for the Catholic Church to influence economic policy, but perhaps the near-collapse of Western capitalism will. Two German authors — one named Marx, the other his patron in Rome — are certainly hoping so.

The first is Reinhard Marx, archbishop of Munich and Freising, who has written a best seller in Germany that he cheekily titled “Das Kapital” (and in which he addresses that other Marx — Karl — as “dear namesake”). The second is [Pope Benedict XVI](#), who last week published his first papal encyclical on economic and social matters. It has a more gentle title, “Charity in Truth,” but is based on the same essential line of thinking. Indeed, Archbishop Marx had a hand in advising the pope on it, and a reading of the archbishop’s book helps explain the intellectual context in which the encyclical was composed.

The message in both is that global capitalism has raced off the moral rails and that Roman Catholic teachings can help set Western economics right by encouraging them to focus more on justice for the weak and closely regulating the market.

Unlike the 19th-century Marx, who thought organized religion was a trick played on the impoverished in order to control them, Archbishop Marx and other Catholics yearn for reform, not class warfare. In that, they are following a long and fundamental line of church teaching. What is different now is that some of them see this economic crisis as a moment when the church’s economic thinking just may attract serious attention.

Archbishop Marx has already drawn a following in Germany by arguing that capitalism needs, in a grave way, the ethical underpinnings of Catholicism. The alternative, he argues, is that the post-crisis world will fall back into furious turbo-capitalism, or, alternatively, experience a renaissance of Marxist ideology based on [atheism](#) and class divisions.

“There is no way back into an old world,” Archbishop Marx said in a recent interview, before the encyclical was issued. “We have to affirm this world, but critically.”

Catholic voices have long had influence on the debate in the West about social justice, but never as much as the church would have wished. That reflected the enduring challenge of devising alternative policies, rather than simply criticizing secular authorities.

[Pope John Paul II](#), a Pole with an intuitive feel for Communism’s injustices, was an important voice in bringing that system down. But he had to watch in the 1990s as Eastern Europe embraced Communism’s polar opposite — a rather pure form of secular capitalism, instead of any Catholic-influenced middle way.

“John Paul II was often very clear what he was against: He was against unbridled capitalism and the kind of socialism of the Soviet sphere,” said John Allen, the National Catholic Reporter [Vatican](#) watcher. “What he was for was less clear.”

Now Archbishop Marx, who at 55 occupies an ecclesiastical perch once held by Benedict, is trying to wriggle out of that intellectual straitjacket.

With his talent for turning a provocative phrase, he has more in common stylistically with the evangelist St. Paul or the philosophes, who popularized Enlightenment thought, than with Karl, who ground out his dense texts from exile in London. After beginning his book puckishly by addressing [Karl Marx](#) personally, the archbishop races through 200 years of Western economic history in a way that pays tribute to Karl’s core analytical conclusion — that capitalism embodies contradictions that threaten the system itself.

But he also makes it clear he is no Communist. He admires Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, a 19th-century writer who put Catholic theory into practice as a member of Germany’s first national Parliament in 1848, and later became a bishop and a fervent critic of Karl Marx.

The gregarious Archbishop Marx has cut a profile in the German business community for his willingness to walk into a roomful of executives and raise the roof. (“Are you marionettes?” he once asked a manager who protested that markets sometimes dictate unethical actions.)

In his book, which was published last fall, he offers a vision of a world governed by cooperation among nations, with a vibrant welfare state as the core of a market economy that reflects the love-thy-neighbor imperatives of Catholic social thought.

On the first point, Archbishop Marx is in good, cosmopolitan company; many officials, from New York to London to Beijing, are calling these days for a world in greater regulatory harmony, though the specifics may be hard to agree upon. He sounds considerably more German

when exhorting the world to create, or recast, the welfare state. People need the welfare state before they “can give themselves over to the very strenuous and sometimes very risky games of the market economy,” Archbishop Marx said. The burdens of aging, illness or unemployment “need to be borne collectively,” he added.

In support of his argument, the archbishop calls for a “global social market economy,” based on a concept familiar to Germans as the model for their own postwar system.

Of course, the archbishop says he realizes that a European’s ideal of welfare states and border-straddling institutions might not have universal appeal. At the end of his book, he quotes Jean-Claude Juncker, the prime minister of Luxembourg, who has said, “I approve of the notion that Europe sees itself, unpretentiously, as a model for the world, but the consequence of that is that we would have to constantly change that model because we are not the world.”

Neither, he might have added, is the Roman Catholic church.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/12/weekinreview/12dougherty.html?_r=2&scp=2&sq=Catholicism&st=cse

July 28, 2009

Pope cites Teilhardian vision of the cosmos as a 'living host'

By John L. Allen Jr.
National Catholic Reporter

Though few might have cast him in advance as a "green pope," Pope Benedict XVI has amassed a striking environmental record, from installing solar panels in the Vatican to calling for ecological conversion. Now the pontiff has also hinted at a possible new look at the undeclared patron saint of Catholic ecology, the late French Jesuit scientist and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Benedict's brief July 24 reference to Teilhard, praising his vision of the entire cosmos as a "living host," can be read on multiple levels -- as part of the pontiff's rapprochement with the Jesuits, or as a further instance of finding something positive to say about thinkers whose works have set off doctrinal alarms, as Benedict previously did with rebel Swiss theologian and former colleague Hans Küng.

The potential implications for environmental theology, however, are likely to generate the greatest interest among Teilhard's fans and foes alike -- and more than a half-century after his death in 1955, the daring Jesuit still has plenty of both. Admirers trumpet Teilhard as a pioneer, harmonizing Christianity with the theory of evolution; critics charge that Teilhard's optimistic view of nature flirts with pantheism.

Benedict's comment came during a July 24 vespers service in the Cathedral of Aosta in northern Italy, where the pope took his annual summer vacation July 13-29.

Toward the end of a reflection upon the Letter to the Romans, in which St. Paul writes that the world itself will one day become a form of living worship, the pope said, "It's the great vision that later Teilhard de Chardin also had: At the end we will have a true cosmic liturgy, where the cosmos becomes a living host.

"Let's pray to the Lord that he help us be priests in this sense," the pope said, "to help in the transformation of the world in adoration of God, beginning with ourselves."

Though offered only in passing, and doubtless subject to overinterpretation, Benedict's line nevertheless triggered headlines in the Italian press about a possible "rehabilitation" of Teilhard, sometimes referred to as the "Catholic Darwin." That reading seemed especially tempting since, as a consummate theologian, Benedict is aware of the controversy that swirls around Teilhard, and would thus grasp the likely impact of a positive papal reference.

At the very least, the line seemed to offer a blessing for exploration of the late Jesuit's ideas. That impression appeared to be confirmed by the Vatican spokesperson, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, who said afterward, "By now, no one would dream of saying that [Teilhard] is a heterodox author who shouldn't be studied."

Teilhard's most prominent living disciple in Italy, lay theologian Vito Mancuso, told reporters that he was "pleasantly surprised" by Benedict's words and that they have "great importance."

Teilhard, who died in 1955 at the age of 73, was a French Jesuit who studied paleontology and participated in the 1920s-era discovery of "Peking Man" in China, a find that seemed to confirm a gradual development in the human species. Teilhard has also been linked to the 1912 discovery of "Piltdown Man" in England, later exposed as a hoax.

On the basis of his scientific work, Teilhard developed an evolutionary theology asserting that all creation is developing towards an "Omega Point," which he identified with Christ as the Logos, or "Word" of God. In that sense, Teilhard broadened the concept of salvation history to embrace not only individual persons and human culture, but the entire universe. In short order, Teilhard's thought became the obligatory point of departure for any Catholic treatment of the environment.

Yet from the beginning, Teilhard's theology was also viewed with caution by officials both of the Jesuit order and in the Vatican. Among other things, officials worried that his optimistic reading of nature compromised church teaching on original sin. In 1962 -- seven years after his death -- the Vatican's doctrinal office issued a warning that his works "abound in such ambiguities and indeed even serious errors, as to offend Catholic doctrine."

In 1981, on the 100th anniversary of Teilhard's birth, speculation erupted about a possible rehabilitation. It was fueled by a letter published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, by the then-Cardinal Secretary of State Agostino Casaroli, who praised the "astonishing resonance of his research, as well as the brilliance of his personality and richness of

his thinking." Casaroli asserted that Teilhard had anticipated John Paul II's call to "be not afraid," embracing "culture, civilization and progress."

Responding to ferment created by the letter, the Vatican issued a statement insisting that its 1962 verdict on Teilhard still stands -- to date, Rome's last official pronouncement on Teilhard. (The statement was issued in July 1981, four months before then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, took over as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.)

Across the years, Benedict has sometimes seemed to be of two minds himself.

In his 1968 work *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger wrote that Eastern Christianity has a deeper appreciation for the "cosmic and metaphysical" dimension of Christianity than the West, but that the West seemed to be recovering that perspective, "especially as a result of stimuli from the work of Teilhard." He argued that Teilhard gave authentic expression to the Christology of St. Paul.

As pope, Benedict has occasionally used language that seems to reflect a Teilhardian touch. In his 2006 Easter homily, the pontiff referred to the theory of evolution, describing the Resurrection as "the greatest 'mutation,' absolutely the most crucial leap into a totally new dimension that there has ever been in the long history of life and its development."

Yet Ratzinger's ambivalence about Teilhard is of equally long vintage. In a commentary on the final session of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), a young Ratzinger complained that *Gaudium et Spes*, the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," played down the reality of sin because of an overly "French," and specifically "Teilhardian," influence.

Overall, the impression is that Benedict finds much to like about Teilhard's cosmic vision, even if he also worries about interpretations at odds with orthodox faith.

Benedict's July 24 remark on Teilhard builds upon the pope's strong record on the environment, considered by many observers to be the most original feature of his social teaching. Most recently, Benedict devoted a section of his new social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, to a call for deepening what he called "that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God."

In her recent book *Ten Commandments for the Environment: Pope Benedict XVI Speaks Out for Creation and Justice*, Catholic writer Woodeene Koenig-Bricker described Benedict as "the greenest pope in history," arguing that he has not only made strong environmental statements but also put them into practice.

In that light, one wonders if Benedict's shade of green could eventually allow Teilhard to be named the patron saint of Catholic ecology *de jure*, as well as *de facto*. If so, July 24 could be remembered as the first stirring of an "evolutionary leap" in the late Jesuit's reputation and official standing.

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July 30, 2009

Sustainable living – a spiritual view
A Christian Science perspective.

By Nancy Humphrey Case
The Christian Science Monitor

Much public thought and discussion is being given to sustainability. It's encouraging to see people from diverse backgrounds and political persuasions thoughtfully considering what practices – individual and collective – are and are not sustainable in the long run.

The [Institute for Sustainable Communities](#), an organization that engages citizens in solving environmental and other problems in communities around the world, has developed a list of elements that make up a sustainable community. Some of these elements are satisfaction of basic human needs; protection of ecosystems; use of renewable resources no faster than their rate of renewal; meaningful employment for all citizens; equal opportunity for all individuals to participate in and influence decisions that affect their lives; respect and tolerance for diverse viewpoints, beliefs, and values; political stability; and a community spirit that creates a sense of belonging and self-worth.

To me, that list is an outward manifestation of spiritual qualities that originate in the nature of divine Love or Principle – nourishment, caring, diversity, balance, productivity, harmony, and all-inclusiveness. Whatever God creates – whatever originates in His nature – is sustained by Him forever. That includes the essentially spiritual identity of every individual and the essentially spiritual substance or idea behind everything we see around us. Conversely, whatever is not created by God has no law or principle to support it, and it cannot be sustained.

Translating this into our everyday life, we might say that whatever in human experience is aligned with God's qualities – whether it's a loving family, a business built on fairness and respect, or a community that values and cares for its members and its natural environment – is inherently sustainable. Opposite states of thought, such as selfishness, greed, lust, intolerance, and despotism, and the practices growing out of them, are inherently self-destructive.

"Sin has the elements of self-destruction. It cannot sustain itself," wrote [Mary Baker Eddy](#) in the Christian Science textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" (p. 481). Elsewhere this book explains, "Truth and Love antidote this mental miasma, and thus invigorate and sustain existence" (p. 274).

The power of God to sustain His creation, even in dire circumstances, is beautifully illustrated by the biblical story of the prophet Elijah. He made it his lifework to listen to, obey, and share what

God told him. You could say this attitude of unselfishness and service aligned Elijah with what Mary Baker Eddy called "the sustaining infinite" ([p. vii](#)).

During a severe drought, God directed Elijah to journey to the east "by the brook Cherith." The account in First Kings records, "The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." When the brook dried up, God told Elijah to go to Zarephath, where he would be sustained by a widow. When Elijah found the widow destitute, he told her not to be afraid. He so trusted divine Love's promise that he was confident that the woman would not run out of food, and she did not. She, her son, and Elijah lived on what looked like impossibly meager resources during a great famine (see [I Kings 17](#)).

Public discussion of sustainability is largely based on the concept of a material world with finite resources, inhabited by life-forms vulnerable to corruption, imbalance, depletion, and extinction. But the experience of Elijah points to a higher view of the universe as spiritual – as both created and sustained by Spirit, God. Holding this view in thought and acting in accord with the qualities of Love and Principle can bring infinite spiritual resources to bear on the needs of all living things on Earth, proving all good to be not only sustainable but sustained by divine law.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0730/p18s02-hfcs.html>

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Eco-Islam

Living on Earth

Distributed by Public Radio International

Green is the color of the conservation movement, and the traditional color of Islam. At a recent conference in Istanbul, Islamic scholars from all over the Muslim world gathered under an especially green banner to talk about climate change. Mahmoud Akef (MAHMOOD AKEEF) organized the conference, and talks with Jeff Young about the seven year Muslim Action Plan on global warming, which sets out to green the Hajj, boost awareness, and create an eco-Islamic label for products.

Transcript:

YOUNG: It's Living on Earth, I'm Jeff Young.

Green is of course the color of the conservation movement - it's also the color of Islam. Islamic scholars gathered in Istanbul recently to blend those two shades of green with a seven-year action plan on global warming.

AKEF - We believe that all of us, all of us, not just Muslims, Muslims, Christians, Jews, everybody lives on this earth, we are in the same boat, so we have to care about this earth. All of us.

YOUNG: That's Mahmoud Akef whose non-profit Earth Mates Dialogue Centre organized the action plan. Goals include climate change education, green cities and the grand mufti of Egypt even pledged to make his fatwa-issuing office in Cairo carbon-neutral. Mahmoud Akef says the inspiration comes from Islam's sacred texts, the Koran, and the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

AKEF: Of course, Koran has a lot of verses with regard to the environment, with regard to working on the Earth, to look what God has created for the human being. And this human being should save and protect and enjoy this creations. And at the same time Prophet Muhammad has also many hadiths, or saying about the environment.

There's a hadith [speaking Arabic] means this mountain, Uhud, it is near to Mecca, and this mountain loves us and we love it. So it moves a level of caring about the mountain as a part of the environment from just to enjoy this beautifulness of the mountain to love and it's a symbol for the other parts of the environment. We should love the environment. And when we love the environment, of course, we will take care of it. We will protect it and we will save it.

YOUNG: And then there's another one that says that essentially you should treat a – do I understand this correctly – a palm tree as if it is your aunt? Is that right?

AKEF: Yes, yes. [speaking Arabic] means respect.

YOUNG: Uh huh.

AKEF: You should respect your aunt, of course.

YOUNG: Of course.

AKEF: So he asks the Muslims to respect and admire the palm tree, your aunt the palm tree.

[LAUGHING]

AKEF: So if you look at it as your aunt you have feeling. This is very important. You should have respect and admire the environment.

YOUNG: Yeah.

AKEF: This is what Islam and prophet Muhammad ask us to do.

YOUNG: Now you convened this conference in Istanbul to talk about the issue and come up with a plan of action. Tell me a couple of specific action items here. I read I think one where

there's a recommendation for essentially a green seal of approval, a label, that would be placed on products.

AKEF: Yes. What we call the Islamic label for products which is produced through an environmental friendly ways. And we call this tayba. Tayba means like Halal, like label putting on the food.

YOUNG: Right that it was processed in a proper way.

AKEF: Yeah. Uh-huh.

YOUNG: And who would give this seal of approval? Who would decide?

AKEF: We started by establishing an organization called MACCA. MACCA is Muslim Association for Climate Change Action.

YOUNG: Uh-huh.

AKEF: And this organization would be responsible for implementing the plan.

YOUNG: And that acronym sounds a lot like Mecca, the holy site.

AKEF: Yes.

[LAUGHING]

AKEF: Yeah, of course, we try to do sounding very similar. That means this organization coming from an Islamic principle, you know, and Islamic values.

YOUNG: Any plans for a green Hajj to reduce the carbon footprint of one's trip to Mecca?

AKEF: Yes, we already discuss it with some people and they thought of this. And we are going to start with what we call [speaking Arabic] which is – it's smaller than the Hajj. Cause in the Hajj are more than three, four million people attending the same place at the same time.

YOUNG: Uh-huh.

AKEF: So this is what we are working on now. And not only when they go to the holy places, but also when they go back to their countries, they will start teaching the other people.

YOUNG: Yeah, that's a real moment of opportunity isn't it? Because when people undertake the pilgrimage, they're about, you know, renewing of their faith and this is a guess what we call a teachable moment, right?

AKEF: Yeah, and the potential is huge, huh? More than 1.3 billions of people around the world believe these values and this principle and if they can implement this actions, I think it will help the whole earth, you know. Because the climate change – it will affect all of us.

YOUNG: Uh-huh.

AKEF: So we should take care of this challenge. There is a hadith also if you feel the Day of Judgment is coming and you have a seedling in your hand, you should plant it.

YOUNG: Even if you think the Day of Judgment is coming you should plant a seedling?

AKEF: Yeah. [Speaking Arabic]

YOUNG: So even though things might look hopeless – still do something to make it better?

AKEF: Uh-huh, yes. If you feel it will not help – but you should do it. And we believe that all of us, we have to save this Earth.

YOUNG: Mr. Mahmoud Akef is founder and director of the non-profit organization Earth Mates Dialogue Centre. Thank you very much.

AKEF: Thank you. Thank you so much.

[MUSIC: Desert Dwellers "Whirlin Within" from Six Degrees Of The Middle East (Six Degrees records 2009)]

To listen to this interview, visit:

<http://www.loe.org/shows/segments.htm?programID=09-P13-00031&segmentID=6>

August 17, 2009

Biofuel production ‘exacerbating’ climate change, says Christian Aid

By Jennifer Gold
Christian Today

Western governments are pouring billions of dollars into the production of biofuels with dubious benefits for the climate, warns Christian Aid.

In a new report out today, the aid agency said that the massive subsidies and quotas set by governments to finance biofuels had proved “disastrous”.

“Vast sums of European and American taxpayers’ money are being used to prop up industries which are fuelling hunger, severe human rights abuses and environmental destruction – and

failing to deliver the benefits claimed for them,” said Eliot Whittington, a Christian Aid climate advocacy specialist and author of the report, ‘Growing Pains’.

The report said an urgent re-think was needed to ensure that only crops and fuels that achieve their social and environmental goals received government backing.

“Major reforms are also vital to prevent the damage already caused by biofuel plantations in Latin American and Asian countries from being repeated in Africa,” Mr Whittington added.

The report dismisses the idea that biofuels are a “silver bullet solution” to climate change and instead urges governments to see them as a force for rural development in poor countries.

The report cited the example of Mali where farmers are growing jatropha alongside millet and sorghum to supply their own energy needs.

“Christian Aid believes that the best approach to biofuels is to grow them on a small scale and process them locally to provide energy for people in the surrounding community,” said Mr Whittington.

“This can also increase rural people’s incomes and has the potential to actually increase soil fertility and moisture retention, without compromising people’s food security.”

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/biofuel.production.exacerbating.climate.change.says.christian.aid/24001.htm>

August 20, 2009

Less Talk, More Action on Climate Change, Young People urge World Leaders

Daejeon (Republic of Korea) - Young people from around the globe today called on world leaders to take radical measures against climate change.

At the largest-ever truly global youth gathering on climate change, some 700 young people, ranging from 10 to 24 years of age, honed in on their governments' track record in addressing climate change, emphasizing the need for strong vision and leadership.

In a [statement](#), the young delegates - representing three billion of the world's population - expressed their "concern and frustration that their governments are not doing enough to combat climate change", adding that "we now need more actions and less talking".

The declaration was finalized and adopted by the young participants at the Tunza Children and Youth Conference in Daejeon (Republic of Korea), as part of the global UN-wide 'Seal the Deal!' campaign spearheaded by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to galvanize political will and public support for a comprehensive global climate agreement.

"It is very important to include the voice of children and youth in every environmental decision. It is our request to all politicians that they please take this statement into consideration in Copenhagen," said 13-year-old Yugratna Srivastava from India.

The children and youth also addressed the citizens of the planet and urged them to push their governments to create a global green economy. Other recommendations included a call to pressure businesses, producers and governments to promote environmentally friendly products and eco-labeling policies.

"We are the generation of tomorrow. The decisions that are made today will define our future and the world we have to live in. So we young people of the world urge governments to commit to a strong post-Kyoto climate regime. It is our lives we are talking about," said youth delegate, 23-year-old Anne Walraven from the Netherlands.

The statement is the culmination of eight-week-long discussions between young people across the planet using the power of the worldwide web. It was finalized at a Global Town Hall on 20 August in Daejeon, where the 600 participants were joined by over 200 young people in 15 cities around the world including Cuernavaca (Mexico), Nairobi (Kenya), Canberra (Australia), Bangkok (Thailand), Vancouver (Canada) and Athens (Greece), among others.

The Climate Change Statement, entitled 'Listen to Our Voices: The Future Needs Strong Vision and Leadership', comes just four months before the critical climate talks that will take place in Copenhagen in December this year, and just four weeks ahead of the High-Level Summit on Climate Change convened by the UN Secretary-General at the end of September in New York City.

"This global Youth and Children gathering under the Seal the Deal! Campaign is the largest international gathering of young people this year advocating for climate change action. Their voices will and must be heard because they will inherit the outcomes of our actions," said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The children and youth are asking governments around the world to:

- Agree on a more fair, just and action oriented post-Kyoto agreement adopted and implemented by all countries
- Have strict laws and enforcement against those who pollute and degrade the environment, coupled with education and incentives to protect the environment
- Develop and implement clearly defined carbon action plans and climate response strategies, which can be monitored and reviewed by an independent multi-national climate facility
- Transition toward a green economy based on renewable energies and offer more incentives for people to buy affordable energy efficient products
- Reduce the number of vehicles and traffic density on our roads, including improved and affordable public and pedestrian transport systems
- Make engaging environmental education mandatory in schools and universities and promote community environmental awareness - an informed public is a powerful public

- Pay attention to the conflicts that have developed throughout the world and the negative impact it has had on the environment and develop conflict resolution strategies
- Make it mandatory to include carbon and ecological footprint information in products
- Implement green energy and industry, including sustainable food production
- Support youth efforts to make a change in the world

The young delegates at the conference pledged they would soon stage large rallies across 100 capitals to urge global leaders to take action on climate change under the banner of the Seal the Deal! campaign.

"In many ways this process of coming to an agreement on this final text mirrors what will take place in December in Copenhagen. This statement is the fruit of a diversity of views and voices from young people of different ages and cultures. We very much hope the spirit set by these young people will be reflected in the negotiations that will take place in December," said Achim Steiner, Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

All the world's leaders, from President Barack Obama Chinese premier Wen Jia Bao will over the coming days receive a personal letter from representatives of the globe's three billion young people urging them to Seal a meaningful Deal on climate change in just over 100 days time. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia were on the delegates' mailing list, along with leaders in countries like Zimbabwe, Colombia, Venezuela, Lebanon, Haiti, Pakistan, Georgia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Mongolia, Japan and Germany.

Notes to Editors:

For photos and graphics from the Tunza conference, please visit:

http://www.unep.org/downloads/Daejeon_Conference/HighRes_Photos_Korea.zip

For more information on the Tunza conference, please visit:

<http://www.unep.org/tunza/Downloads/tabid/870/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

The Tunza Youth and Children's Conference on the Environment in Daejeon (Republic of Korea) on 17-23 August is the largest-ever gathering of young people on climate change.

The Tunza International Youth Conference was organized by UNEP with the support of the UNEP National Committee for Korea, the Daejeon Metropolitan Government, and Tunza global programme partner, Bayer AG, as well as UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, WMO, the World Organization of the Scout Movement, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and 350.org. Other private sector sponsors include Hyundai-Kia Automotive group and Samsung Engineering. Nickelodeon TV Asia is the media partner for the event.

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About Tunza

The Tunza Youth Strategy, adopted in February this year by UNEP's Governing Council, is a long-term strategy to engage young people in environmental activities and in the work of UNEP. The word 'Tunza' means 'to treat with care or affection' in Kiswahili. The Tunza initiative aims to develop activities in the areas of environmental awareness and information exchange on the environment for children and youth. For more information, please visit www.unep.org/Tunza/

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=594&ArticleID=6278&l=en&t=long>

August 23, 2009

Young People Step Up Pressure on World Leaders to Clinch a Crucial Climate Deal in Copenhagen

Daejeon/Nairobi - Rallies in 100 cities will be organized by young people across the world as part of a major push to persuade governments to Seal a meaningful Deal at the crucial UN climate convention meeting in Copenhagen in just under 110 days time.

Youth delegates pledged to keep global warming high on the international agenda as the Tunza International Youth Conference on Climate Change ended today in Daejeon, Republic of Korea.

"Climate change is the greatest threat we are facing in the 21st century, and many countries are vulnerable. If we the children and youth don't act now, we cannot be sure there will be a future for us, for future generations. We want to make sure that future generations will inherit a better place to live in," outgoing Tunza Youth Advisory Board member, 22-year old Jessie James Marcellones from the Philippines, said.

Regional Action Plans, agreed during the conference and covering Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and West Asia include:

- Mobilizing youth for the upcoming UN climate change meeting that opens on 7 December in the Danish capital;
- Reaching out to other environmental groups, especially during the September 21-25 Climate Week;
- Educating others about the Copenhagen meeting on campuses, in school and among churches, sports teams and more;
- Letter-writing, phone banking, visiting officials to 'Seal the Deal';
- Social Networking through the Unite for Climate, Facebook, Twitter and other e-fora;
- College campaigns and tree planting initiatives.

The 220 youths, aged 15-24, were joined by 580 children in Daejeon City in South Korea. It has been the largest truly global conference of young people on climate change ever.

Seventeen-year-old Yaiguili Alvarado Garcia, from the Kuna indigenous group in Panama, expressed the need for adults to hear and listen and understand why the young need their support.

"There are a lot of indigenous cultures that are losing, because nobody wants to hear what we want to say, what we know about Mother Earth, and it is frustrating for us because we have so many things to share and the world doesn't listen to us," she said. "There are many things we asked the governments to do and we know it is hard, but we want to work with them, we just want to make a better place for the children, for the animals and plants. It is about time we stop thinking just for us and think also for other beings that cannot speak for themselves. It is time to stop being selfish."

Yaiguili Alvarado Garcia is among the 13 newly elected Tunza Youth Advisory Council members. The Tunza Youth Advisory Council has two Youth Advisors for each of the six regions, and two representing indigenous groups. The Council advises UNEP on better ways of engaging young people in its work and represents youth in international environmental negotiations.

"This global Youth and Children gathering under Seal the Deal Campaign is the largest international gathering of young people this year advocating for climate change action. Their voices will and must be heard because they will inherit the outcomes of our actions," said the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon.

"The young people of the world are the generation that will inherit the transformational decisions governments need to take in less than 110 days time. If their passion, commitment and ideas can be embraced by world leaders and governments over the coming days and weeks, then a climate agreement that can put the world on track to a low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy can be secured," said Achim Steiner, Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

UNEP organized the conference with the support of the UNEP National Committee for Korea, the Daejeon Metropolitan Government, and Tunza global programme partner, Bayer AG, as well as UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, WMO, the World Organization of the Scout Movement, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and 350.org. Other private sector sponsors include Hyundai-Kia Automotive group and Samsung Engineering. Nickelodeon TV Asia is the media partner for the event.

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=594&ArticleID=6281&l=en&t=long>

August 26, 2009

Pope says global leaders must take care of environment, remember poor

By Bryon Cones
Catholic News Service

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy (CNS) -- Pope Benedict XVI urged world leaders to address global environmental issues "with generous courage" and reminded them that the world's resources are to be shared by all, including poorer countries.

The pope, speaking Aug. 26 at the summer papal residence outside Rome, addressed his remarks to representatives of governments and international agencies who will attend a high-level United Nations summit on climate change in September.

The pope, addressing some 3,000 people at his weekly audience in the courtyard of his villa, said the recent forest fires near Athens and water shortages elsewhere were signs that "creation is under threat." He said it was everyone's responsibility to protect the environment because "the earth is indeed a precious gift of the Creator."

Government leaders have an obligation to work together for the "protection of the environment, and the safeguarding of resources and of the climate," in respect of the law and in solidarity with weaker nations, he said.

Natural resources must be shared, he said, and the social and economic costs of consuming them "must be recognized with transparency and borne by those who incur them, and not by other peoples or future generations."

Referring to his recent encyclical, "Charity in Truth," Pope Benedict emphasized the link among solidarity with poorer countries, care for the environment and development.

"The natural environment is given by God to everyone, and so our use of it entails a personal responsibility toward humanity as a whole, particularly toward the poor and toward future generations," he said.

"It is essential that the current model of global development be transformed through a greater and shared acceptance of the responsibility for creation," made necessary not only because of environmental issues "but also by the scandal of hunger and human misery," he said.

Pope Benedict offered his support to the participants of the Sept. 22 summit in New York and encouraged them to "enter their discussions constructively and with generous courage."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called the meeting in New York in preparation for the U.N. Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December. In that meeting, nations will be called on to forge a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emission, which expires in 2012.

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Editor's Note: The text of the pope's audience remarks in English will be posted online at: www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090826_en.html.

The text of the pope's audience remarks in Spanish will be posted online at: www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090826_sp.html.

<http://www.uscatholic.org/news/2009/08/pope-says-global-leaders-must-take-care-environment-remember-poor>

August 28, 2009

Asia's future melts away as climate talks stall

Beijing, China — Greenpeace has placed ice sculptures of 100 children at the Temple of Earth in Beijing, China, today, symbolising the disappearing future of the more than 1 billion people in Asia who are threatened with water shortages by the changing climate.

Made from glacial melt water [1] from the source of Yangtze, Yellow and Ganges rivers, the melting sculptures mark the start of the 100-day countdown to the United Nations Copenhagen Climate Summit, and the launch of the TckTckTck campaign [2], which is urging governments to agree a fair, binding and ambitious deal at the Summit. At the same time, an ice sculpture in the form of the number "100" on a World Map is also being unveiled in New Delhi to show "the world washed away" by glacial melts.

The Temple of Earth used to be where Chinese emperors prayed for the well-being of Earth and good harvests. "We are here today to highlight the catastrophic danger faced by our planet Earth. The disappearance of the Himalayan glaciers threatens the fresh water supply of the one-fifth of the world's population who live in their watershed. If world leaders don't agree to stop runaway climate change, children of today will grow up facing a constant struggle to secure reliable

access to drinking water," said Greenpeace China Climate and Energy Campaign Manager Yang Ailun.

"It's real concern about climate change impacts like the threat to our water supply that is driving China and India to pursue a low-carbon development path that balances development and environmental protection," said Greenpeace India Climate and Energy Manager Vinuta Gopal. "If the developed world doesn't take the opportunity to support developing countries to both adapt to and mitigate climate change, then that balance won't hold and we will suffer an environmental catastrophe."

The latest scientific research shows that to avert catastrophic climate impacts, global greenhouse gas emissions need to peak by 2015 and decline after that in order to keep global temperature increase below 2°C. Greenpeace urges developed countries, as a group, to agree to cut emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2020. Developing countries must reduce their projected emissions growth by 15-30% by 2020. To support these cuts, funding from the developed world of \$ 140 billion US dollars a year is needed.

"The future prosperity of India and China is literally melting away," Yang Ailun added. "With only 100 days to go before the Copenhagen Climate Summit, leaders around the world must take personal responsibility for averting climate chaos and stop the greatest threat to all of humanity."

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<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/releases/asia-s-future-melts-away-as-cl>

August 28, 2009

100 Days: UN Calls for Signatures for Action on Climate Change

Nairobi - The United Nations is calling for millions of online signatures for a climate petition and is launching the first-ever Global Climate Week as part of its Seal the Deal! campaign, 100 days ahead of a crucial UN climate change summit in Copenhagen (COP 15) in December.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is leading the call for communities around the world to take advantage of Global Climate Week from September 21-25 to encourage leaders to seal a fair, balanced and effective agreement on climate change.

"Time is running out. Scientists warn that climate impacts are accelerating. Now more than ever, we need political leadership at the highest level to ensure we protect people and the planet, and to catalyze the green growth that can power the 21st century economy," the UN Secretary-General stressed.

"With just 15 negotiating days remaining before the start of COP15, now is the time for people in every corner of the world to urge their governments to seal a fair, effective and ambitious deal in Copenhagen," he added.

On 1 September, Mr. Ban will visit a Norwegian island deep inside the Arctic Circle near the North Pole to witness the problem of glacial melt and other climate change impacts.

Global Climate Week will coincide with the Secretary-General's Summit on Climate Change at UN Headquarters in New York on September 22, one day ahead of the annual General Assembly meeting.

Among the events planned for more than 120 countries are youth assemblies, tree planting drives, a climate neutral day and a 'Go Green Day'. New York and other cities around the world have set up a full programme for the week.

"A scientifically-credible deal in Copenhagen can catalyze a transition to a low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy which is so essential on a planet of six billion people, rising to over nine billion by 2050. As such, it will represent perhaps the biggest and most far reaching stimulus package of 2009 and beyond," added Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Communities, businesses and individuals are encouraged to add their voices to the Seal the Deal! campaign during Global Climate Week by signing the Climate Petition at www.sealthedeal2009.org to coalesce millions of signatures.

The Climate Petition is a consolidation of appeals supported by the UN Seal the Deal! campaign. The petition will be presented by civil society to the governments of the world in Copenhagen.

The Prime Minister of Thailand, Abhisit Vejjajiva, the President of Ethiopia, Dr. Girma Woldegiorgis and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, Han Seung-soo and Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai are amongst those who have lent their support to campaign.

The campaign has also attracted the support of Austrian pop group My Excellence with a song called "Come On (Seal the Deal)" which was performed for the first time live on August 28 in a ceremony at the United Nations Office at Vienna attended by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

"Efforts made today to combat climate change are one of the smartest possible investments we can make in our future. We need to show our support for green stimulus packages and a fair deal in Copenhagen which will determine the path of the global economy and the well-being of hundreds of millions of people throughout the 21st century," said Mr. Ban.

Notes to Editors:

To sign the petition, go to www.sealthedeal2009.org.

To pledge your support and to sign up for Global Climate Week go to <http://www.sealthedeal2009.org/global-climate-week>.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is supporting the Internews Earth Journalism Awards to honour the best climate change reporting in the run up to Copenhagen: <http://awards.earthjournalism.org/content/climate-change-negotiations-award>.

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=594&ArticleID=6289&l=en&t=long>

August 31, 2009

India's idol rituals take toll on environment

By Liz Neisloss
CNN

PALLAVAKAM, India -- South India's sun beats down on a long line of trucks wending to the Bay of Bengal. In the back of these trucks, giant, brightly painted statues of the Hindu god Ganesha are waiting to be dropped in the nearby ocean.

All over India, Hindus recently celebrated the birthday of the elephant god and now the idols made for this festivity are being taken to India's ocean, rivers and lakes and deposited.

It's part of the Hindu religious cycle. But it's also a huge source of pollution. And in recent years, idol immersion has become a popular local event, with some statues so huge they must be lifted by cranes.

The Ganeshas gleam with gold paint and glisten with reds, pinks and greens. But scientists who've studied the problem say these paints often contain toxic metals, such as lead and mercury. They contaminate plants, and poison fish and irrigation and drinking water. They end up in the human food chain.

The problem is not just caused by idols of Ganesha, but by the many other Hindu god idols as well, such as Saraswati and Durga. Hundreds of thousands of god idols are immersed every year in festivals across India.

A detailed study of the problem has been done by Shyam R. Asolekar of the Indian Institute of Technology in Bombay. He estimates that, in the city of Mumbai alone, several hundred thousand idols are made annually.

Decades ago, there were far fewer idols and idols were made of mud and biodegradable materials, Asolekar said. The effect also was "minimal" he said, because waterways weren't linked as they are now. As a result of water and irrigation projects, "connected water systems and dams have reduced the flow of water" and dramatically increased the effect of pollution.

According to Asolekar's study, "Forbidding the disposal of painted idols, ornaments and decoration is the only sure way of protecting our water bodies."

Various Indian states are testing out new approaches, such as mobile immersion tanks, and encouraging mud idols.

Asolekar dismissed the idea of an eco-friendly idol, saying even large amounts of mud kill waterways.

"The number of idols is so high," he said, "no matter what the material, there will always be an impact. Even organic substances in large quantities cause a problem."

He suggests a "dry immersion," in which the idol is sprinkled symbolically with water and then later dried for reuse. This approach would face great hurdles in a country where religious rituals have deep social and cultural ties and change comes slowly.

Another possible interim measure uses a polymer-lined tank for immersion. More than 100 such tanks have been installed in Mumbai. The linings can be rolled up after use and the materials separated into bio and nonbiodegradable materials for composting and landfill. The water is filtered. But this solution is far from ideal, Asolekar said, as tens of thousands of such tanks would be needed, and there is still plenty of contamination.

"It will take time to change people's attitudes," he said.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/08/30/india.idols.pollution/index.html>

September 1, 2009

Catholic groups call for focus on poor in climate change debate

DPA

New York - Caritas Internationalis and an alliance of Catholic development agencies called on world governments on Tuesday to give top priority to the debate on climate change, with a focus on the poor. The two groups will send a high-ranking delegation to be headed by Britain's Cardinal Keith O'Brien to the climate change summit at UN headquarters in New York on September 22, Caritas said in a press release.

"We urge them to think about the world's poorest people, as bold action is needed to protect them from the devastating impacts of climate change," it said.

O'Brien said separately, "Wealthy have an unequivocal moral duty to reduce their own emissions and help developing countries that are already suffering the consequences of our profligate use of fossil fuels for economic gains."

The UN says the one-day climate change session in New York will draw the largest number of high-level delegations, who will also attend the UN General Assembly's political debate. Many of the leaders will also travel to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for the Group of 20 (G-20) meeting of the world's 20 leading economies.

Studies have shown that the urban poor are most vulnerable to climate change because global warming will heavily impact rising food and energy prices. There are an estimated 1 billion-plus people living on less than 1 dollar a day and atmospheric changes will aggravate their living conditions, studies show.

Caritas Internationalis and the alliance, known by the acronym CIDSE, are the world's largest Catholic groups that devote activities to assisting the poor and developing countries.

Their delegation plans to meet with government leaders to call for actions on alleviating poverty.

<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/283771.catholic-groups-call-for-focus-on-poor-in-climate-change-debate.html>

September 1, 2009

Greek Orthodox Day of Prayer on the Environment

Environment News Service

NEW YORK, New York – The General Secretary of the National Council of Churches has commemorated September 1, 2009 as the 20th anniversary of the Day of Prayer on the protection of the environment, and he urged all persons of faith to take up the prayer today.

The first environmental prayer day was instituted by the late Patriarch Demetrios I in 1989. Since then, every first day of September has been designated a day of prayer for the protection of the environment throughout the Orthodox world.

"The Orthodox Church has a long-standing commitment to healing the environment and Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I marked this concern by emphasizing the need for all of us to exhibit a 'eucharistic and ascetic spirit,' through a Day of Prayer," said the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, National Council of Churches General Secretary.

"The survival of God's Creation and God's children hinges on our ability to embrace the very tenets that Patriarch Demetrios put forth in his first address in 1989," Kinnamon said.

Patriarch Demetrios I served as Ecumenical Patriarch from 1972 to 1991. His successor, Patriarch Bartholomew I, has continued the church's emphasis on protecting the environment.

"Let us pray for God's blessing on the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December, so that the industrially developed countries may co-operate with developing countries in reducing harmful polluting emissions, that there may exist the will to raise and manage wisely the funds required for the necessary measures, and that all may work together to ensure that our children enjoy the goods of the earth that we leave behind for them," Patriarch Bartholomew I wrote in an encyclical in Monday.

"Human progress is not just the accumulation of wealth and the thoughtless consumption of the earth's resources," wrote the Patriarch.

Demetrios, Archbishop of America, wrote in a separate encyclical to mark the beginning of the Ecclesiastical New Year on September 1, "Our natural environment calls us to be in communion with God and with others. God brought the natural world into existence out of nothingness and He then created humankind within the natural environment for a harmonious coexistence and fellowship."

"Our natural environment is also dependent upon our faith inspired work as a people, specifically as stewards of what God has created," wrote the Archbishop. "We have been called to oversee and protect the natural environment. This requires cooperation with others in a spirit of love and fellowship."

Kinnamon expressed the hope that persons of all faiths will add their own prayers for the protection of the environment on Tuesday and each succeeding September 1.

The National Council of Churches is the ecumenical voice of America's Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, historic African American and traditional peace churches representing 45 million members in 100,000 congregations in all 50 states.

The Council's Eco-Justice program works to raise awareness in the churches and in the public at large about the urgent need to protect the environment through conservation of resources and action against climate change and global warming.

<http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/sep2009/2009-09-01-093.asp>

September 1, 2009

Your greenest Ramadan

By Shawna Ayoub
Grist Online

After my grandfather had a stroke, the doctor said he might not walk again. He also said that getting him to challenge himself—to give walking a true try—was critical to his physical and emotional recovery. My grandfather took his first steps only a week after the near total paralysis of his left side.

While he never regained his easy gait, he also never let his slow, strained shuffle hinder him. Mornings, he made ten laps back and forth on the Lebanese mountain road outside the gates of his house. When I visited Lebanon, I walked with him, helping him stoop and clear the trash—plastic bags, Pepsi bottles, paper, cigarette butts—that passersby had tossed out their windows onto the road. It was close to the time Jiddo died that I learned clearing the roads wasn't so much a physical exercise as a spiritual one.

The responsibility Muslims hold in man's divinely bestowed role as the world's vicegerents extends to the planet's health. We know that removing litter from the road is considered an Islamic charity (Sahih AlJumea). We also know that God loves those who do not waste (Qur'an 7:31). In fact, Muslims are specifically commanded to eat fruit in its season and refrain from wasting the goods from this earth (6:141). Multiple examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (*ahadith*), peace and blessings be on him, instruct us to conserve water, avoid overeating, and care for animals and plants in need.

Islam is by its nature a "green" religion—and Ramadan, the Islamic month during which fasting is prescribed for all able Muslims, offers a chance for the 1.2 billion of us worldwide to make a huge and hugely positive environmental impact.

There is more to a Ramadan fast than abstention from food, drink, and sex during the daylight hours. An Islamic fast also requires the participant to refrain from angry activities and discourse, and good deeds are strongly encouraged. The standard for good deeds is that they be charitable

in nature, such as feeding the poor and taking care of orphans. Ramadan is capped off with a community-oriented feasting day called Eid al Fitr during which an obligatory tax (*zakat*) is collected that is redistributed to the needy.

While there is no disputing the social and economic value of feeding the hungry and nursing the sick during this holy month, it is just as important that we remember to take care of the world for which we are the inheritors.

Simply by not overeating before or after our fast, we can contribute to global health—and our own. In a [recent article for the *Washington Post*](#), Zafar Nomani, professor emeritus of human nutrition and foods at West Virginia University, noted that, “During Ramadan, research has shown that the basal metabolism of fasting subjects slows down. A person can stay healthy and active during Ramadan consuming a diet that is less than the normal amount of calories or food intake but balanced in nutrients.”

Even if only 50 percent of the estimated 7 million Muslims living in the United States fast during Ramadan, if that fast eliminates our [weekly cheeseburger](#) (or meat and rice equivalent) and we do not over consume to compensate for a missed meal, that means the American Muslim community could reduce U.S. CO2 output by 60,900 metric tons during Ramadan alone. That’s the equivalent annual CO2 output of 6,090 SUVs!

Further, we often pay attention to how our meat is slaughtered with little or no regard to how it was raised. Many local farms allow us to do our own slaughtering on their premises. This gives us a choice come Eid, when ritual animal sacrifices are made and the meat shared out to our neighbors and the poor. We can elect to purchase our animals (and vegetables) from farms that use sustainable agricultural methods. We may pay a slight premium, but isn’t it worth it if, when we go before God on the Last Day, among our deeds it will be recorded that we chose from the animals that were responsibly and compassionately raised to offer as our sacrifice?

What else can you do? Begin with the next fast-breaking dinner (*iftaar*) you host or attend. Collect recyclables such as soda cans and plastic bottles and drop them off at your [local recycling center](#). Choose reusable dishes instead of disposables. If you’re attending a nightly community dinner at a mosque, set up a dishwashing schedule that will let your Muslim brothers and sisters rake in the blessings by pitching in once a week.

While you’re at it, set up a Freecycle-style program for Eid gifts that allows community members to exchange goods or gently used toys. Not only will you save money that can later be donated to the poor, you will avoid buying new items that can be toxic for the planet and for your health. Encourage your community to get educated and organized in order to contribute, perhaps by planting an organic vegetable garden on the mosque lawn.

If you aren’t fasting or have no local community, you can still chip in. Walk to the mosque for prayers (and gain rewards) or carpool when you travel. Consider putting in some time at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. You could even donate some of your time to the Humane Society. You can join groups such as [Green Ramadan](#) that have popped up online with the goal of a global green effort for one month each year.

Like my grandfather, we can all do our part in a small way. Each individual act is like a pebble in a pond that sends out ten ripples. Who knows how far those miniature waves will reach or what good they may carry?

Ramadan is a month of hyperawareness achieved through the challenges of the body in order to strengthen the soul. Every good deed is one that contributes to this renewal. And each one can contribute to the renewal of our planet, too, whether your efforts are individual or communal.

There are still plenty of blessed days left this Ramadan. Challenge yourself and strengthen your soul, and by doing so, earn the rewards of the next life. Make this Ramadan your greenest ever.

<http://www.grist.org/article/2009-09-01-your-greenest-ramadan/>

September 2, 2009

The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology

By Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim
Carnegie Ethics Online

Introduction

This article aims to present a prismatic view of the potential and actual resources embedded in the world's religions for supporting sustainable practices toward the environment. An underlying assumption is that most religious traditions have developed attitudes of respect, reverence, and care for the natural world that brings forth life in its diverse forms. Furthermore, it is assumed that issues of social justice and environmental integrity need to be intricately linked for creating the conditions for a sustainable future.

Several qualifications regarding the various roles of religion should be mentioned at the outset. First, we do not wish to suggest here that any one religious tradition has a privileged ecological perspective. Rather, multiple perspectives may be the most helpful in identifying the contributions of the world's religions to the flourishing of life for future generations.

Second, while we assume that religions are necessary partners in the current ecological movement, they are not sufficient without the indispensable contributions of science, economics, education, and policy to the varied challenges of current environmental problems. Therefore, this is an interdisciplinary effort in which religions can play a part.

Third, we acknowledge that there is frequently a disjunction between principles and practices: ecologically sensitive ideas in religions are not always evident in environmental practices in

particular civilizations. Many civilizations have overused their environments, with or without religious sanction.

Finally, we are keenly aware that religions have all too frequently contributed to tensions and conflict among ethnic groups, both historically and at present. Dogmatic rigidity, inflexible claims of truth, and misuse of institutional and communal power by religions have led to tragic consequences in various parts of the globe.

Nonetheless, while religions have often preserved traditional ways, they have also provoked social change. They can be limiting but also liberating in their outlooks. In the 20th century, for example, religious leaders and theologians helped to give birth to progressive movements such as civil rights for minorities, social justice for the poor, and liberation for women. More recently, religious groups were instrumental in launching a movement called Jubilee 2000 for debt reduction for poor nations.¹ Although the world's religions have been slow to respond to our current environmental crises, their moral authority and their institutional power may help effect a change in attitudes, practices, and public policies.

The Challenge of the Environmental Crisis and the Role of Religions in Meeting It

The environmental crisis has been well documented as a plural reality in its various interconnected aspects of resource depletion and species extinction, pollution growth and climate change, population explosion and overconsumption.² Thus, while we are using the term "environmental crisis" in a singular form, we recognize the diverse nature of the interrelated problems. These problems have been subject to extensive analysis and scrutiny by the scientific and policy communities and, although comprehensive solutions remain elusive, there is an emerging consensus that the environmental crisis is both global in scope and local in impact. A major question we confront is: What are the appropriate boundaries for the protection and use of nature? The choices will not be easy as we begin to reassess our sense of rights and responsibilities to present and future generations, and to reevaluate appropriate needs and overextended greed regarding natural resources.

Many organizations and individuals have been calling for greater participation by various religious communities in meeting the growing environmental crisis by reorienting humans to show more respect, restraint, and responsibility toward the Earth community.³ Consider, for example, a statement by scientists, "Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion," issued at a Global Forum meeting in Moscow in January of 1990. It suggests that the human community is committing "crimes against creation" and notes that "problems of such magnitude, and solutions demanding so broad a perspective, must be recognized from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension. Mindful of our common responsibility, we scientists-many of us long engaged in combating the environmental crisis-urgently appeal to the world religious community to commit, in word and deed, and as boldly as is required, to preserve the environment of the Earth." It goes on to declare that "the environmental crisis requires radical changes not only in public policy, but in individual behavior. The historical record makes clear that religious teaching, example, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment. As scientists, many of us have had profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is

regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred."⁴

Although the responses of religions to the global environmental crisis were slow at first, they have been steadily growing over the last 25 years.⁵ Just as religions played an important role in creating sociopolitical changes in the 20th century (e.g., human and civil rights), so now religions are poised in the 21st century to contribute to the emergence of a broader environmental ethics based on diverse sensibilities regarding the sacred dimensions of the natural world.

Religion and ecology

Religion is more than simply a belief in a transcendent deity or a means to an afterlife. It is, rather, an orientation to the cosmos and our role in it. We understand religion in its broadest sense as a means whereby humans, recognizing the limitations of phenomenal reality, undertake specific practices to effect self-transformation and community cohesion within a cosmological context. Religion thus refers to those cosmological stories, symbol systems, ritual practices, ethical norms, historical processes, and institutional structures that transmit a view of the human as embedded in a world of meaning and responsibility, transformation and celebration. Religion connects humans with a divine or numinous presence, with the human community, and with the broader Earth community. It links humans to the larger matrix of mystery in which life arises, unfolds, and flourishes.

In this light nature is a revelatory context for orienting humans to abiding religious questions regarding the cosmological origins of the universe, the meaning of the emergence of life, and the responsible role of humans in relation to life processes. Religion thus situates humans in relation to both the natural and human worlds with regard to meaning and responsibility. At the same time, religion becomes a means of experiencing a sustaining creative force in the natural and human worlds and beyond. For some traditions this is a creator deity; for others it is a numinous presence in nature; for others it is the source of flourishing life.

This experience of a creative force gives rise to a human desire to enter into processes of transformation and celebration that link self, society, and cosmos. The individual is connected to the larger human community and to the macrocosm of the universe itself. The transformative impulse seeks relationality, intimacy, and communion with this numinous power. Individual and communal transformations are expressed through rituals and ceremonies of celebration. More specifically, these transformations have the capacity to embrace the celebration of natural seasonal cycles as well as various cultural rites of passage. Religion thus links humanity to the rhythms of nature through the use of symbols and rituals that help to establish moral relationships and patterns for social exchange.

The issues discussed here are complex and involve various peoples, cultures, worldviews, and academic disciplines. Therefore, it is important to be clear about our terms. As it is used here, the term "ecology" locates the human within the horizon of emergent, interdependent life rather than viewing humanity as the vanguard of evolution, the exclusive fabricator of technology, or a

species apart from nature. "Scientific ecology" is a term used to indicate the empirical and experimental study of the relations between living and nonliving organisms within their ecosystems. While drawing on the scientific understanding of interrelationships in nature, we are introducing the term "religious ecology" to point toward a cultural awareness of kinship with and dependence on nature for the continuity of all life. Thus, religious ecology provides a basis for exploring diverse cultural responses to the varied earth processes of transformation. In addition, the study of religious ecology can give us insight into how particular environments have influenced the development of cultures. Therefore, one can distinguish religious ecology from scientific ecology just as one can distinguish religious cosmology from scientific cosmology.

This awareness of the interdependence of life in religious ecology finds expression in the religious traditions as a sacred reality that is often recognized as a creative manifestation, a pervasive sustaining presence, a vital power in the natural world, or an emptiness (*sunyata*) leading to the realization of interbeing.⁶ For many religions, the natural world is understood as a source of teaching, guidance, visionary inspiration, revelation, or power. At the same time, nature is also a source of food, clothing, and shelter. Thus, religions have developed intricate systems of exchange and thanksgiving around human dependence on animals and plants, on forests and fields, on rivers and oceans. These encompass symbolic and ritual exchanges that frequently embody agricultural processes, ecological knowledge of ecosystems, or hunting practices.⁷

Methodological Approaches to Study of Religion and Ecology

There is an inevitable disjunction between the examination of historical religious traditions in all of their diversity and complexity and the application of teachings or scriptures to contemporary situations. While religions have always been involved in meeting contemporary challenges over the centuries, it is clear that the global environmental crisis is larger and more complex than anything in recorded human history. Thus, a simple application of traditional ideas to contemporary problems is unlikely to be either possible or adequate. In order to address ecological problems properly, religious leaders and laypersons have to be in dialogue with environmentalists, scientists, economists, businesspeople, politicians, and educators.

With these qualifications in mind we can then identify three methodological approaches that appear in the emerging study of religion and ecology: retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction. Interpretive retrieval involves the scholarly investigation of cosmological, scriptural, and legal sources in order to clarify traditional religious teachings regarding human-Earth relations. This requires that historical and textual studies uncover resources latent within the tradition. In addition, interpretive retrieval can identify ethical codes and ritual customs of the tradition in order to discover how these teachings were put into practice.

In interpretive reevaluation, traditional teachings are evaluated with regard to their relevance to contemporary circumstances. Can the ideas, teachings, or ethics present in these traditions be adopted by contemporary scholars or practitioners who wish to help shape more ecologically sensitive attitudes and sustainable practices? Reevaluation also questions ideas that may lead to inappropriate environmental practices. For example, are certain religious tendencies reflective of otherworldly or world-denying orientations that are not helpful in relation to pressing ecological

issues? It asks as well whether the material world of nature has been devalued by a particular religion and whether a model of ethics focusing solely on human interaction is adequate to address environmental problems.

Finally, interpretive reconstruction suggests ways that religious traditions might adapt their teachings to current circumstances in new and creative ways. This may result in a new synthesis or in a creative modification of traditional ideas and practices to suit modern modes of expression. This is the most challenging aspect of the emerging field of religion and ecology and requires sensitivity to who is speaking about a tradition in the process of reevaluation and reconstruction. Postcolonial critics have appropriately highlighted the complex issues surrounding the problem of who is representing or interpreting a tradition. Nonetheless, practitioners and leaders of particular traditions may find grounds for creative dialogue with scholars of religious traditions in these various phases of interpretation.

Diversity and Dialogue of Religions

The diversity of the world's religions may seem self-evident to some, but it is worth stressing the differences within and between religious traditions. At the same time, it is possible to posit shared dimensions of religions in light of this diversity, without arguing that the world's religions have some single emergent goal. The world's religions are inherently distinctive in their expressions, and these differences are especially significant in regard to the study of religion and ecology.

Several sets of religious diversity can be identified as being integrally related. First, there is historical and cultural diversity within and between religious traditions as expressed over time in varied social contexts. For example, we need to be sensitive to the variations in Judaism between Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements, in Christianity between Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant varieties of the tradition, and in Islam between Sunni and Shiite positions.

Second, there is dialogical and syncretic diversity within and between religions traditions, which adds another level of complexity. Dialogue and interaction between traditions engenders the fusion of religious traditions into one another, often resulting in new forms of religious expression that can be described as syncretic. Such syncretism occurred when Christian missionaries evangelized indigenous peoples in the Americas. In East Asia there is an ongoing dialogue between and among Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism that results in various kinds of syncretism.⁸

Third, there is ecological and cosmological diversity within and between religions. Ecological diversity is evident in the varied environmental contexts and bioregions where religions have developed over time. For example, Jerusalem is the center of a sacred bioregion where three religious traditions-Judaism, Christianity, and Islam-have both shaped and been shaped by the environment. These complex interactions illustrate that religions are not static in their impacts on ecology. Indeed, throughout history the relationships between religions and their natural settings have been fluid and manifold.

Religious traditions develop unique narratives, symbols, and rituals to express their relationships with the cosmos as well as with various local landscapes. For example, the body is a vital metaphor for understanding the Daoist relationship with the world: as an energetic network of breathings-in and breathings-out, the body, according to Daoism, expresses the basic pattern of the cosmos. Another example, from Buddhism, of a distinctive ecological understanding involves Doi Suthep, a sacred mountain in the Chiang Mai valley of northern Thailand: the ancient Thai reverence for the mountain is understood as analogous to respect for the Buddhist reliquary, or *stupa*.

Converging Perspectives: Common Values for the Earth Community

The project of exploring world religions and ecology may lead toward convergence on several overarching principles. The common values that most of the world's religions hold in relation to the natural world might be summarized as reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility, and renewal. While there are clearly variations of interpretation within and between religions regarding these six principles, it may be said that religions are moving toward an expanded understanding of their cosmological orientations and ethical obligations. Although these principles have been previously understood primarily with regard to relations toward other humans, the challenge now is to extend them to the natural world. As this shift occurs—and there are signs it is already happening—religions can advocate reverence for the earth and its profound cosmological processes, respect for the earth's myriad species, an extension of ethics to include all life forms, restraint in the use of natural resources combined with support for effective alternative technologies, equitable redistribution of wealth, the acknowledgement of human responsibility in regard to the continuity of life and the ecosystems that support life, renewal of the energies of hope for the transformative work to be done.

Just as religious values needed to be identified, so, too, the values embedded in science, education, economics, and public policy also need to be more carefully understood. Scientific analysis will be critical to understanding nature's economy; education will be indispensable to creating sustainable modes of life; economic incentives will be central to an equitable distribution of resources; public-policy recommendations will be invaluable in shaping national and international priorities. But the ethical values that inform modern science and public policy must not be uncritically applied. Instead, by carefully evaluating the intellectual resources both of the world's religions and of modern science and public policy, our long-term ecological prospects may emerge. We need to examine the tensions between efficiency and equity, between profit and preservation, and between the private and public good. We need to make distinctions between human need and greed, between the use and abuse of nature, and between the intrinsic value and instrumental value of nature. We need to move from destructive to constructive modes of production, and from the accumulation of goods to an appreciation for the common good of the Earth community.

There has been much progress in the arena of religion and ecology. Indeed, a new academic field of study has emerged with implications for public policy. This is in large measure due to a three-year conference series at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions from 1996-1998, which resulted in ten edited volumes, a large website, the journal *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, and the formation of the Forum on Religion and Ecology based at Yale

University. Other milestones include the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, published in 2005. Thousands of people around the globe are now participating in this work, both in the classroom and in engaged projects for a sustainable future.

NOTES

¹ The movement, which began in Britain, has had demonstrable influence on the decisions of the World Bank and other lending organizations to reduce or forgive debts in more than twenty countries. See <http://www.jubilee2000uk.org>

² See, for example, [IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, 2007](#)

³ See <http://www.thomasberry.org>

⁴ "[Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion](#)," 1990.

⁵ For two examples of this, see: [Stewardship or Sacrifice?](#) Conference, October 2009, Rock Ethics Institute and [Public Campaign on Climate Change](#), World Council of Churches

⁶ The term "interbeing" is used in the writings of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

⁷ See Eugene N. Anderson, *Ecologies of the Heart: Emotion, Belief, and the Environment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and John A. Grim, ed., *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2001).

⁸ See Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

http://www.cceia.org/resources/ethics_online/0037.html

September 2, 2009

Churches should support cutting greenhouse gas emissions

Earthtimes.org

Geneva - The World Council of Churches on Wednesday called on its members to push their governments to agree to a deal at the December climate conference in Copenhagen that "drastically" reduces greenhouse gas emissions. The organization which represents churches with 550 million Christians as members "identifies the current unprecedented ecological crises as being created by humans, caused especially by the agro-industrial-economic complex and the culture of the North."

In a statement, the WCC also said the international community should transfer financial resources to poorer countries to refrain from oil drilling in fragile environments.

"It is a debt owed primarily by industrialized countries in the North to countries of the South on account of historical and current resource-plundering, environmental degradation and the dumping of greenhouse gases and toxic wastes," the religious group said.

The previous day, the United Nations, which will host the conference in December, said rich countries would have to pass up to 600 billion dollars annually to the developing world to help the poor cope with climate change.

Environmentalists hope the Copenhagen meet will see governments agree to drastically reduce emissions, which scientists say cause global warming and other changes to the climate.

<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/283938,wcc-churches-should-support-cutting-greenhouse-gas-emissions.html>

September 3, 2009

A Golden Rule for God's Green Earth

By Clark Strand
The Washington Post

The Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") is the foundation of Christian moral teaching. But lately I've begun to wonder if that gold standard of ethical behavior really equips us for an age of global environmental concerns. Jesus teaches us to include other people in our prayers--even our enemies. But what about other species of plant and animal life? What about the atmosphere? What about the Earth?

As suggested by its color, the Golden Rule is defined primarily in terms of human commerce. Most of the examples of right conduct Jesus offers in the gospels involve the exchange of money, goods, or services. Not one addresses other species or the Earth. Does this mean that Jesus was as clueless as every other Homo sapiens on the planet when it comes to grasping ecological truths? If Jesus were here today, would he too live in denial of the coming environmental collapse?

A growing number of environmentally-concerned Christians believe the answer is no. Were Jesus with us today, they tell us, he would replace the Golden Rule with the Green Rule: "Do unto the Earth as you would have the Earth do unto you."

Unfortunately, that rule still reflects a dangerous bias. It still uses human welfare as the yardstick by which we measure what is good for Nature, and that simply doesn't work.

What is good for human beings (all 6.8 billion of us) isn't necessarily good for the planet. Current projections indicate that one half of all plant and animal species on Earth will likely

become extinct by century's end as a result of climate change and other anthropogenic factors -- an inevitability which led MIT professor Stephen Meyer to ask in his 2006 book "The End of the Wild:" "What is the essence of our own morality if it fails to encompass most of life on Earth?"

For the past three millennia, the essence of human morality has been expressed primarily in terms of how we treat one another. Consequently, some version of the Golden Rule appears in virtually all of the world's major religious traditions, making it the bedrock of human ethical concern. Unfortunately for us, however, it is not the bedrock of our biological existence on Earth.

The foundation for life on Earth is now just what it always has been -- not how we treat others of our own species, but the planetary ecosystem itself. That system provides the air we breathe, the food and water we consume, and -- at present -- a range of temperatures conducive to our continued survival. For millennia now, we've lived in our heads as a species, convinced as one that nature would give way indefinitely before the advance of human ambition and desire. Our bodies tell another story. We are wholly dependent on the Earth and its bounty for our continued existence. Eliminate one half of that bounty, and pretty soon the Golden Rule, for all the beauty and nobility of its conception, won't mean a thing. Or at least not for this world -- presumably, those who believe in heaven can still follow it in hopes of the world to come.

Even the "Green Rule" is too timid a fix for the problems we face now. It isn't just that the eco version contributes to our collective delusion of knowing how best to manage the Earth's energies and resources . . . provided we think empathetically, that is. A bigger problem is its conception as a "rule." Reality would be a better word to describe our relationship to the planet and its diversity of plant and animal life. A rule may be bent...or broken...or observed in some instances but not in others. Its very nature derives from the fact that we can elect to observe it or not. But there is no opt-out when it comes to the reality of Nature. There is no way we are going to live well or for long in a world where Nature has been cut in half.

Would Jesus have understood a "Green Reality" which says "As we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves"? I believe he would. The word "golden" appears nowhere in the gospels. Nor does "rule." Jesus' only comment on his famous maxim ("for this is the law and the prophets") suggests that in his mind it was simply everything -- a complete portrait of life and the world, rather than a simple plug-in prescription for what one was to do to others, or refrain from doing.

At its most profound level, Jesus' central commandment is nothing less than a description of reality itself -- the portrait of a working ecosystem. As you treat others, you treat yourself. As you forgive others, you are forgiven. "As you do unto the least of these, so have you done unto me." Everything is inter-related. Not one of us exists independently or alone. That is the "Green Reality" Jesus would surely teach if he were with us again today. "What would Jesus do?" It's the wrong question for the age head. The real question is, How would he think? And the answer is BIG . . . and for the long term.

Assuming that Jesus' intention isn't to save the few and leave the rest behind -- including house sparrows, lost sheep, and lilies of the field -- he'd have a way of looking at things that would serve to guide us on the long green road ahead. It's painful to think of Jesus coming back to find

that half of the plants and animals he knew intimately and referred to constantly in his teachings had simply disappeared. It's hard to imagine that he wouldn't want to know what happened to them, and why. Or that he wouldn't have a teaching on how to protect those that remained.

Clark Strand is the author of "How to Believe in God: Whether You Believe in Religion or Not," and the founder of WholeEarthGod.com.

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2009/09/a_golden_rule_for_gods_green_earth.html

September 7, 2009

UK Christians don't need convincing to be green

By Stephen Bates
The Guardian

The call by Lord May in his presidential address to the British Science Association festival today for religious groups to play a leading part in warning the world about climate change and encouraging their followers to help tackle global warming is encouraging as it strikes a more positive note from a scientist than is usually heard when religion is mentioned these days.

But it also suggests that the government's former chief scientist has not paid much attention to what has been going on in British churches in recent years. You won't find many clergy of any denomination over here querying the need to be more environmentally conscious.

The Bishop of London – admittedly ambushed on camera by the television producer and former Catholic ordinand Mark Dowd – foreswore air travel for a year. And the Archbishop of Canterbury, in keeping with his other-worldly, monkish, image, doesn't even drive a car, though this may be as much due to Rowan Williams's perception of his potential danger to other road users if he ever got behind the wheel as to any environmental considerations. Conveniently, Rowan does also have a chauffeur for official business, though his car uses hybrid fuel.

If Lord May spreads his horizons as far as the US however, he will find a political debate among evangelicals likely to warm the cockles of Richard Dawkins' heart. There, leaders of the religious right have spurned all arguments about climate change and turned on younger church leaders who have grown increasingly concerned over the issue. On a purely religious level the debate has been between the so-called pre-millennialists who believe that because the end of the world is nigh there is no need to conserve its resources for future generations. These are the folk, especially among the Pentecostal community, who believe that the battle of Armageddon will soon be upon us, almost certainly sparked in the Middle East and fostered by such agents of the Antichrist as the United Nations, or even the poor old European Union.

Of course, such a belief is additionally useful in bolstering a more secular political worldview. You will find amongst them such ageing luminaries as Pat Robertson, James Dobson and Tim

LaHaye. Presumably another of their number, the Rev Jerry Falwell, having gone to meet his Maker, now knows whether such things will come to pass, or not. The influence of such men is on the wane, however their arguments still find echoes in politicians such as Sarah Palin.

Theirs is the loudest, but not the only voice amongst politically-active US religious folk. An alternative view has arisen that actually the Bible enjoins believers to be stewards of the earth and hence conserve it. The leading voice for this is the Rev Rich Cizik, who saw the light after attending a conference. When I interviewed him in Washington a couple of years ago, he told me:

I had a conversion in 2002 in Oxford. I saw the data. I said this takes my breath away. I don't believe I can be a fence sitter, but my evangelical friends still say I should not talk about it. This issue challenges our lifestyle in ways other issues don't. We've sold our recreational vehicle. We've redone our heating system. We're recycling and reusing.

Read Matthew 6:19: store not up your treasures. Don't we say the prayer: 'thy will on earth as in heaven'? It's all coming and maybe it's coming a lot sooner than we ever thought it would. Hey, I'm sounding like a preacher now, aren't I?

Naturally, for such heretical views, the greybeards forced Cizik from his post as chief executive of the National Association of Evangelicals. As is the way with the American right in political argument these days, they smeared him with accusations that his stance meant he was in favour of abortion, infanticide and euthanasia. His message is, however, getting through to younger churchgoers, many of whom even voted for Obama last November.

So far such debate as there has been in British churches has been much more muted. There will be few religious leaders unsympathetic to Lord May's call. They will happily turn down the heating and there must be few that do not serve Freetrade coffee and ethically-produced biscuits after services. There at least the message is already getting through. It might even demonstrate a more attractive side of Belief than obsessing about gay sex.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/sep/07/environment-religion-christianity>

September 7, 2009

Church Leaders, Climate Experts to Urge World Leaders to Focus on Poor

By Aaron J. Leichman
Christian Post

Two networks of faith-based humanitarian and development groups will be sending a delegation to this month's high-level U.N. event on climate change to ask world leaders to give the highest political priority to a new climate deal.

Alongside representatives from CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis, church leaders and climate experts from the developed and developing world will personally urge world leaders to think about the world's poorest people as they believe "bold action is needed to protect them from the devastating impacts of climate change."

"Wealthy countries have an unequivocal moral duty to reduce their own emissions and help developing countries who are already suffering the consequences of our profligate use of fossil fuels for economic gain," commented delegation head Keith O'Brien, a cardinal from the United Kingdom.

On Sept. 22, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will host an all-day high-level event on climate change for heads of state and government, one day before the opening of the general debate of the 64th session of the U.N. General Assembly.

According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2009 is a crucial year in the international effort to address climate change.

In December, national government delegations who agreed to shape an ambitious international response to climate change in 2007 will be meeting for the end-of-the-year summit in Copenhagen to finalize the details of a new climate change agreement that will replace the current one, which runs until 2012.

Under the current Kyoto Protocol, 37 industrial countries are required to cut emissions a total 5 percent from 1990 by 2012.

According to some scientists, industrialized nations must cut emissions by 25 to 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020 to prevent climate disasters, such as coastal flooding from rising sea levels, severe weather events, and variations in rainfall and temperatures that will affect agriculture and wipe out species of plants and animals.

The World Wildlife Fund for Nature calculated that the current declarations from wealthy countries amount to a total emissions cut of just 10 percent by 2020.

Though not all people believe that climate change is a strictly man-made phenomenon, those who do have been urging world leaders to take decisive action to secure an ambitious and fair climate deal this year in Copenhagen.

Delegates who CIDSE and Caritas will be sending to the high-level U.N. event on Sept. 22 include, among others, John Onaiyekan, the Catholic archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria; Theotonius Gomes, the Catholic bishop of San Marcos, Guatemala; Janet Mangera, the executive secretary of Caritas Kenya; Bernd Nilles, CIDSE's secretary general; and Jim Hug, the president of Center of Concern.

Caritas Internationalis, the largest network of Catholic charities in the world, works through its 164 national members to combat poverty and injustice, directly helping around 24 million people each year in 200 countries and territories.

CIDSE, meanwhile, is a network of 16 member organizations in Europe and North America that share a common strategy in their efforts to eradicate poverty and establish global justice. CIDSE's advocacy work covers global governance, resources for development, climate change, trade and food security, EU development policy and business, and human rights.

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20090907/church-leaders-climate-experts-to-urge-for-focus-on-poor/index.html>

September 16, 2009

In a Fitting Tribute, Thomas Berry to be Honored in Word and Deed

Press Release

As one of the pioneering thinkers of the 20th century, Thomas Berry, who died in June at the age 94, revealed a stream of insights on humans, Earth, and the universe that have led to countless ongoing initiatives to preserve and sustain the planet. That type of engaged scholarship leading to action will be evidenced at the Thomas Berry Award & Memorial Service with Paul Winter on Saturday, September 26 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, a celebration of Berry's life and the honoring of the latest recipient of the award given in his name.

Teacher, writer, and sage, Berry's life is often associated with the term "Great Work," not only because it served as the title of his seminal 1999 book on environmental awakening, but also because his vast range of scholarship and the enlightenment it inspired can aptly be described as such. From his academic beginnings as a historian of world cultures and religions, Berry developed into what he described as a "geologist," a scholar of Earth and its evolutionary processes.

Typical of the consciousness he raised is the work of Martin S. Kaplan, the 2009 winner of the Thomas Berry Award, who for more than 20 years has promoted progressive environmental grant making at numerous organizations and academic institutions, and was instrumental in establishing the Thomas Berry Foundation in 1998.

"Thomas Berry contributed to the realization in our times that environmental issues are more than science or policy, they are also issues of the spirit," said Mary Evelyn Tucker, who with her husband, John Grim, heads the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale and directs the Thomas Berry Foundation, co-sponsors of the event. "How well we respond to the planetary challenges that face us now will be determined by our ability to form an Earth community with a common future for all species."

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale builds on Berry's work in the history of world religions by focusing on the roles that religions play in constructing ethical worldviews for interaction with other people, species, and the environment. Created in 1998 following the three-year World Religions and Ecology conference series at Harvard, the United Nations, and the American Museum of Natural History, the Forum is credited with creating a new field of

academic study in religion and ecology as well as spearheading a growing moral force for environmental action.

"The planet Earth is something more than a natural resource to be used by humans," Berry wrote. "A viable future for the human community rests largely upon a new relationship between human communities and the planet we dwell on."

That future would be difficult to achieve, Berry realized, and would require what he called "the great work" – in politics and law, economics and business, education, and religion. "From here on," he explained in a 2006 interview, "the primary judgment of all human institutions, professions, programs and activities will be determined by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship."

Born in Greensboro, N.C. in 1914, Berry entered the Roman Catholic Passionist Order as a young man, received his Ph.D. in European intellectual history from the Catholic University of America, and then spent many years studying the cultures and religions of Asia, authoring two books, *Buddhism* and *Religions of India*. After teaching Asian religions at Seton Hall and St. John's University, Berry chaired Fordham University's history of religions program and directed many doctoral and master's theses, including those of John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker.

Berry also served as president of the American Teilhard Association, dedicated to the 20th century French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who inspired Berry's "universe story" concept which came to fruition in his 1992 book, *The Universe Story*, written with mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme.

Berry explored the intersection of ecological, spiritual and cultural issues in other books including *The Dream of the Earth* (1988; 1995 Lannan Award), *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (1999), *Evening Thoughts: Reflection on the Earth as Sacred Community* (2006), and two essay collections, *The Sacred Universe* and *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, published this month.

The 2009 Thomas Berry Award recipient, Martin S. Kaplan, has been a guiding force in the development of the field of religion and ecology. He played a leading role in arranging the grants for the World Religions and Ecology conference series and subsequent conferences, leading to the Fall 2001 issue of *Daedalus* entitled "Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?"

As trustee and managing director of the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation and trustee of the Germeshausen Foundation, Kaplan helped achieve grants for environmental programs at Harvard, Columbia, MIT and Yale as well as the Consortium for Conservation Medicine, the Wildlife Trust Alliance, and Grist, the on-line environmental news service. He recently retired as a partner at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP, where he represented public and private corporations and developed philanthropic strategies for families and foundations.

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, in collaboration with Brian Swimme and director David Kennard, is nearing completion of a documentary film, *Journey of the Universe*, inspired

by Berry's book. Scheduled for release in 2010, it will provide an integrating framework for understanding the story of the universe and the Earth from the perspectives of science and religion. The Forum's website at www.yale.edu/religionandecology, the world's most comprehensive source of overviews, bibliographies, commentary, and resources on religion and ecology, also includes up-to-date global news and events listings, and statements on climate change from the world's religions.

The Thomas Berry Foundation, established in 1998 by Berry, his sister Margaret Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, carries out Berry's work in enhancing the flourishing of the Earth community through the publication of his essays, the Thomas Berry archive at Harvard University, and The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. For more information on the Thomas Berry Award and Memorial Service, go to www.thomasberry.org.

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The Thomas Berry Foundation and The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale are engaged in four major initiatives:

- Enhancing Thomas Berry's Legacy. Over the last decade Berry's archives have been transferred to Harvard with the assistance of his sister Margaret Berry. Concurrently, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim have edited and promoted the distribution of four of his books, *The Great Work*, *Evening Thoughts*, *The Sacred Universe*, and *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. They also lead the American Teilhard Association, organizers of the Teilhard celebration at the United Nations and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 2005 on the 50th anniversary of his death.
- Creating a New Field of Study with Implications for Policy: Publications and Conferences. The Forum has helped create a new field of study in religion and ecology with global implications for environmental policy. With its scholarly network it published the ten-volume World Religions and Ecology Series (Harvard University Press), and it supported the first journal in the field, *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*. The Forum participates in policy-oriented, interdisciplinary conferences with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Dialogue of Civilizations, the Earth Dialogues led by Mikhail Gorbachev, the Earth Charter, and the Parliament of World Religions.
- Promoting a Moral Force for Environmental Action: Network and Internet Outreach. The Forum has expanded the global network of scholars, activists, educators, and religious leaders concerned with environment and justice issues. To assist this network it is editing the 20-volume "Ecology and Justice" series (Orbis Books), which includes Berry's final book. Its website at www.yale.edu/religionandecology provides introductory essays, annotated bibliographies, selections from sacred texts, environmental statements from religious communities, and examples of religious environmentalism. The Forum was a principal advisor for the film, *Renewal*, featuring eight case studies of religious environmentalism in the United States, and held a major conference at Yale in 2008 bringing together scholars and

activists to celebrate the film's release. Upcoming activities include the October "Restoring Balance: The Great Mississippi River" conference sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, the Parliament of the World's Religions in December in Canberra, Australia, and organization of a conference on "Environmental Justice and Climate Change" at Yale in April 2010.

- Fostering Knowledge of "The Universe Story". In collaboration with mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, the Thomas Berry Foundation is creating an educational film, book, and website to build on Berry's vision. The project is designed to foster a broader understanding of the Universe Story and its implications for a viable future for the Earth community. As project background, the Forum has created a network of advisors and organized a series of conferences with scientists and humanists at Whidbey Institute in Washington State.

<http://fore.research.yale.edu/news/item/in-a-fitting-tribute-thomas-berry-to-be-honored-in-word-and-deed/>

September 18, 2009

Hollywood joins politicians, artists and environmentalists in hard-hitting UN campaign to combat climate change

Nairobi - Climate change is here and threatens us all, say Hollywood actors, film directors, environmentalists and politicians in a new UN public service announcement series, launched today.

Jeffrey Nachmanoff, co-writer of blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow*, an apocalyptic science-fiction film that depicts catastrophic effects of global warming, has directed the series which urges viewers to sign the Climate Petition (www.sealthedeal2009.org).

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said: "The series is aimed at promoting public awareness and catalyzing action at the highest and humblest level to boost the prospects for a wide-ranging and transformative agreement at a crucial UN climate convention meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark in less than 80 days."

Speaking about the project, Jeffrey Nachmanoff said: "Climate change is such a pervasive and persistent challenge that it's difficult to get people to focus on it constructively. The Copenhagen conference represents a specific moment in time, and is an opportunity for action. My hope is that this campaign will encourage people to increase public pressure on world leaders to seize that opportunity."

The hard-hitting, Seal the Deal! public awareness campaign is being launched at the start of Global Climate Week, 21-25 September and was shot in six locations across four continents.

The videos feature President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives; Don Cheadle -Hollywood actor, film producer and author; Professor Wangari Maathai - Nobel Peace Prize Winner; Midori Goto - UN Messenger of Peace; Phillipe Cousteau - Animal Planet presenter and environmentalist; Saba Douglas-Hamilton - wildlife film maker.

Speaking about the Seal the Deal! campaign, the featured personalities said:

The Honourable Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Maldives: "For the Maldives, climate change is no vague or distant irritation, but a clear and present danger. And what happens to the Maldives today happens to the rest of the world tomorrow. That's why the Maldives is slashing emissions by shifting from foreign oil to renewable energy, aiming to become carbon neutral in a decade. It's time we all Seal the Deal!"

Midori Goto, UN Messenger of Peace: "I am happy to add my voice to those who are concerned about climate change, and I am extremely excited by the opportunities implicit in the commitment of the newly-appointed Prime Minister of Japan, Yukio Hatoyama. He and his government are advocating a substantial decrease in emissions. We can act together to bring meaningful changes to our lives and to our environment. Let's sign the climate petition and let our voices be heard."

Professor Wangari Maathai, Founder of the Green Belt Movement and Nobel Peace Prize winner: "Climate change is a matter of life and death. Something very serious is happening. Africans - and especially African women - will suffer most from climate change. It's time to Seal the Deal! in Copenhagen."

Phillipe Cousteau, CEO EarthEcho International, Animal Planet host and environmentalist: "I've spent my life working to educate people about our environment and about how human actions have had a catastrophic effect on our planet. Now we have the chance to take action to make a positive difference and correct some of the damage caused in Copenhagen. It's time to Seal the Deal!"

Saba Douglas-Hamilton, BBC wildlife presenter and conservationist: "For me it took a trip to the high Arctic filming polar bears to understand what was going on in my own back yard. In Kenya, we live or die by the grace of the Monsoon and when the rains fail, as they have this year, we suffer terrible drought. Climate change is the great leveler. No matter who or what you are - rich or poor, human or amphibian - it will affect us all. I want to be able to tell my daughter with an open heart that I tried to make a difference when I could. Help us Seal the Deal."

Notes to editors:

1. To download the Seal the Deal! PSAs go to www.sealthedeal2009.org/psa-downloads which will be available from **0800 GMT on 18th September**. The PSA is available for free distribution and promotion. Online and print versions will also be available.
2. To sign the Climate Petition, go to www.sealthedeal2009.org

3. Photo opportunity: New York, USA - September 20

As part of the Seal the Deal campaign, supermodel and environmentalist Gisele Bündchen, Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, will be available for an unusual photo opportunity, press conference and comment on 20 September 11 am local time New York, ahead of the UN Secretary General's Summit on Climate Change.

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=596&ArticleID=6310&l=en>

September 20, 2009

Warning over climate 'wrangling'

Scotland's leading Roman Catholic has warned the international community that "political wrangling" over climate change is putting the poor at risk.

Cardinal Keith O'Brien's comments came ahead of high-level United Nations talks on tackling the issue.

He is heading up an international delegation of bishops and climate change experts in New York.

Cardinal O'Brien said Scotland had played its part by setting ambitious emission-cutting targets.

Ahead of Monday's session, involving international heads of state and UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, the cardinal said: "Climate change is another situation where the poor of the world are paying for the over-consumption of the rich.

"Global warming is too important an issue for political wrangling and short-term national interest.

"Leaders should be getting down to serious negotiations for the sake of all humanity - instead we are seeing political disagreements and a lack of commitment."

Cardinal O'Brien, who is representing the CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis coalition of catholic aid agencies, said it was the responsibility of the world's wealthy, industrialised nations to act.

The UN talks are part a series of events to agree a replacement for the international Kyoto Protocol on tackling climate change, to be finalised in Copenhagen in December.

In June, the Scottish Parliament passed legislation setting out a 42% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, rising to 80% by 2050.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/8265364.stm

September 20, 2009

'Green Pope' sees Creation as a Gift

Zenit.org

Father Lombardi Comments on Pontiff's Ecological Openness

VATICAN CITY - The environmental concern of Benedict XVI, often tagged the "Green Pope" in the media, is anchored in a religious and ethical vision of the world, according to a Vatican spokesman.

"Indeed, the pronouncements on the protection of the environment, on the safeguarding of creation, are more frequent and -- we can say -- almost continuous," commented Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Holy See's press office.

In his weekly editorial on the Vatican Television program "Octava Dies," the Jesuit priest observed that "humanity is becoming more and more aware and preoccupied with the effects of its activities on the planet's fragile equilibrium."

The Vatican spokesman's remarks anticipate one-day climate summit at U.N. headquarters in New York on Tuesday that will seek to revitalize negotiations on a U.N. climate pact that would be proposed at a U.N. climate change to be held in Copenhagen this December.

"In this context the Pope offers a framework of solid religious, rational and moral references for programs of effective action and for new behaviors and lifestyles adapted to a responsible development," Father Lombardi noted.

He said the Pope's latest encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate," amply treated the theme, commenting on "the exploitation of non-renewable resources and justice toward poor populations, the questions of energy consumption, responsibility toward future generations, the relationship between ecology and respect for life."

However, the spokesman added, "one must first of all, the Pope tells us, learn 'to see in creation something more than a mere source of wealth and exploitation in human hands,' to see it truly as it really is, that is, as 'expression of a project of love and truth that speaks to us of the Creator and his love for humanity.'"

He noted that this is where "the 'Green Pope' and the Church" can be of service.

<http://www.zenit.org/article-26921?l=english>

September 22, 2009

Press Conference by Caritas Internationalis on High-Level Climate Change Summit

United Nations

The wait-and-see attitude adopted by many countries with regard to action to address climate change was putting the process at risk and making it less and less easy to ensure a fair and just climate treaty offering something to the world, especially the poorest parts, René Grotenhuis, President of the CIDSE Network of Catholic Development Agencies, said today at Headquarters.

Too many countries were still holding their cards close to their chest and waiting and to see what others were doing before committing themselves to climate change efforts, Mr. Grotenhuis said at a press conference by CIDSE and the Caritas Internationalis delegation to the high-level Climate Change Summit, which was organized by the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands to the United Nations.

Accompanied by Elizabeth Peredo, Director of Fundación Solon of Bolivia, and Cardinal Keith O'Brien, Archbishop of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh in Scotland, he said that, as a result, there was a lot of talk about 2020 and 2050 as the target year, whereas immediate action was needed. Many people in Africa and across the world were suffering the effects of climate change, as droughts and unpredictable rain patterns affected livelihoods and put their survival at risk.

Emphasizing the importance of coming up with a clear-cut message in Copenhagen that the poorest had been taken into account, he said CIDSE had engaged in the climate change campaign on the basis of its experience working on poverty and realizing that climate change really affected poor people most, even though they were the least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. As a Catholic organization, CIDSE believed deeply that the Earth was a creation of God handed over to humans and, as such, people must be responsible stewards in caring for it.

He said the presence of Caritas and CIDSE representatives at the Summit was aimed at giving the discussions a human face by showing that beyond industry politics, energy politics and the economic crisis, climate change was affecting people. Behind the figures and "power wrestling"

of the big actors, human faces were most afflicted, and world leaders must show up in Copenhagen to give the Conference the political momentum needed to forge a good treaty.

Cardinal O'Brien added that his experiences had motivated his involvement in trying to do something about climate change, and called for efforts to spread awareness of the issue. In his discussions at the current Summit, he had found that delegates were all fully aware of the risk to the planet, but at home they were still dragging their feet and had been slow to respond. It was one of his responsibilities as a church leader to stimulate, upon returning home, the people under his care to realize what was happening with regard to climate change.

In response to a question, he said there was no conflict between Catholic beliefs and efforts to address climate change, pointing out that the Pope had spoken out about the necessity of being aware of what was happening to the world. There was talk of the Pontiff working on an encyclical on the subject in the not-too-distant future.

Ms. Peredo said that the city of La Paz, where she was born, had been blessed with glaciers that were now melting, though Bolivia contributed less than 0.1 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, while suffering the worst consequences of global warming. Many people were suffering because the fields had been affected and seeds were dying. Drought afflicted some areas and malaria had been reported in communities as high as 3,000 metres above sea level.

The climate crisis was the tragic symptom of a global economic system based on profit, over-production and over-consumption, she continued. Climate change was not just an environmental issue, but first and foremost a matter of justice, development, equity and honour. It was unfair that developing countries and poor people paid the consequences of a problem created by rich countries. People in developing countries were already adapting to the changing climate, but the rich countries must also adapt, not only in their survival methods, but also by modifying their lifestyles.

While human rights remained important, it was also necessary to honour the relationship between humans and "Mother Earth", she said. That was why the international community was being urged to produce a declaration that could retrieve the rights of Mother Earth. In that regard, it had been suggested that a seat be symbolically reserved for Mother Earth in the General Assembly.

http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/090922_Caritas.doc.htm

September 25, 2009

Catholic leaders at UN summit urge immediate action on climate change

By Beth Griffin
The Boston Pilot

UNITED NATIONS (CNS) -- Climate change is more than an environmental concern; it is an

issue of justice that merits immediate attention by world leaders. This was the message delivered repeatedly by Catholic participants in the Sept. 22 U.N. Summit on Climate Change in New York.

"It is unfair that people in developing countries pay the consequences for problems that rich countries have created," said Elyzabeth Peredo, director of the Solon Foundation in Bolivia, at a Sept. 22 press conference. As an example, she said Bolivia generates only 0.1 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, but melting glaciers caused by the warming effect of emissions worldwide endanger crops for small-scale farmers in communities throughout the country's Andes mountains.

The proposals now under discussion at the United Nations set goals and targets for international investment in adaptation technologies to help countries withstand climate change.

"We have 2020 targets and even 2050 targets, but it's necessary to act now to reduce the vulnerability of the poorest," said Rene Grotenhuis, president of CIDSE, a Belgium-based international alliance of Catholic development agencies.

"We're trying to put a human face on climate change," he added. "Beyond the statistics, there are people living with the effects of climate change already. It's necessary and urgent to get a bold and ambitious treaty in Copenhagen."

Pope Benedict XVI urged world leaders to address global environmental issues "with generous courage" and reminded them that the world's resources are to be shared by all, including poorer countries.

He said "creation is under threat" and that it was everyone's responsibility to protect the environment because "the earth is indeed a precious gift of the Creator."

The pope's message was sent by the Vatican to the climate change summit and appeared on the U.N. summit's Web site. The papal message had been recorded during an Aug. 26 general audience in Castel Gandolfo, Italy.

Government leaders have an obligation to work together for the "protection of the environment, and the safeguarding of resources and of the climate," in respect of the law and in solidarity with weaker nations, he said.

Natural resources must be shared, he said, and the social and economic costs of consuming them "must be recognized with transparency and borne by those who incur them, and not by other peoples or future generations."

The Sept. 22 summit, called by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, is a prelude to a comprehensive international climate change deal that will be finalized at the Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change Dec. 7-18 in Copenhagen, Denmark. The nonbinding convention, or treaty, was adopted in 1992 and aims to prevent "dangerous" human interference with the climate system.

Representatives of the 192 countries that are parties to the climate change convention meet annually to review progress on implementing it. This year's meeting in Denmark is viewed as a pivotal opportunity to reverse the causes of climate change by implementing a new treaty that will expand the reach of the convention's 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. That agreement set binding targets for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The 15-member Catholic delegation of laity and religious was organized by CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis, a network of 164 Catholic charities. It is led by Cardinal Keith O'Brien of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, Scotland. The group met with heads of state, government and religious leaders and delegates in multiple venues Sept. 20-23.

Cardinal O'Brien called on heads of state to give the issue the highest political priority and to attend the meeting in Copenhagen to make sure a strong and equitable agreement is reached.

"Leaders should be getting down to serious negotiations for the sake of all humanity," he said. "Instead, we are seeing political disagreements and a lack of commitment. The lives of millions of people in the developing world, who have done least to cause the problem, are at stake."

Grotenhuis said a fair, just climate treaty is endangered by "too many countries holding their cards close to the vest, waiting to see what the main actors will do. There is not yet a broad commitment from players other than" the European Union.

He said climate change relates to a basic principle of Catholic social teaching, the common good. "It's a fundamental issue at the heart of Catholic social thinking to care about climate change and make it an important issue," he added.

Catholic delegates also participated in a Sept. 21 panel that addressed practical steps being taken to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience of affected populations. The speakers also gave examples from their regions to illustrate the scope of the situation.

Janet Magera, executive secretary of Caritas Kenya, said changing climate patterns made rainfall unreliable in Kenya, where only 17 percent of the land is moderately productive. "Of 38 million people, 10 million are in need of food," she said. "In the past, we have had drought and famine, but it has not affected this high a percentage of the people."

She said Caritas Kenya is helping communities adapt to the water shortage by promoting traditional and drought-resistant crops, such as sorghum, millet and cassava, and demonstrating bio-farming in the dioceses.

Magera said Caritas is also "capacity-building in climate change," by training development coordinators to enable communities to advocate for policy changes.

Nafisa D'Souza, executive director of Laya Resource Centre in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, said, "Local communities are very much affected by the climate crisis, but they are also very resilient." But resilience erodes, she said, when scarce energy resources "go to meet the

demands that come from the elites, either in or out of the country."

Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini of San Marcos, Guatemala, said the Catholic delegation was committed to encouraging fundamental policy changes by its presence at the meeting and by promoting the relationships among development, climate change, social justice and the suffering of poor people.

He urged people to adopt an austerity toward natural resources. He said his morning shower at a New York hotel dumped a surprising amount of water on him. "It was not only incredible, but unfair," he said, reflecting on the irregular availability of potable water in his country.

"We need to encourage a social system where to be is more important than to have," Bishop Ramazzini added.

<http://www.thebostonpilot.com/article.asp?ID=10882>

September 25, 2009

Religious Groups Push for Climate Change Legislation

American religious traditions have emerged as a large part of the environmental movement.

By Dan Gilgoff
US News and World Report

When Orthodox Jews met with top White House adviser David Axelrod and a handful of U.S. senators this month as part of an annual lobbying effort, they talked up climate change legislation as a way to improve security for the United States and Israel. "America's reliance on imported oil from the Arab Middle East has been a grave concern for a very long time," says Nathan Diament, public policy director for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. "The Jewish community is interested in energy independence."

But the Jewish delegation also based its case for a climate change bill, which cleared the House earlier this year, on another premise: the Bible. "We are getting ready to read Genesis and the creation story in our synagogues in a few weeks," Diament says. "Our responsibility to tend the garden is part of our understanding of the Torah and of our worship." Indeed, some Jews have begun referring to their green activism as "creation care," a term coined by environmentally inclined evangelical Christians.

As environmental interests begin pressing the Senate to pass major climate legislation before next year's midterm elections, groups and activists from across the spectrum of American religious traditions have emerged as an integral part of the effort. Some denominations and faith-based organizations are planning grass-roots campaigns around the bill for this fall. The White House's faith-based advisory council has convened a climate change task force. And Pope

Benedict XVI's environmental proclamations, including writing recently that "the environment is God's gift to everyone," have earned him the nickname the "green pope."

At a time when many senators are skittish about adopting the House climate bill's cap-and-trade provision because of fears it could further slow the economy, religious activists may prove crucial to building support, or at least dampening opposition, among important religious constituencies. Religious conservatives, for instance, generally oppose more government regulation. And many African-Americans, among the most religious demographic groups in the country, worry about cap-and-trade's impact on manufacturing jobs. Faith-based environmentalists have responded to such doubts with a moral case that climate change will disproportionately affect the world's poor by causing food shortages, drought, and coastal flooding. "The faith community talks about climate legislation differently than scientists or environmentalists," says Cassandra Carmichael, director of the Washington office of the National Council of Churches. "We frame it in terms of the people impacted, which can bring in legislators who hadn't thought in those terms."

With the healthcare debate sucking up most of the oxygen in Washington, a climate bill might not have a chance in the Senate this year, as environmentalists had hoped. But Environment and Public Works Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer and Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry have vowed to introduce a bill by the end of September. And lobbyists on all sides of the issue have already begun trying to shape the legislation, battling over whether the Senate version should include cap-and-trade.

In the House, religious activists helped to narrowly pass a climate bill in June. A group called the American Values Network, founded by the religious outreach director for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, Burns Strider, bought Christian radio ads promoting the bill in conservative congressional districts. The progressive group Faith in Public Life funded polling that showed most evangelicals and Catholics support efforts to combat climate change. Religious lobbyists, meanwhile, won a provision in the House bill guaranteeing that houses of worship are eligible for federal subsidies for retrofitting energy-inefficient buildings.

The stepped-up environmental efforts of religious groups in Washington have paralleled a grass-roots effort among religious Americans to green their congregations. An ecumenical group called GreenFaith recently launched a program to certify green houses of worship. Earlier this month, the Environmental Protection Agency unveiled a tool kit to help churches, synagogues, and mosques earn its Energy Star ratings for their facilities. The Obama administration is reportedly considering the idea of a faith-based office at the EPA to expand its work with religious communities.

Though some religious activists were present at the environmental movement's inception, the greening of American faith took off in the past decade. "The work first emerged among mainline Protestant and liberal Jews and Catholics," says the Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith. "They were looking to reassert a religious voice for the common good and social justice after 30 years of a conservative evangelical take on public issues." Some evangelicals

have since joined the movement, with leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention recently declaring that they'd been "too timid" on climate change.

At the same time, religion remains a dividing line in public opinion on the environment. Despite polling by progressive groups on support for climate legislation, a recent Pew survey found that just a third of white evangelicals believe global warming is caused by humans. And only 39 percent of black Protestants accept the evidence for human-caused climate change. The group most convinced that humans are to blame? Those unaffiliated with any religious tradition.

- *See photos from the [Values Voter Summit](#).*
- *Follow Dan Gilgoff on [Twitter](#).*

<http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/religion/2009/09/25/religious-groups-push-for-climate-change-legislation.html>

September 26, 2009

Remembering the Great Worker
By Andrew C. Revkin

A memorial service and celebration were held on Sept. 26 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine to honor the memory of [Thomas Berry](#) and the philanthropic energies of [Martin Kaplan](#), who is pictured above delivering an address at the event. Mr. Kaplan alluded to Mr. Berry's longtime view that humans are poised at a "[moment of grace](#)" as they absorb and respond to the reality that the "[human project](#)" is a subset of the "Earth project."

[Thomas Berry](#), who died at 94 on Monday, leaves behind a global following of academics, environmentalists, writers, educators and other people who found inspiration in his message: that awe for the cosmos, particularly this [pale blue dot called Earth](#), could foster a transition to a new way of being for humankind, more in balance with nature's limits. He said humanity was poised to shift from an anthropocentric to a biocentric view. He called the effort to make this transition "[The Great Work](#)." Many people are remembering him this week as a great worker. (If you're not familiar with his work, here's one of his essays, "[The Meadow Across the Creek](#)," which describes a childhood experience that shaped his view of the power of experience in nature. Here's a broader look at the mix of [values and data in environmental policy](#).)

I wrote [an obituary for the paper](#), but it necessarily just flies over the surface of Dr. Berry's deeply formed ideas and the community that grew around them. He was sometimes a tough critic of humanity and its institutions, including the Catholic Church, despite his ordination as a priest in 1942 (see his [discussion of population](#) in this Appalachian Voices interview). But he was most often a Pied Piper exhorting humanity to [embrace the awe in encountering Earth and the universe](#) as a kind of rocket fuel for powering a new way of life. Here are some more voices and resources:

[Terry Tempest Williams](#): "We lost a soulmate and a beautiful Earth scholar who wrote from the future with compassion and insight. His ideas had a ferocity of imagination and truth that we are

only beginning to understand. “The Great Work” about which he speaks is all of our work. All words now are local.”

Mary Evelyn Tucker, who with her husband John Grim runs the [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#), is part of Dr. Berry’s intellectual lineage and has been his longtime editor. In a phone call en route to the Wednesday funeral in Greensboro, N.C., his place of birth and passing, she offered this view of his definition of the human challenge now:

Darwin gave us the broad sweep of evolution as we are beginning to understand it. Thomas has given us a sense of our role in that process as almost no other thinker has done. We are birthed from the universe and the Earth. Through us, these processes that have created life in all its immense complexity have also given rise to a conscious form of the universe. It’s not just a poetic vision. It’s not just a spiritual connection to Earth systems and the Earth community but it’s an absolutely vital urgent moment. We now have to earn our name — Homo sapiens sapiens.

(Joe Romm made an apt comment in a recent blog post about [our unique biological status](#): “[T]echnically, we are the subspecies Homo sapiens sapiens. Isn’t it great being the only species that gets to name all the species, so we can call ourselves ‘wise’ twice!”)

[Caroline Webb](#), an educator and filmmaker, granted us permission to post video of a 2006 interview (above) that provides a glimpse of his eloquent delivery. She’s built a Web site, [earth-community.org](#), with lots more background. There’s another nice video interview with Dr. Berry at the [Web site for “Renewal,”](#) a documentary about religious environmental activism.

[Bill McKibben](#) said this in an e-mail Tuesday night: “He — early on — understood that this was a much bigger question than stopping particular sources of pollution or protecting particular natural parks, that it went straight to the heart of how we understood ourselves, and that our traditions would have to bend to reflect those new understandings.”

[Brian Swimme](#), a mathematical cosmologist who collaborated with Father Berry on the 1992 book “The Universe Story,” said in an interview that the strength of Dr. Berry’s ideas lay in his broad but also deep knowledge of religious and cultural traditions and the full scale of Earth history. “He’d reflect on the whole of things,” Dr. Swimme said, including the important but limited role of science. “He was able to position the scientific era in all of human history in a way scientists ourselves wouldn’t be able to.”

[Richard Louv](#), whose book “[Last Child in the Woods](#)” was a favorite of Father Berry’s late in his life, [has blogged on him](#). In an e-mail exchange, part of which is quoted in the obituary, he said this:

Thomas Berry was the earliest and most important voice to describe the profound importance of the disconnection between humans and the natural world, and what that could mean for the future of our species. He often said that his own experience in nature as a boy transformed him and shaped all of his work. I tried to visit him the few times I came through the state, taking him to his favorite restaurant for lunch. To spend time with him was like getting a soul transfusion. Of all the people I have met, I can truthfully describe only two as beatific: Thomas Berry and [Fred Rogers](#). Thomas’s favorite topic was the 21st Century, and his hope for a new human relationship with nature. So I think that it’s poetic and appropriate that he died not long after dawn.

September 27, 2009

On Cathedrals, Dreams and Climate

By Andrew C. Revkin
New York Times - Dot Earth

Over the weekend, I attended an event at the [Cathedral of Saint John the Divine](#) recalling the “great work” of [Thomas Berry](#), who died at 94 this year, and honoring the philanthropic efforts of [Martin Kaplan](#). The several hundred attendees were swallowed up by the vaulting space of the enormous building, which — like most [cathedrals](#) — took generations to build. It’s useful to be in such a space when reflecting on epic questions, like figuring out how to provide adequate energy as [human numbers and appetites crest](#) in the next few decades without risking a dangerous destabilization of climate.

The speeches centered on Berry’s idea that humanity has come to a great point of transition in its development, a point between “[two dreams](#),” as some of Berry’s intellectual heirs describe this juncture. (This is a more elegant framing of this moment than a [planetary transition out of puberty](#), perhaps.) The old dream or worldview was human-centered and defined the rest of the Earth’s inhabitants as a “collection of objects” to be exploited, not what Berry called “[a communion of subjects](#)” to be respected and cherished.

Clearly, the work of those aspiring to create a new norm for how humans define progress and relate to resources, both living and nonliving, is akin to the methodical, sustained work required in cathedral building. Some people, in fields as different as commerce and philosophy, call this approach “[cathedral thinking](#).”

Global warming was touched on repeatedly in speeches at the Berry memorial, and this planet-scale challenge, too, appears to be a perfect target for the cathedral-building approach, given the time scales required to curb emissions that are still a near-direct reflection of economic activity.

The real tension among those seeking a meaningful shift away from fossil-fueled “business as usual” is whether humanity has time for cathedral building. There are those seeking science-driven policy who insist it’s clear now that we overshot the safe zone for greenhouse gas concentrations in 1988, when the carbon dioxide level was [350 parts per million](#). (Now it’s 385 or so). This bloc is pursuing a powerful international accord in Copenhagen in December with binding commitments to deep, prompt cuts in emissions.

Then there are policy realists, including [Eileen Claussen](#) of the Pew Center on Climate Change, [David Victor](#) of the University of California, San Diego, and [Michael Levi](#) of the Council on Foreign Relations — as well as many of the people in President Obama’s climate team. They have repeatedly warned that the country can only support a climate agreement that it knows is feasible in the real world (clearly trying to avoid signing on to something that wouldn’t fly in the Senate, as happened with the Clinton administration and the Kyoto Protocol). Their approach, despite the underlying urgency, is one of patience and persistence, accommodating the nature of

the human side of the problem (our varied interests, our political focus on the here and now, our limited menu of [competitive non-polluting energy sources](#)) as well as the risks identified by science. Even though Copenhagen comes 17 years after the first effort to create a climate treaty, it is a beginning, not an end point, this bloc says. (Here's a valuable recent examination of short-term steps that could result in [effective long-term risk management](#).)

The foundations of meaningful climate action were [laid in 1992](#), and some adornments were [tried in 1997](#). Now comes the heavy lifting. What are the traits required of those [working on a cathedral](#), whether one built of stone or of a thousand variegated actions aimed at a long-term environmental and social goal (for instance taking the carbon out of the global energy system)?

In a recent piece on his [Archizoo](#) blog, Jim Meredith, a strategist and designer (and other things), used the words [intentionality and responsibility](#) to encapsulate this approach to planning a long-term endeavor. Another vital component, he wrote, is “mindfulness of the future in all that we do.”

Does humanity have the time for cathedral building on climate? If so, does society have the will, fortitude and discipline to keep building a new energy future despite our focus on the here and now?

In a comment, Mike Roddy [rejects the cathedral metaphor](#), noting the dark realities behind many such edifices. In a reply, I note that the wealth and power of the Church that facilitated cathedral building are far harder to marshal in an American-style democracy. No one said this'll be easy.

This excerpt from Berry's [1983 poem about the cathedral](#) provides another level of meaning and message in the soaring space and echoes:

The arch of the Cathedral itself takes on the shape
Of the uplifted throat of the wolf
Lamenting out present destiny
Beseeching humankind
To bring back the sun
To let the flowers bloom in the meadows,
The rivers run through the hills
And let the Earth
And all its living creatures
Live their
Wild,
Fierce,
Serene
And Abundant life.

<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/on-cathedrals-dreams-and-climate/>

September 29, 2009

‘Green Patriarch’ backs strong Copenhagen agreement

WWF

The Christian Orthodox Church’s most senior leader has issued a statement urging world leaders to join him and his more than 200 million followers in pushing for a strong and fair climate deal in Copenhagen this December.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, nicknamed the ‘Green Patriarch’ for his longtime support of environmental issues, is calling on political leaders participating in climate change talks this week in Bangkok to agree on strong and fair measures to mitigate climate change in advance of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen this December.

Bartholomew is among a growing number of religious leaders from various denominations weaving environmental awareness into their teachings and activities. Last year, more than 400 mosques in Malaysia held sermons focused on turtle conservation issues to discuss the need for better wildlife protection in that country.

“The accomplishment of a good agreement within the framework of the international negotiations in Copenhagen does not solely constitute a moral imperative for the conservation of God’s creation,” Patriarch Bartholomew said in a statement issued this week.

“It is also a route for economic and social sustainability. Taking action against climate change should not be understood as a financial burden, but as an important opportunity for a healthier planet, to the benefit of all humanity and particularly of those states whose economic development is lagging behind. We pray for the achievement of the best possible international agreement during the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen, so that the industrialized countries undertake generous commitments for a total reduction of the polluting greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent until 2020, compared to the 1990 levels, as well as for the provision of important financial support to the developing countries”.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is the highest office of the Orthodox Church and is based in Istanbul, Turkey.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew serves as the spiritual leader to approximately 300 million Orthodox Christian faithful across the globe. Since his election in October 1991, Bartholomew has often spoken publicly about the moral imperative to protect the environment, according to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Demetres Karavellas, CEO of WWF-Greece welcomed the Patriarch's statement, saying: “The call for strong political commitment against climate change by the leading Primate of the Orthodox Church is a very clear message. It is time for world leaders to listen to this ecumenical message and achieve a binding climate deal at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen in December.”

http://www.panda.org/wwf_news/?175201/Green-Patriarch-backs-strong-Copenhagen-agreement

September 30, 2009

World's religions plead for action on climate change at UN talks in Bangkok

By Denis D. Gray
Associated Press

BANGKOK, Thailand - Adherents of the world's major religions urged political leaders, businessmen and individuals Wednesday to renounce short-term gains and greed, telling a U.N. climate conference in Bangkok that reversing global warming is a moral duty.

Meanwhile, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization warned that climate change could cut food production 21 per cent by 2050 in poor countries, and the Asian Development Bank predicted that global warming could lead to a surge of migration into the region's already crowded cities.

"The food and energy security of every Asian is threatened by climate change, but it's the poor - and especially poor women - who are most vulnerable and most likely to migrate as a consequence," the ADB Vice president Ursula Schaefer Preuss said in a statement.

Negotiators from around the world at the two-week conference are working on a treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol that expires in 2012. The pact is meant to be completed for a major climate forum in Copenhagen in December, but a deal is far from certain.

Religious leaders chastised governments for placing national advantage ahead of preserving the human species and negotiators for lacking a sense of urgency.

"We are one humanity with a single fate," said Stuart Scott, director of the Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change project. The declaration, endorsed by prominent adherents of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, was handed to Yvo de Boer, the U.N. climate chief.

"Stewardship and reverence for creation are central tenants of all faiths on Earth," the declaration said.

For months, negotiations have been deadlocked, with poorer nations frustrated by industrialized countries' refusal to commit to sufficiently deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions or provide billions of dollars to help them adapt to climate change.

"Shame on us. We are creating a hell on earth for our children," said Myint Thein, a senior Muslim cleric from Myanmar. "We must tell our leaders that life is more important than wealth."

Finance is among the most contentious issues, with a grouping of developing nations - the G-77 and China - saying there will be no deal without climate assistance. They called Wednesday for roughly \$2 trillion a year from rich countries, more than double what they have included in the current negotiating text.

Proposed mechanisms to generate funding include everything from tapping the carbon markets to taxing aviation and maritime fuels.

"I can't see a successful conclusion of Copenhagen without financing and the transfer of technology," G-77 and China Chairman Lumumba Di-Aping told reporters. "It is these two conditions that are effectively the founding pillars. We can build the rest."

But the European Commission's environment director general said financing would not be forthcoming without clear actions from poor countries to rein in their skyrocketing emissions.

"If there is no action, there will be no finance," Artur Runge-Metger said.

The European Commission has estimated that \$146 billion annually will be needed in climate financing by 2020, and it has called for \$32.3 billion to \$73.3 billion of that to come from public funds. The remainder would come from money generated from the carbon markets.

<http://green.ca.msn.com/news/canadianpress-article.aspx?cp-documentid=21984100>

September 30, 2009

A Spiritual Obligation to Act on Climate Change

By Rev. Nelson Bock
Denver Post

We leaders of Colorado faith communities urge Sens. Mark Udall and Michael Bennet to work for the passage of strong clean energy legislation that addresses climate change. This is one of the dominant moral issues of our time.

Our religious faith deepens an awareness that should be clear to all people: The earth, our home, is a gift. We did not create it or earn it, and we do not own it. So we have a sacred responsibility to be good stewards of that gift.

Further, the earth's resources are finite, and with our technological prowess we have the ability to upset the ecological balance which supports our life on this earth. We must be attentive to the impacts of our activity on the environment, and not foolishly pretend that we are immune from those impacts.

We believe that our planet is in great peril from the threat of climate change. We believe it is real, and that it is to a significant extent human-induced. We accept the vast body of scientific evidence which forecasts severe consequences for the Earth and all its inhabitants if we fail to act.

Our thirst to consume the earth's natural resources, and our reliance on old energy sources which emit greenhouse gases, has led us to a crisis both spiritual and environmental. In view of this, for us as spiritual leaders to remain silent would be an abdication of our responsibilities.

Another consideration for us, and of primary concern, is that all of our religious traditions call us to serve and protect the poor and vulnerable, who contribute the least to this problem yet will suffer the most from the impacts of climate change.

We cannot expect to safeguard our own prosperity and security if we ignore or neglect the plight of the poor and vulnerable around the world, whose numbers will only increase as climate change disrupts lives and livelihoods.

A recent Pentagon report likewise concluded that increasing numbers of conflicts are sure to arise if people are displaced by climate change or forced to fight for dwindling resources such as water and arable land.

With the world's largest economy, and historically as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the United States has a special responsibility to help lead the way towards solutions to this global problem through the development of new clean energy technologies. The technologies can be adopted not only here but also by poorer, growing nations, so that their people can also enjoy the benefits of progress without further exacerbating the problem of climate change. We can ALL prosper and benefit from the "new energy economy."

While the legislation passed by the House of Representatives in June is a milestone in efforts to mitigate climate change, we would prefer more dramatic action in a few crucial areas:

1. We need to act more quickly in shifting U.S. energy production toward cleaner sources like wind and solar in order to ensure strong growth in the clean energy industries and new jobs that are key to solving both our environmental and economic crises. Therefore, we support higher targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as for the expansion of renewable energy and energy efficiency programs through stronger utility mandates;
2. We support restoring the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate coal-fired power plant emissions-one of the highest-contributing sources of greenhouse gases.
3. We support requiring polluting industries to pay for their carbon emissions, and using the revenue generated to provide protection for consumers, wildlife, and vulnerable communities. Therefore, we support auctioning a higher proportion of emissions permits, rather than giving them away free as is proposed in the House version of the clean energy jobs legislation.

We urge our Senators to help pass strong, comprehensive clean energy jobs legislation that incorporates the elements stated above. prior to the International Climate Change Conference scheduled to be held in Copenhagen this December.

We also pledge to do our part to change the way our own communities' behaviors contribute to the problem of climate change and other environmental issues. Future generations will thank us for doing so.

Rev. Nelson Bock is executive director of the Colorado Interfaith Power and Light. This guest commentary was also signed by: Rev. Peter Sawtell, executive director of Eco-Justice Ministries, Rev. Dr. Jim Ryan, executive director of the Colorado Council of Churches, Rev. Jann Halloran Chair of the Justice Commission for the Colorado Council of Churches, Rev. Mark Meeks, member of the advisory board of the Colorado Interfaith Power and Light, Rev. Nathan Woodliff-Stanley, Chair of the Public Policy Commission of the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado; and Rev. Ambrose Carroll, coordinator of Green Jobs Interfaith Coalition.

http://www.denverpost.com/headlines/ci_13446139

October 2, 2009

Church leaders support Climate Change Day of Prayer

Christian Today

British church leaders have expressed support for a Climate Change Day of Prayer on 4 October in the run up to the next United Nations climate change summit due to take place at the end of the year.

"I shall be joining Christians from many different churches on 4 October in praying to the Author of Life and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that God's will be done during the decisive Copenhagen conference this December," said the Bishop of London, the Rt Rev Richard Chartres. "Prayer is powerful in dispelling the illusion that we are gods; an illusion which has wreaked such havoc on the earth."

Resources are now available on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland website to help Christians organise local events on 4 October, or another nearby date that might be more convenient. The Climate Change Day of Prayer will be the culmination of a "Time for Creation" month of study by British and Irish churches on the theme of "Creation in Crisis - a time for prayer and action".

The Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt Rev James Jones said, "I urge all Christians to pray for the earthing of Heaven on this day of prayer. Each day I make my own prayer with these words, 'Holy Jesus, Son of Man, come in glory and renew the face of the earth'."

The Climate Change Day of Prayer is an initiative of the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The network brings together environmental representatives from all of Britain and Ireland's mainstream churches. Also involved are Christian development and environmental organisations, including Christian Aid, CAFOD,

Tearfund, A Rocha, Christian Ecology Link, EcoCongregation, the John Ray Initiative, and Operation Noah.

"Prayer is at the heart of all our actions, and this call to prayer comes at a good time," said Linda Jones, Head of Spirituality for the Catholic development agency, CAFOD. "We pray not just that political leaders might act but that we too may be transformed. We need to be ready to change the way we live to reflect our belief that we are called to care for creation, not to participate in its destruction. Poor countries are already bearing the brunt of droughts, floods and extreme weather conditions. CAFOD is calling for a fair and binding climate change deal at the UN meeting in Copenhagen this December which puts poor communities at its heart. We pray that we may recognise our responsibilities towards others, and towards creation itself, which, in its beauty and diversity, mirrors the glory of God. As the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has written, 'Our destructiveness can silence creation's song of praise to God; our care for creation can be a true expression of our own praise.'"

The President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd David Gamble, is also supporting the Climate Change Day of Prayer. He said, "We need not only brave words but also brave actions. This means showing we understand both the gravity and complexity of the situation facing our planet. It means offering our support in every possible way to those committed to finding solutions, especially those involved in the Copenhagen talks. For Christians, that support must be grounded in prayer, which makes 4 October an important date. However, our support cannot stop there; it needs to be expressed in our willingness to change our lifestyle as individuals and as churches."

The Rt Revd William Hewitt, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, commented, "Climate change is one of the greatest challenges we face in the 21st century. The Church of Scotland is responding to climate change by asking all presbyteries to monitor and reduce their carbon footprint, and I am delighted to join churches elsewhere in Britain and Ireland to call upon all congregations to join in prayer on 4 October. In particular, we would pray that world leaders and governments everywhere are alive to God's will, and that we understand our duty of care for creation and put aside our selfish interests".

Dr Isabel Carter has written the resources for the Climate Change Day of Prayer in coordination with Operation Noah. She says, "The talks in Copenhagen this December are of huge significance because they provide an opportunity for the nations of the world to reach binding agreements on cutting back carbon emissions to slow rising global temperatures. Bold agreements for action are needed based on climate science. Much of the negotiating and decision making will take place prior to the summit in December. Hence, there is the crucial need for prayer over the next three months."

"When it comes to climate change, there is plenty of talk and, at least in some quarters, plenty of action. What is often missing is quiet reflection and passionate prayer", said the Revd Dave Bookless, Moderator of the Environmental Issues Network and Director for theology, churches and sustainable communities at the Christian conservation organisation, A Rocha UK. "As the world descends into fearful uncertainty, we need space to ask God for his perspective and intervention, to think about what our abuse of creation says about us, and to plead for a new

vision of God's purposes for us in his world. I believe the Climate Change Day of Prayer is probably the most important initiative that Christians can be involved in during the lead up to the critical negotiations in Copenhagen."

The Revd Professor Michael Northcott, professor of ethics at the University of Edinburgh and a member of the Scottish Episcopal Church, has commented on what he believes are the underlying issues of climate change. He said, "The biggest per capita global polluters have laid out their stall before Copenhagen and declared their intent to go on polluting, with very little restraint, to 2020 and beyond. Faith in capitalism has supplanted faith in the Creator, and humanity and the planet are on the brink of runaway global warming. On this day of prayer, Christians will gather to witness to their love for God and creation."

Those behind the Climate Change Day of Prayer initiative hope that Christians will hold joint times of prayer within every town and city.

The date of Sunday, 4 October is St Francis' Day, and many churches will hold their harvest festival services then. This makes the date an appropriate time to pray especially about climate change. The organisers are also encouraging churches to arrange several times of prayer before and during the Copenhagen talks in December.

All the resources required to prepare for, promote and run a Climate Change Day of Prayer event are available for free download at www.ctbi.org.uk/climatechangeprayer

Time for Creation 2009 materials remain available as free downloads at www.ctbi.org.uk/creationtime, and are available in Welsh and Irish language versions, as well as in English.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.leaders.support.climate.change.day.of.prayer/24308.htm>

October 8, 2009

Interfaith Leaders Back Climate Bill

Zach Rosenberg
Inter Press Service

WASHINGTON - An interfaith group of religious leaders Thursday announced the launch of DaySix.org, an initiative aimed at influencing the passage of Senate legislation on climate change.

The group hopes to motivate grassroots support among religious members of the U.S. public.

"DaySix is really focused on education, motivation, inspiration," said Katie Paris, programme director of Faith in Public Life, the founding organisation of DaySix.org, in a conference call

announcing the launch.

The website for the campaign is designed to persuade young religious people to support climate change legislation, in particular calling for increased funding in the proposed Kerry-Boxer bill for assisting developing nations in adapting to the consequences of climate change.

"Adaptation is truly focused on those that are being hit first and worst, the poorest of the poor, those that have contributed least to this problem," said Paris.

The campaign cited a recent World Bank study which calculated that between 70 and 80 percent of the financial costs of climate change would be borne by developing nations. Developing nations are responsible for an estimated 20 percent of greenhouse gas emissions.

"We already see how climate change is affecting the lives of those we serve," said Bill O'Keefe, director of policy and advocacy at Catholic Relief Services. "We reviewed our entire project portfolio about a year ago and discovered we were already doing 60 million dollars a year of disaster relief related to climate change."

"The good news," O'Keefe added, "if there is any good news, is that we already know how to address the situation, but it requires resources at the scale that only governments can provide."

Representatives of DaySix.org met with Sen. John Kerry in September to discuss their concerns.

"DaySix" is a reference to the Bible's Genesis chapter, which says God made human beings "stewards of creation".

"On the sixth day, we were made in God's image and given responsibility to care for the earth and each other. Today, we must fulfill that charge," read the campaign's website.

Halting climate change has in recent years become a major focus of religious lobby groups in Washington.

The website's launch is the latest in a flurry of efforts to influence Washington policymakers before a major international summit on climate change in Copenhagen, Denmark this December.

Momentum is building in Washington for an overhaul of climate policy, with President Barack Obama signing an executive order Monday directing federal agencies to monitor their greenhouse gas emissions and set targets to reduce their emissions by 2020.

The Kerry-Boxer bill marks a potential milestone in U.S. environmental policy. If passed, the bill would mandate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 to 20 percent less than 2005 levels.

Adaptation initiatives receive little attention, often ignored in favour of large-scale, high-profile issues like technology innovation and job creation programmes.

"The game is being played, and we have to be in it, and no one is going to speak up for adaptation if we don't," said Rabbi Steve Gutow, executive director of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.

"I am here today to ask in God's name," he added, "that those leaders who shape climate change legislation include robust funding for adaptation programmes that enable the poor to make livelihood-saving and life-saving innovations and changes to their communities."

"In the debate so far, there has been more attention to polar bears than people," said O'Keefe. "The U.S. doesn't demonstrate enough effort to help the poorest people in the poorest countries, and those countries are not going to want to help us [at the Copenhagen summit]."

Domestic commitments are seen as crucial steps in building support for a global framework on climate change.

The proposed Kerry-Boxer bill has been referred to committee. Supporters of the bill are unsure of a Senate vote before the end of the year.

Concerted resistance efforts by industry lobby groups often make supporting climate change legislation an expensive proposition for policymakers.

Many influential religious leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI, have expressed support for efforts at halting climate change. Religious groups have become a staple of debates over environmental legislation in the United States.

Representatives from: Evangelical Environmental Network, Catholic Relief Services, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Interfaith Power and Light, and Faith in Public Life participated in the launch of the campaign.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=48782>

October 12, 2009

The Hope We Share: A Vision For Copenhagen
A Statement from the Anglican Communion Environmental Network

Anglican Communion News Service

In preparation for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference Of Parties (COP) Meetings to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark in December, the Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN) has issued a [statement](#) to Anglicans Worldwide, to COP Delegates, Faith Community Representatives, Observer Organizations, and Friends of Creation.

Conferring by email, and using a draft text by Convener, Bishop George Browning, retired Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn in Australia, the network's nineteen provincial representatives considered and amended a [three-page statement](#) seeking to address the moral consequences of climate change and to provoke UN delegates to combine hope with realism as they devise a political system which will take effect in 2012 when the Kyoto Protocol expires:

We look to the Copenhagen conference with hope but also with realism . . . there must be a desire on the part of every nation to do what they know they must, not because they are legally bound, but because they share a vision for a more just and sustainable future . . . We pray that each nation will come to the conference wanting the highest level outcome; that demanding targets will be set, not in an attempt to discipline reluctant participants, or to give some preferential treatment which undermines the whole; but that a greater vision might be shared.

The Anglican Communion occupies a unique position globally in terms of affecting and suffering from climate change:

From all points of the globe we point to the reality of climate change and to the very serious effect it is already having upon our people; from severe weather events, to prolonged droughts, major floods, loss of habitat and changing seasons.

Our position is faith-based:

Our faith and our ancestors have always taught us that the earth is our mother and deserves respect; we know that this respect has not been given. We know that like a mother the earth will continue to give its all to us. However, we also know that we are now demanding more than it is able to provide. Science confirms what we already know, our human footprint is changing the face of the earth and because we come from the earth, it is changing us too.

Our statement is framed in the context of hope channeled through a positive vision.

We have always known that “without a vision, the people perish”. The Copenhagen Conference can either produce a bland, minimalist set of non enforceable targets or it can sketch a vision to inspire the world and its peoples. Leaders lead, please . . . do not let us down.

A PDF of the Statement is available [here](#)

Contact Information

[**The Rt. Rev. George Browning, Convener**](#)

Statement Draft

[**The Rev. Terrie Robinson, Anglican Communion Networks Coordinator**](#)

Anglican communion Networks Context

[**Office of the UN Observer, New York**](#)

UN functions

The Rev. Ken Gray,
Communication

Notes:

ACEN

<http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/index.cfm>

As an official network of the Anglican Communion the ACEN strives:

- to encourage Anglicans to support sustainable environmental practices as individuals and in the life of their communities
- to provide information about policies embraced by synods, councils and commissions, and especially by the instruments of Unity (Statements by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Resolutions and Reports of the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council)
- to support local initiatives by providing information about ideas and best practices developed around the communion
- to share information about resources and initiatives that may be of value to Anglicans everywhere
- to provide an opportunity for interested Anglicans to meet both as a formal network, and informally via electronic media.

<http://www.aco.org/acns/news.cfm/2009/10/12/ACNS4659>

October 13, 2009

Dr Rowan Williams says climate crisis a chance to become human again

Riazat Butt
The Guardian

People should use the [climate change](#) crisis as an opportunity to become human again, setting aside the addictive and self-destructive behaviour that has damaged their souls, the Archbishop of Canterbury said today.

Dr [Rowan Williams](#), head of the Church of England and leader of the worldwide Anglican communion, told an audience at Southwark Cathedral that people had allowed themselves to become "addicted to fantasies about prosperity and growth, dreams of wealth without risk and profit without cost".

The consequences of such a lifestyle meant the human soul was "one of the foremost casualties of environmental degradation".

Small changes, such as setting up carbon reduction action groups, would help them reconnect with the world in addition to repairing some of the damage to the planet, because it was too much to expect the state to provide all the solutions.

"Many of the things which have moved us towards ecological disaster have been distortions of who and what we are and their overall effect has been to isolate us from the reality we're part of. Our response to this crisis needs to be, in the most basic sense, a reality check."

Williams added: "We need to keep up pressure on national governments; there are questions only they can answer about the investment of national resources. We need equally to keep up pressure on ourselves and to learn how to work better as civic agents."

In the lecture, sponsored by the Christian environmental group Operation Noah, Williams outlined a Christian response to the climate crisis.

"When we believe in transformation at the local and personal level, we are laying the sure foundations for change at the national and international level.

"If I ask what's the point of my undertaking a modest amount of recycling my rubbish or scaling down my air travel, the answer is not that this will unquestionably save the world within six months, but in the first place it's a step towards liberation from a cycle of behaviour that is keeping me, indeed most of us, in a dangerous state — dangerous, that is, to our human dignity and self-respect."

In a message to heads of state attending the Copenhagen summit, Williams said leaders had to create a "suitably serious plan" for the speedy implementation of protocols on carbon reduction.

"We have had unexpected signs that the east Asian countries are readier than we might have imagined to put pressure on the economies of the US and Europe. The idea that fast-developing economies are totally wedded to environmental indifference because of the urgency of bringing their populations out of poverty no longer seems quite an obvious truth."

Earlier this year Williams said that God was not a "safety net" that would guarantee a happy ending and that human pillaging of the world's resources meant the planet was facing a "whole range of doomsday prospects" that exceeded the results of global warming.

Humanity faced being "choked, drowned or starved" by its own stupidity, he said, and he compared those who challenged the reality of climate change to the courtiers who flattered King Canute, until he proved he could not command the waves by going to the seashore and trying to do so. "Rhetoric, as King Canute demonstrated, does not turn back rising waters," said Williams in a lecture in March.

Tonight's remarks came days after research suggested that Britons had little appetite for shrinking their carbon footprint by reducing the number of flights they took.

The study, from Loughborough University, showed that the vast majority of the public would rather cut energy use at home than go without flying for a year. While 88% of participants in the Propensity to Fly survey said they were willing or very willing to "reduce how much energy I use in my home throughout the year" only 26% said the same when asked if they would "not fly in the next 12 months".

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/13/rowan-williams-climate-crisis>

October 19, 2009

Religious leaders gather in Memphis and New Orleans as sea level rise threat grows.

Religion, Science, and the Environment
Press Release

With the continuing and increasing threat of erosion, sea level rise, pollution and storms to the Mississippi basin and particularly the delta, religious leaders from the US and overseas are gathering with experts in Memphis and New Orleans this week. Their aim is to push for a successful outcome of crucial international climate talks to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark in early December.

The Religion, Science and the Environment Symposium, being based at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and the Hilton Riverside in New Orleans, brings together some of the world's leading scientists associated with climate change, and local and international dignitaries and environmental experts. Delegates will be touring the delta from October 21st to 25th.

“Taking action against climate change should not be understood as a financial burden but as an important opportunity for a healthier planet in order to benefit all humanity” says HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of an estimated 300 million Orthodox Christians around the world.

Bartholomew, known as the “Green Patriarch” for his enduring concern on environmental issues, says reaching a good agreement in Copenhagen constitutes “a moral imperative for the conservation of God's creation.”

Other green religious leaders attending the symposium include Reverend Jim Ball, Reverend Sally Bingham, Bishop of London Richard Chartres, HE Archbishop Demetrios of America, HE Metropolitan Emmanuel of France and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of the Roman Catholic Church.

Also in attendance will be indigenous leaders Oran Lyons and Patricia Cochrane, representing native American and Inuit communities.

The Symposium will discuss ways in which religion can be brought to influence world leaders on issues of the environment and in particular climate change.

One main theme of the event will be the vulnerability of coastal cities such as New Orleans to sea level rise, and the increasing incidence of tropical storms and hurricanes. Experts will tell the meeting of latest figures on melting in the Arctic region which indicate that sea level rises around the world will happen considerably earlier than previously estimated and be much larger. This poses serious problems for those tasked with defending vulnerable cities. Many cities are building, or in the case of New Orleans rebuilding defences, using already out of date predictions for sea level rise.

Figures from Arctic expeditions released last week suggest the Arctic could be largely ice-free within a decade, accelerating the loss of glaciers and the Greenland's ice cap.

"The Arctic sea ice holds a central position in our Earth's climate system. Take it out of the equation and we are left with a dramatically warmer world" said Dr Martin Sommerkorn, head of the Arctic Programme at the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as the latest ice melt data was released last week. "Such a loss of Arctic sea ice cover has recently been assessed to set in motion powerful climate feedbacks which will have an impact far beyond the Arctic itself – self perpetuating cycles, amplifying and accelerating the consequences of global warming. This could lead to flooding affecting one-quarter of the world's population, substantial increases in greenhouse gas emissions from massive carbon pools and extreme global weather changes", Dr. Sommerkorn said.

As coastal defences such as wetlands continue to be destroyed, cities such as New Orleans, London, New York, Dacca in Bangladesh and Manila in the Philippines come under ever greater threat from storms and rising sea levels."

The Bishop of London will be among those sharing his concerns about his own diocese and the vulnerability of other coastal cities and communities to climate change at the Symposium and the need for them to combine together to face the threat of sea level rise and eroding coastlines.

More than 40 media from both inside and outside the US will be covering the event.

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<http://www.rsesymposia.org/more.php?&pcatid=&theitemid=63&catid=37>

October 23, 2009

Orthodox leader calls for environmental action

By The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Standing beside the Mississippi River, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, made a plea Wednesday for more action to save the planet and stop destroying it "as if there is no tomorrow."

"The dilemmas we are faced with are the problems created by human beings," Bartholomew said at the opening of an environmental symposium in New Orleans. "We are consuming environmental capital and destroying its sources as if there is no tomorrow.

"We have cracked the code of DNA, we can create life in test tubes, we can genetically modify crops, we can put men upon the moon — but we have lost our balance, externally and within."

The Istanbul-based patriarch, whom former Vice President Al Gore has called the "green patriarch," brought a delegation of Orthodox church leaders to New Orleans, where they planned to visit neighborhoods flooded by Hurricane Katrina and take a trip up the Mississippi, where oil refineries and chemical plants dwarf rural communities and light up the night sky with burning flares.

Bartholomew came to New Orleans in January 2006 after Katrina flooded New Orleans on Aug. 29, 2005, and prayed for the storm's victims during a visit to the Lower 9th Ward, one of the city's neighborhoods hit hard by the hurricane.

Also Wednesday, the Archbishop Demetrios of America, the Greek Orthodox Church's leader in the United States, called attention to the troubled state of New Orleans and the Mississippi.

"This glorious river through the years has become heavily polluted, causing grave damage to both the land and the Gulf far beyond its basin," Demetrios said. "There is a concerted effort to reverse the damaging course of pollution and return to the pristine clarity of the waters, but restoration is not easy."

Since 1995, Bartholomew has brought attention to the world's environmental problems with a series of forums billed as the Religion, Science and The Environment symposia. The New Orleans event, titled "The Great Mississippi River: Restoring Balance," was the eighth forum overseen by Bartholomew.

<http://www.dailyworld.com/article/20091023/NEWS01/910230308>

October 24, 2009

350.org to Stage Largest Day of Environmental Action in History

5,242 Simultaneous Events on Climate in 181 Countries

Cosa Bullock
Press Release

Citizens, scientists and world leaders in 181 countries will take to nearby streets, mountains, parks, and reefs today to demand strong action on climate change, in what will be the most widespread day of political action in the planet's history.

5,242 rallies and creative demonstrations will take place, all of them centered on the number 350, to draw attention to 350 parts per million (ppm), which an overwhelming number of scientists now insist is the safe upper limit for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

“We had no idea it we would get the overwhelming support, enthusiasm and engagement from all over the world that we're seeing,” said Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org which is coordinating the day's events. “It seems far-fetched that you could get this many people to rally around a scientific data point, but the number just keeps climbing. It shows just how scared of global warming much of the planet really is, and how fed up at the inaction of our leaders.”

In major cities, tens of thousands of people will form giant 3s or 5s or 0s, in a “planet-scale game of Scrabble.” Smaller scale actions include climbers with banners high on the slopes of Mt. Everest and teams of divers with signs on the Great Barrier Reef or the coral off the coast of Oman in the Persian Gulf. Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian campaigners are coordinating a joint action along the shores of the Dead Sea. There will be more than 1,800 actions across the U.S., as well as 300 in China, 200 in Africa and more than 150 in India.

“People in almost all the nations of the earth are involved,” said 350 messenger Archbishop Desmond Tutu. “It's the same kind of coalition that helped make the word "apartheid" known around the world.”

350 ppm originally came from a NASA research team headed by American climate scientist James Hansen, which surveyed both real-time climate observations and emerging paleo-climatic data in January of 2008. Their peer-reviewed article concluded that above 350ppm co2 the earth's atmosphere couldn't support “a planet similar to the one on which civilization developed and to which life on earth is adapted.”

“It's a very tough number,” says McKibben, who wrote the first book on climate change for a general audience in 1989. “We're already well past it—the atmosphere holds 390 ppm today, which is why the Arctic is melting and the ocean steadily acidifying. To get back to the safe level we need a very rapid halt to the use of coal, gas and oil so that forests and oceans can absorb some of that carbon.”

350.org uses novel approaches to political organizing, combining the web and SMS networks, distributing lightweight Flip video cameras, and training young people in “climate camps” on multiple continents. On Saturday, event organizers will be filming and photographing their actions and uploading them immediately to the group's website and Flickr account. Organizers will display hundreds of them on the giant advertising screens of Times Square in New York before hand-delivering shots to UN delegations on Monday.

Following the Global Wake Up Call on September 21, 350.org's International Day of Climate Action is the second key moment in the Tck Tck Tck campaign on the road to the next UN

climate change meeting in Copenhagen this December. Tck Tck Tck is an unprecedented global alliance of civil society organizations, trade unions, faith groups, and millions of individuals all calling for a fair, ambitious, and binding climate change agreement. The Day of Action is a part of an effort to build the world's biggest mandate for bold climate action.

“Sometimes politicians say that ordinary citizens just don’t worry that much about global warming,” said McKibben. “I think we’ve proven—around the world—that there’s no issue they care more about.”

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ABOUT 350.ORG

Founded by environmentalist and author Bill McKibben, 350.org is an international campaign dedicated to building a movement to unite the world around solutions to the climate crisis—the solutions that science and justice demand. Their mission is to inspire the world to rise to the challenge of the climate crisis—to create a new sense of urgency and of possibility for our planet.

350 parts per million is what many scientists, climate experts, and 92 national governments are now saying is the safe upper limit for CO₂ in our atmosphere. Scientists have concluded that we are already above the safe zone at our current 390ppm, and that unless we are able to rapidly return to 350 ppm this century, we risk reaching tipping points and irreversible impacts such as the melting of the Greenland ice sheet and major methane releases from increased permafrost melt.

For more information, including hi-res photos and video for free use, please visit the 350.org Media Room: www.350.org/media.

<http://www.350.org/media/Oct24release>

October 25, 2009

Our Indivisible Environment

If life is sacred, so is the entire web that sustains it.

By The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
The Wall Street Journal

Last week, 200 leaders in the environmental movement gathered in New Orleans for the eighth ecological symposium organized by the Orthodox Christian Church. Participants included leading scientists and theologians, politicians and policy makers, business leaders and NGOs, environmentalists and journalists. Similar conferences have taken place on the Adriatic, Aegean, Baltic, and Black Seas, the Danube and Amazon Rivers, and the Arctic Ocean. This time we

sailed the mighty Mississippi to consider its profound impact on the U.S. and its fate within the global environment.

It may seem out of character for a sacred institution to convene a conference on so secular an issue. After all, Jesus counseled us to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). Climate change, pollution and the exploitation of our natural resources are commonly seen as the domain not of priests but rather of politicians, scientists, technocrats or interest groups organized by concerned citizens. What does preserving the planet have to do with saving the soul?

A lot, as it turns out. For if life is sacred, so is the entire web that sustains it. Some of those connections—the effects of overharvesting on the fish populations of the North Atlantic, for example—we understand very well. Others, such as the long-term health impacts of industrialization, we understand less well. But no one doubts that there is a connection and balance among all things animate and inanimate on this third planet from the Sun, and that there is a cost or benefit whenever we tamper with that balance.

Moreover, just as God is indivisible, so too is our global environment. The molecules of water that comprise the great North Atlantic are neither European nor American. The particles of atmosphere above the United Kingdom are neither Labour nor Tory. There can be no double vision, no dualistic worldview. Faith communities and nonbelievers alike must focus on the common issue of the survival of our planet. The natural environment unites us in ways that transcend doctrinal differences.

This is not to negate the need for action by nations, both individually and in concert with other nations. Quite the contrary—they are vital. The Obama administration has committed the United States to a 50% reduction in greenhouse gases by the year 2050. And there are growing expectations that meaningful progress can be made in the United Nations Climate Change Conference scheduled to take place in Copenhagen this December. There are in fact many promising developments on the political front. But it would be a mistake to treat human impact on the environment simply as a political issue. Not only does it have a profoundly spiritual dimension, as we have shown, but that spiritual dimension offers a huge additional lever that can be used to motivate our brothers and sisters around the world to take action on this critical issue.

This is why we call upon leaders of all faiths to involve themselves and their communities in one of the great issues of our time. Ours is a powerful voice. And our belief in the unity and interconnectedness of all things constitutes a strong argument for immediate action.

Is this an issue for Caesar or for God? We believe it must be approached in both its political and spiritual dimensions. Climate change will only be overcome when all of us—scientists and politicians, theologians and economists, specialists and lay citizens—cooperate for the common good.

The Ecumenical Patriarch is the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians. He is the author of "Encountering the Mystery" (Doubleday) and "In the World, Yet Not of the World" (Fordham).

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704500604574485341504345488.html?mod=googlenews_wsj#

October 26, 2009

Faith-based Organizations Can Help Deliver United Nations Message for Renewed

Cooperation to Tackle Climate Change, Other Crises, Secretary-General Says

United Nations

Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message, delivered by Under-Secretary-General Vijay Nambiar, Chef de Cabinet, to the Ninth Annual Orthodox Prayer Service for the United Nations Community, presided over by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in New York, today, 26 October:

I send greetings to His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and to all the participants in this annual prayer service.

As a secular organization, the United Nations has no common religion. But as humanitarians we, too, like all major faiths, work on behalf of the weak, the disadvantaged, and those who are vulnerable to violence, disease and disaster. And we share the same ethical foundation: a belief in the inherent dignity of all individuals.

If ever there were a time for unity among religions and peoples, it is now. We must be united in purpose, united in action. Our world is beset by multiple crises. Volatile energy prices, food insecurity, the flu pandemic, the global recession and climate change all demonstrate how closely our fates are linked. Such challenges demand our full collaboration -- all nations and peoples working together for common solutions. They demand a renewed multilateralism.

Multilateralism is not just about Governments. It is about all of us: individuals, businesses, civil society and faith-based organizations in every region. We all have a stake in our common future. Multilateral cooperation, founded on common but differentiated responsibilities, can help us to address climate change and our many other challenges.

In just six weeks, Governments will meet in Copenhagen to find a way forward on climate change. The goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and assist the most vulnerable to adapt to inevitable climate impacts. Copenhagen provides a unique opportunity to prevent further damage to our common home and to define a more sustainable relationship with our planet.

I urge you to make your voices heard loud and clear in the coming weeks. We need a global climate deal that is comprehensive, equitable and ambitious -- one that involves all countries working towards a long-term goal to limit global temperature rise to safe levels consistent with science.

I have called on the industrialized countries to take the first steps forward. Reasons of equity and historical responsibility require no less. But all countries must do more. Political leaders must understand that the public expects action now. Faith communities can help to deliver this message. Let us work together for a safer, healthier more equitable future for all.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12567.doc.htm>

October 27, 2009

Nine Faiths, One Vegan Lunch at Windsor Castle

On the Agenda — The Largest-Ever Commitment To Take Environmental Action

By Leah Koenig

Jewish Daily Forward

On Tuesday November 3, His Royal Highness Prince Philip will host over 200 guests for lunch at Windsor Castle, the 900-year-old palace that serves as an official residence of his and Queen Elizabeth's. But this lunch will be noticeably different from the roasted quail and crème fraîche typical of castle meals. Instead, the menu is entirely vegan and centered on seasonal, regionally sourced ingredients.

The reason: an interfaith conference called "Many Heavens, One Earth: Faith Commitments for a Living Planet," to be attended by leaders from Jewish, Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, Hindu, Muslim, Shinto and Sikh backgrounds. Co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Program and Alliance of Religions and Conservation (or ARC, a faith-based environmental organization co-founded by Prince Philip in 1995), the conference has the goal of presenting unique seven-year commitments that outline each religion's plan to foster action around climate change within the participants' communities.

The seven-year framework resonates deeply within Jewish tradition, which mandates a weekly day of rest on Shabbat and a septennial resting of agricultural land in Israel during the *shmita* year. At the conference, eight Jewish delegates — a collection of educators, entrepreneurs, rabbis, activists and politicians from the United States and Israel — will present a commitment that calls upon Jewish individuals and organizations to "play a distinct and determined role in responding to climate change" between now and the next *shmita* year, which starts September 2015.

"Jewish people have moved through history by marrying small steps with big vision," said attendee Nigel Savage, whose organization, Hazon, played a lead role in crafting the Jewish commitment. Now is the time, he said, to connect small actions — like switching to energy-efficient light bulbs or planting a synagogue vegetable garden — with education and advocacy.

While not the first gathering to marry faith and sustainability, this conference marks the largest-ever commitment by faiths to take environmental action. "Religions have the unique capacity to

think beyond the next business cycle to long-term generational change,” said delegate Rabbi Yedidya Sinclair, who founded the Jewish Climate Change Campaign in Israel.

Not coincidentally, the conference has been scheduled to precede the international climate-change talks that will be held in Copenhagen in December. “The U.N. and World Bank (which will attend both gatherings) are among the world’s biggest, multilateral organizations,” said Rabbi Sinclair. “These organizations are beginning to realize that religions have a crucial role in addressing climate change.”

So what about that lunch? The meal at Windsor will be, in effect, a model for the type of eco-minded choices that the delegates hope to encourage within their constituencies. Co-conference organizer Victoria Finlay said that ARC chose vegan food to provide a low-impact meal that accommodates the widest spectrum of the delegates’ dietary needs. Daoists, for example, cannot eat onions, garlic or other ingredients that might cause a disruption of airflow within the body. Religious Hindus avoid meat and eggs and observant Muslims eschew pork and meat that has not been ritually slaughtered. (Understandably, the organizers avoided the logistical headache of offering separate meals that cater to nine different religions.)

The resulting menu includes roasted pear salad with cobnuts and chicory, Portobello mushrooms stuffed with artichoke and herbs, pearl barley risotto and organic wine bottled by Orthodox nuns in France’s Rhone Valley. This will be the first-ever vegan effort undertaken by Edible Food Design, one of Windsor’s regular catering companies. Head chef Sophie Douglas-Bate said her “heart sank at the thought of cooking without butter and cream,” but she ultimately enjoyed the challenge.

Despite the organizers’ least-common-denominator approach, however, the lack of a *mashgiach* and separate dishes means that kosher-keeping Jewish delegates will not be able to eat the lunch — they are the only participants unable to do so. And although they were offered the option of ordering food from an outside kosher kitchen, some of them declined. “I realized I’d be eating food that was triple-wrapped in plastic with disposable cutlery at an environmental conference,” said Rabbi Sinclair of the kosher offerings. “That was a moment when I realized kosher is important, but not enough.” Instead, Sinclair plans to eat fruit, salad and “a few granola bars,” brought from home.

While Rabbi Sinclair’s lunch might not be entirely satisfying, ultimately the more important challenges lie beyond one lunch at Windsor. “We’re interested in what happens next.” Savage said. “The next *shmita* year is far enough away to imagine big changes, but near enough that it’s not pie in the sky.”

For Hazon, the seven-year plan is part of a larger campaign that has already begun to galvanize action around climate change in the Jewish community. Delegate Naomi Tsur, a seasoned environmental activist who recently became deputy mayor of Jerusalem, intends to use the plan as a springboard toward a more thoughtful approach to the *shmita* year in 2015. “*Shmita* is big business in our city, but the way it is currently observed is a tragedy,” she said. Tsur hopes to involve Jerusalem’s city gardens in raising awareness around sustainable agriculture’s connection to climate change. “This is our opportunity to think globally and act locally,” she said.

Leah Koenig writes a monthly column on food and culinary trends. She lives in New York City. She can be contacted at ingredients@forward.com

<http://www.forward.com/articles/117809/>

October 27, 2009

Baha'is join global plan for "generational change" on climate change

Baha'i World News Service

NEW YORK — The Baha'i International Community today announced that it has become a partner in a United Nations-sponsored program to promote "generational change" to address climate change and environmental sustainability.

The program, which is co-sponsored by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), seeks to promote lifestyle changes that will help slow global warming and other environmental problems during a seven-year period from 2010 to 2017.

"We are very pleased to join with other world religions and with the United Nations in this inspiring initiative to promote lasting change in the way people interact with the environment," said Tahirih Naylor, a representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations.

"The significance of this effort is the manner in which it capitalizes on the strengths of faith communities – such as their strong grassroots network and the transformative power of religious belief – to address environmental problems at their foundation, which is human behavior.

"One of the long-term goals of the Baha'i Faith is to promote the positive transformation of individuals and communities, and to this end we already sponsor thousands of study circles, children's classes, devotional gatherings, and youth groups in more than 180 countries.

"We look forward to learning more about the efforts of other faith communities and are confident that we can make a useful contribution to this exciting program," she said.

Ms. Naylor will join representatives of the world's other religions next week at Windsor Castle when the ARC/UNDP program is formally launched. The event, scheduled for 2-4 November, will feature a keynote speech by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and will be hosted by HRH The Prince Philip.

More than 200 faith and secular leaders are expected to be present, and many faith groups will announce commitments to practical initiatives, like the Baha'i plan, to meet global environmental challenges. Joining Ms. Naylor as a Baha'i representative to the event will be Arthur Lyon Dahl,

a former deputy assistant executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, an author, and a well-known specialist on coral reefs and biodiversity.

Ms. Naylor noted that the BIC has been a member of ARC since its founding, and has consistently sought to support its program of interfaith conservation efforts.

"The worldwide Baha'i community has long been involved in promoting sustainable development and in creating small-scale projects that include environmental conservation," she said. "And so this initiative is especially exciting because of the way it concretely addresses the underlying attitudes and values that are at the root of many of humanity's environmental problems."

Specifically, said Ms. Naylor, Baha'is around the world will be encouraged to explore the relationship of humans to the environment as articulated in the Baha'i sacred writings and to take action at the individual and community level.

"In our experience, connecting the hearts of people to sacred writings is the best way to provide the motivation for social change and action," she said. "As well, Baha'is will be encouraged to engage in acts of service related to environmental sustainability."

At the present time, Ms. Naylor said, many thousands of Baha'is in virtually every country are engaged in a coherent framework of action that promotes the spiritual development of the individual and channels the collective energies of its members towards service to humanity.

These activities include the systematic study of the Baha'i writings in small groups in order to build capacity for service; devotional gatherings aimed at connecting the hearts of participants with the Creator; neighborhood children's classes that offer lessons aimed at laying the foundations of a noble and upright character; and groups that strive to assist young teens to navigate a crucial stage of their lives and become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization.

The Baha'i International Community is an international nongovernmental organization that represents the worldwide Baha'i community, which has some five million members in 100,000 localities spread through virtually every country. Its members come from nearly every ethnic group, culture, profession, and social or economic background.

ARC is a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programs, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. It was founded in 1995 by Prince Philip. Its members include 11 major world religions.

<http://news.bahai.org/story/735>

October 27, 2009

European faith-based networks worried about EU's role at UN Climate Change Conference

Caritas Europa

Brussels - The Secretary General of Caritas Europa, along with the Secretary Generals of two other faith-based networks (Aprodev and CIDSE), sent a letter yesterday to top EU decision-makers asking them to ensure that the European Council will show leadership towards a more sustainable and equitable economic future for the world.

The Swedish Presidency's first EU Summit will take place in Brussels this week (29th - 30th October) and it is in advance of this occasion that the three networks are addressing Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt (Sweden's Prime Minister and President of the European Council), Mr. Jose Manuel Barroso (President of the European Commission), Mr. Jerzy Buzek (President of the European Parliament), Mr. Stavros Dimas (Commissioner for the Environment) and Mr. Lars Lokke Rasmussen (Denmark's Prime Minister and President of the 15th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

In their letter, the three Secretary-Generals insist on the importance of reaching an ambitious, equitable and binding international agreement in Copenhagen, since climate change is not only happening, but it is developing disturbingly faster than it was originally anticipated.

“Early and effective action now is the only way to reduce human, environmental and economic costs – both for present and future generations”, states the letter. It also highlights that not all countries have the same possibilities to tackle this ecologic crisis since most developing countries cannot cope with the economic burden that countering climate change is imposing on them. On the other hand, the EU has the resources to help. Therefore it is the Union's moral and historical responsibility to assist and support developing countries in their struggle to become more carbon efficient without hampering their own development.

The letter also includes a short list of essential elements of an effective and equitable EU negotiation position that must be adopted by the Council during this week's summit, such as

- Strong commitment to domestic emission reductions of at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020
- Support for fair and equitable global effort sharing model which respects the right of poorer countries to sustainable development
- Commitment to innovative climate finance mechanisms that can provide predictable, sustainable and adequate funding in addition to the existing Official Development Assistance commitments
- Commitment for the EU to provide at least €35 billion new and additional public funds annually for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries and to commit to a near-term financing package for pre-2012 action in developing countries

The networks will monitor very closely the development of the Summit and its outcome regarding climate change and the UN Conference in Copenhagen. They will also continue advocating at the national level through their member organisations, which will send a similar letter to their national Head of States and relevant decision-makers.

For more information, please contact:

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<http://www.caritas-europa.org/code/EN/inte.asp?Page=995>

October 29, 2009

Protest against genetically modified Bt Brinjal

South Asia Mail

Chennai: Church of South India (CSI) Synod Ecological Concerns Committee (SECC) strongly protests against the decision of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), in approving the commercial cultivation of genetically modified (GM) Bt brinjal. The CSI SECC has the opinion that the GEAC had “mindlessly” gone ahead and approved Bt Brinjal even when informed scientists and citizens of the country raised serious concerns on the nature of the safety studies.

The church cannot be indifferent to issues that vitally affect life on this planet and the integrity of creation. Its response to the recommendation of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) permitting the commercial cultivation of Bt. Brinjal must be consistent with its general position on Genetic Engineering (GE) in agriculture. By unnaturally intervening into the order of creation, we are not only playing God, but also destroying the integrity of God’s creation, and meddling with biodiversity and the life-sustaining interdependence among species. “Mixing genetic material from species that cannot breed naturally, takes us into areas that should be left to God. We should not be meddling with the building blocks of life in this way.” (Prince Charles, quoted in the BBC News, Online Network: 26 February 1999)

It is obvious that the introduction of Bt Brinjal would contaminate the large number of traditional Brinjal varieties available to us, particularly those with unique medicinal properties. This would also shift the control of seeds from the farmers to profit hungry corporations that have already established virtual monopoly over seeds through the new patent regime. As a nation and communities, what is at stake is not only our food security but also our food sovereignty. The inevitable consequences would be the disempowerment of small and marginal farmers, and their displacement by aggressive models of corporatized agriculture.

This is only the beginning. The flood gates are opening. Bt Brinjal is a test case that must not go

unchallenged. Several more food crops are under various stages of field trials. GEAC clearances are in the offing for crops like cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, corn/maize, ground nut, bhindi/okra, potato, rice, tomato, mustard and sorghum.

Insertion of genes into the genome of a particular organism can result in unintended effects. The native genes of the crop could be affected in unpredictable ways. Unknown toxic/allergenic components could be generated. The available tests look only for known toxic elements. Scientists of all persuasions warn us that Genetically Modified (GM) foods can have unforeseen negative consequences on the health of animals and human beings. Such effects will elude the conventional test regimen. The GEAC clearances are hinged on the scientific evidence provided by seed companies. This mode of determining the bio-safety of GE crops is unacceptable and unethical, when evidences to the contrary keep coming from the scientific community. The voices of caution may not be the establishment mandate. True science is not based on majority views but on commitment to truth and objectivity. Dissenting voices in the scientific establishment need to be heard while dealing with potentially hazardous technology.

Acknowledging the position of the World Council of Churches and the Courts of many civilized nations, we appeal to the government to apply the precautionary principle in the introduction of GE crops and not to be influenced by corporate entities that strive to establish their monopoly on every aspect of agriculture. It is important to decide whether the introduction of Bt. Brinjal serves the farming community in India or the seed corporations. There must be clarity about how the problem has been framed and who has done it and who the ultimate beneficiaries are. We must also know whether there are better, safer and more viable solutions. The adoption of a new technology calls for a process of deep interrogation, especially when there are apprehensions on potential hazards.

While science and technology have immense potential to further the cause of life, we also recognize that they can also be used to destroy life in the pursuit of profit and power. It is the inalienable obligation of a responsible government to ensure that the people are not subjected, even unwittingly, to “bio error or bio terror”.

Joining the Justice, Peace and Creation Concerns of the World Council of Churches we affirm the following statements from the AGAPE document (3:3):

“We believe that God’s economy of solidarity and justice for the household of creation includes the promise that the people of the world have the right to produce their own food and control the resources belonging to their livelihoods, including biodiversity. It is therefore the right and responsibility of governments to support the livelihoods of small farmers in the South and in the North. It is their right to refuse the demands of agribusinesses that seek to control every aspect of the cycle of life. Such an approach requires respect for indigenous spiritual relationships to land and the bounties of mother earth.”

Signed by 1) Rt.Rev.Thomas Samuel, Chairman of CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee,
2) Dr.Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, Convener of CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee.
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October 30, 2009

Tackling climate change is 'moral imperative', say faith leaders

By Jenna Lyle
Christian Today

Faith leaders have issued a first of its kind statement on climate change in which they recognise "unequivocally that there is a moral imperative to tackle the causes of global warming".

The statement was issued following a historic meeting between faith leaders at the official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lambeth Palace, on Thursday.

It says that faith communities have a "crucial" role to play "in pressing for changes in behaviour at every level of society and in every economic sector".

"We all have a responsibility to learn how to live and develop sustainably in a world of finite resources," say the leaders, who represent the world's major faiths.

"As leaders and representatives of faith communities and faith-based organisations in the UK we wish to highlight the very real threat to the world's poor, and to our fragile creation, from the threat of catastrophic climate change."

They continue: "The developed world is primarily responsible for the already visible effects of global heating. Justice requires that we now take responsibility for slowing the rise in global temperature.

"We call upon UK negotiators at Copenhagen, and the other nations of the G20 in particular, to fight for a deal which speedily ends unsustainable reliance on fossil fuels and puts in place urgent measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that global temperature rise may be kept within two degrees centigrade."

The meeting was hosted by the Archbishop to discuss the response of faith communities to the environmental crisis and marked the 40-day countdown to the start of the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit.

The faith leaders pledged to work together to raise awareness of the effects of climate change on the world's poor and to take the necessary action to reduce their carbon emissions and promote sustainable practices.

They called on the UK and other G20 governments to push for an ambitious climate deal in Copenhagen that would commit countries to efforts towards keeping global temperature rises

below two degrees centigrade.

“We all have to do more to face the challenges of climate change,” said Dr Williams. “Faith communities have a crucial role to play.

“We must do our bit and encourage others to do theirs. Together we can and we will make a difference.”

The statement was welcomed by the Secretary of State Ed Miliband, who said tackling climate change was “a cause that unites people of all faiths”.

“Each generation holds the planet in trust for the next and to fulfil our obligations to these future generations, we must succeed in getting a fair and ambitious agreement,” he said.

“We need the voice of all the world’s religions in the coming weeks as we approach the Copenhagen summit.”

The Church of England will launch its seven-year ‘Church and Earth’ climate change action plan at a gathering of faith leaders next week. Church and Earth is one of nine-long term plans drawn up by the world’s major faiths to be discussed at the Windsor Conference, attended by UN secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon.

Faith leaders will make commitments on climate change at the conference ahead of the Copenhagen summit in December.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/tackling.climate.change.is.moral.imperative.say.fath.lead.ers/24499.htm>

October 31, 2009

Sikh leaders to join UN Secretary General on Climate Change at Windsor Castle before Copenhagen

Punjab Newsline Network

NEW YORK: Sikh environmental activists Baba Sewa Singh and Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal will be part of what has been called “the biggest civil society movement on climate change in history”... Leaders from nine of the world’s major faiths – Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism – will gather in Windsor Castle from November 2-4, 2009, to commit to long-term practical action to save the environment.

They will announce a huge range of practical initiatives, from new faith-based eco-labelling standards for Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism to the planting of 8.5 million trees in Tanzania; from sourcing sustainable fuel for India’s Sikh gurdwaras (which feed 30 million people every day) to

the greening of religious buildings and introducing eco tourism policies for pilgrimages – still the world’s biggest travel events.

So significant is this move that UN Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon will make a keynote address at the Celebration, which will be hosted by HRH The Prince Philip, founder of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. This gathering of nearly 200 faith and secular leaders comes a month before the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit in December and is:

The first major, internationally-coordinated commitment by the religions to the environment and aims to shape the behaviour and attitudes of the faithful for generations to come.

Supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and major secular bodies, including the World Bank, Conservation International, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Fairtrade, WWF, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the Soil Association. They will be at the Celebration to commit to working with the faiths on the environment.

Called a Celebration because despite the gloom surrounding the environmental challenge ahead, these initiatives show that there is much to hope for and be positive about.

THE WINDSOR CELEBRATION

The Celebration has been organised by the UK-based international body, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) in conjunction with the UNDP. UN Assistant Secretary-General Olav Kjørven has described it as: “the biggest civil society movement on climate change in history”, and: “the biggest mobilisation of people and communities that we have ever seen on this issue”.

The religious leaders coming to the Celebration are the decision-makers and implementers in the faiths, rather than simply the speech makers and figureheads; this is about practical action to be implemented now.

They include: leading Saudi Arabian scholar Dr Solman Al-Ouda; Rev Canon Sally Bingham, president of Interfaith Power and Light Campaign in the US; Rt Rev and Rt Hon Dr Richard Chartres, Bishop of London; Sheikh Ali Goma’a, Grand Mufti of Egypt; Rev Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of the US’s Green Faith; Archbishop Hilarion of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate; Master Huang Xinyang, Vice President of the China Daoist Association; Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches; His Eminence Seraphim Kykkotis, Archbishop of Johannesburg and Pretoria of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa; Rabbi Michael Melchior, leader of the new Green Movement-Meimad party in the Israeli Knesset; Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa, President of the All Africa Conference of Churches; Rt Rev Nyansako-ni-Nku, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon; Shaunika Risi Das, Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies; Rt Rev Thomas Samuel, Bishop of Madhya Kerala, Church of South India; Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi; Rabbi Yedidya Sinclair, co-founder of the Jewish Climate Change Initiative in Israel; Dr Rajwant Singh, Chairman of the Inter Sikh Council on Religion and Education; two Sikh environmentalists Baba Sewa Singh of Khadoor Sahib and Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal from Sultanpur, Punjab, Venerable Hiek Sopheap, Executive Director of the Cambodia-based

Association of Buddhists for the Environment; Bishop Walter Thomas of the US-based New Psalmist Baptist Church; and Abbot Yang Shihua of Maoshan Daoist Temple, China.

Dr. Rajwant Singh, EcoSikh convener and Chairman of SCORE, said, "this is a great opportunity for Sikhs to demonstrate to the world that we feel deeply for the future of Mother Earth and that is the continuation of the compassionate stand taken by our founder, Guru Nanak."

SCORE has arranged the Sikh delegation to attend this summit with UN leaders. It has also organized the Kirtan performance on November 3, 2009 at Windsor celebration in which Navleen Kaur from London and Sehejneet Kaur from Washington will participate. They will be accompanied by Tanpura, Tabla, and Harmonium players.

<http://www.punjabnewslines.com/content/view/20282/38/>

November 2, 2009

Religious Leaders Meet with Penny Wong

The Climate Institute

A single prophetic stance unified leaders from six different religious traditions when they met with Penny Wong on October 27th. With the negotiations in Copenhagen around the corner, they advocated that Australia adopt courageous, ambitious targets for the sake of the world's poor and for future generations.

"We share the moral values of justice, compassion and mutual responsibility for humanity and for the life that sustains us on this planet and the planet itself," said Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins, Chairman of the Council of Progressive Rabbis. "We also share a belief that human contribution to climate change requires urgent and immediate attention."

Among the "asks" were that Australia should set a target of emissions reductions of 40% from 1990 levels by the year 2020 and contribute in the range of \$1-4 billion dollars annually to those affected by climate change in developing countries and who need assistance to adapt.

The religious leaders, all from different traditions, were amazingly unified on this position. "Truth is one. The wise speak of it in many ways," said Mr Kanti Jinna, Vice Chairman of the Hindu Council of Australia.

Sr Geraldine Kearney, representing Australian Catholic Religious, spoke from her first-hand experience of the islands of Kiribati. She said people there are trying to build sea walls as best they can but are fearful for the next generation. She reiterated President Anote Tong's plea to Australia for continued partnership, sacrifice and compassion especially in support of adaptation, skills training and if necessary future relocation.

Rev. Professor James Haire, Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, expressed concern for people in sub-Saharan Africa: “Even a small rise in global temperatures would have the effect of compounding their water shortages and devastating their populations.”

Each of the leaders wanted to impress on Senator Wong the growing concern about climate change among their constituencies. This is demonstrated by many communities switching to Green Power and conducting energy audits.

The delegation’s visit attracted media coverage and also included Br. Ikebal Patel, President of Australian Federation of Islamic Councils and Bhante Sujato of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils. Other people visited were Shadow Ministers, the Hon. Tony Abbott and Hon. Greg Hunt and Clare Penrose from the Prime Minister’s office. Members of the delegation all belong to the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (www.arrcc.org.au), which organised the meetings.

ARRCC’s website has a letter-writing guide for people wishing to write to their local MP about these issues before Copenhagen.

http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=79%3Afaith-campaigns&id=550%3Areligious-leaders-meet-with-penny-wong&Itemid=4

November 2, 2009

Religion gets behind fight against climate change

Agence France-Presse

PARIS—Leaders from nine major faiths meet at Windsor Castle on Tuesday in an exceptional initiative that supporters predict will harness the power of religion in the fight against climate change.

The ecumenical gathering at the home of Queen Elizabeth II, 22 miles west of London, is being co-staged by the United Nations and Prince Philip’s Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

Representatives from Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Taoism will unveil programs that “could motivate the largest civil society movement the world has ever seen,” said U.N. Assistant Secretary General Olav Kjørven.

U.N. Chief Ban Ki-moon will launch the event under the banner “Faith Commitments for a Living Planet.”

“We expect to send a strong signal from religion to governments that we are extremely committed. It’s about religions mobilizing their followers to act against climate change,” Kjørven told AFP in an interview.

Eighty-five percent of humanity follow a religion, a figure that shows the power of faith to move billions, he pointed out.

In addition, faith-based groups own nearly 8 percent of habitable land on Earth, operate dozens of media groups and more than half the world's schools, and control 7 percent of financial investments worth trillions, according to ARC.

“But the problem is deeper than economics and money, it's much more about the moral idea [of] ‘Nature is God's Nature, so we have to be kind to it,’” said Victoria Finlay, ARC's director of communication.

“Global warming and its impacts cannot be looked at just as a material problem. The root causes are spiritual,” agreed Stuart Scott, whose Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change—calling for the “stewardship and reverence for creation”—has been endorsed by dozens of major religious organizations.

In July, some 200 Muslim leaders gathered in Istanbul to forge a seven-year climate change action plan.

One of the measures adopted was the creation of a “Muslim eco-label” for goods and services ranging from printings of the Koran to organized pilgrimages.

“We don't want to distance ourselves from governments, we are all in the same boat,” said Mahmoud Akef, who led the initiative. “If we devastate the planet, we'll have no place else to live.”

Sikhs who feed some 30 million people in need every day in their temples in India are poised to revamp their kitchens to make them “eco-friendly,” and China's Taoist temples are going solar.

“Religions cross boundaries and don't have to deal with issues of finance, of sovereignty, of intellectual property on technology”—all issues bedeviling U.N. climate talks, said Jessica Haller, director of the Jewish Climate Campaign.

American environmentalist Bill McKibben, the founder of grassroots climate group 350.org, has identified two wellsprings for the worldwide tsunami of support for his web-based cause: educated youth and faith-based groups.

350.org organized a day of “global action” on Saturday, Oct. 24 of more than 5,000 mainly small-scale climate-awareness events around the world.

“If Earth is in some way a museum of divine intent, it's pretty horrible to be defacing all that creation,” McKibben, an author who is active in the Methodist Church, said.

“And if, in Christianity and other faiths, we are called upon above all else to love God and love our neighbors, drowning your neighbor in Bangladesh is a pretty bad way to go about it,” he added.

Scientists warn that unabated global warming will likely cause ocean levels to rise at least 3.25 feet by century's end, enough to wreak havoc in high-populated low-lying deltas, especially in South, Southeast and East Asia.

For Peter Newell, a professor at the University of East Anglia in England who had tracked climate activism for more than a decade, religion has the traction to haul a truly global movement.

“It would be a huge mobilizing force if people started to frame the issue of climate change in religious terms,” noted Newell.

<http://www.grist.org/article/2009-11-02-religion-gets-behind-fight-against-climate-change/>

November 2, 2009

Shout it from the mountaintop

By The Rev. Bud Heckman
The Courier-Journal

His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, standing before the recent Great Mississippi River Symposium in New Orleans, urged people of faith to protect the earth with earnestness. He said, “Our successes, our failures, personal and collective, determine the lives of billions. Our decisions, personal and collective, determine the future of the planet.” He noted that decisions made at the local level had global implications.

Religions for Peace commends Louisville as it begins to celebrate its 14th Annual Festival of Faith this week with over 60 water-related exhibits uniting. Participants will find ways to unite care for God's creation — mountains, water sources and people.

Mountain tops, in the language of sacred texts, are sacred spaces where the Divine offers covenant to creatures, where the changing course of human history is made plain, and, indeed, even where God reveals God's self. This is true in the Abrahamic traditions that so predominate our landscape and history and true in the diverse religious traditions of our nation's newest immigrants.

Powerful coal companies have imagined expeditious and economical ways to extract coal from mountaintops. And, as the scope of problems mountaintop removal unveils increases, people of faith are mobilizing to question the moral, economic and social justifications for the process.

Pressed with the harsh realities of the Great Recession and the desire to quench the thirst for new energies for the American public, the people of Appalachia are wrestling with the promises and perils of mountaintop removal as a method of extracting coal.

As the 14th Annual Festival of Faiths gets underway, participants will, no doubt, be making connections between “Sacred Water: Sustaining Life” and the mountains from which those waters run. The Festival of Faiths is a widely respected national beacon in the emerging movement of religious communities seeking to work together for peace. And as recent articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* attest, the issue of mountaintop removal is now moving to center stage in our domestic environmental and energy debates.

The White House and the Corporation for National and Community Service recently made special note of the Greater Louisville Adopt-a-Waterway program under development as a model of interreligious cooperation. In this program, religious leaders and their communities are cooperating together to examine the sources of their water and take responsibility for the stewardship of their watersheds. As the program develops, this process of discovery and action will surely encompass mountaintop removal and the extensive damage it causes to our streams and ponds, as well as underground aquifers and wells.

Our demand for energy in the United States is so great that over 100 tons of coal are removed every 2 seconds. And in the past 20 years, an increasing amount of that is coming from the expedited extraction of mountaintop-removal sites. As a result, hundreds of valleys in Appalachia are now unceremoniously filled with what the coal companies call “overburden.” For people of faith, the sacred is made profane.

Though one may see immediate effects to their water source, air quality, and health, a true understanding of the scope and scale of the problem is only gained from a God's eye view. Hundreds of once beautiful mountaintops are now lifeless craters of coal slurry and toxins.

The Environmental Protection Agency now estimates that over 700 miles of life-sustaining streams have been literally buried by the process of mountaintop removal. Hundreds of more miles of watersheds have been compromised.

Kentucky is at the epicenter of this environmental problem. With people of faith focusing on the issue, Kentucky will soon be at the forefront of finding solutions. And with a little faith, they will shout from the nearest mountaintop.

The Rev. BUD HECKMAN
Director for External Relations
Religions for Peace
New York 10017

The Festival of Faiths' “Sacred Water: Sustaining Life” will be Nov. 4-13, sponsored by the Center for Interfaith Relations. For more information about times, speakers and tickets, visit www.interfaithrelations.org

<http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20091102/OPINION01/911020314/Shout%20it%20from%20the%20mountaintop>

November 2, 2009

Orthodox head brings 'green' views to D.C.

By Julia Duin
The Washington Times

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual head of the world's 250 million to 300 million Orthodox Christians, arrived in Washington on Sunday night bearing the standard as the world's foremost religious leader on environmental issues.

But one of his first tasks in the area will be a visit to a Greek Orthodox parish in Annapolis on Monday, where he will celebrate the 18th anniversary of his enthronement to his Istanbul-based See.

"It's like the pope coming to our church," says the Rev. Kosmas Karavellas, protopresbyter (pastor) of Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church on Riva Road, who will also host a dinner for 500 guests. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our church."

The 69-year-old patriarch, who has been touring the United States since Oct. 20, spent the first five days of his 18-day visit leading a "Religion, Science and the Environment" symposium in New Orleans. It is the most recent of many efforts that have earned him the sobriquet of the "green patriarch." During a 1997 trip to the United States, he hosted an environmental summit in Santa Barbara, Calif., where he called the destruction of the environment "a sin" and offered "a vision of repentance" for those who have acted as "materialistic tyrants" toward God's creation.

The six days he will spend in Washington, including a Tuesday lecture at Georgetown University and a Wednesday speech at the Brookings Institution, will also deal with the topic. His web site, www.patriarchate.org, has a link to a Facebook discussion on Orthodoxy's contribution to the environmental movement and links to several YouTube videos of the patriarch, including Bartholomew's recent speech at the New Orleans aquarium.

On Oct. 25, the Wall Street Journal printed his guest editorial that called for believers and nonbelievers in God alike to work together to save the earth.

"The natural environment unites us in ways that transcend doctrinal differences," he wrote.

He will visit President Obama at the White House on Tuesday afternoon. On Wednesday, after the Brookings speech, he will attend a lunch in his honor on Capitol Hill, meet privately with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and attend a dinner in his honor hosted by Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. at the vice president's residence.

Interspersed with his many official activities will be private visits with some of the 1.5 million Greek Orthodox believers in the United States.

"He wants to be with the people," said the Rev. Mark Arey, general secretary for the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas. "He is extremely vigorous. I dare anyone to walk down the street with him and keep up.

"His visit will highlight environmental responsibility, include meetings with religious leaders and greeting his own faithful," he said.

The patriarch spent last week in New York - with a quick side trip to Atlanta - including a visit to the United Nations, a meeting with Jewish leaders at Park East Synagogue in Manhattan, a chat with former President Bill Clinton and the acceptance of an honorary degree at Fordham University.

Bartholomew does not accept all honorary doctorates offered him, but he did want to accept Fordham's offer as an outreach to Catholics, Father Arey said.

"He wanted to set the tone for Roman Catholic-Orthodox relations," he added. "We are trying to heal the breach to be one indivisible church again."

The Annapolis event will be one huge exhibition of Orthodoxy with 50 to 60 other hierarchs and priests in attendance. The 65-year-old Sts. Constantine and Helen is Maryland's second-oldest Greek Orthodox church and one of nine Greek Orthodox congregations in the state.

The patriarch will preside at a prayer service before coming to the dinner, which will also include several state elected officials.

"For five hours, we will be the center of the Orthodox world," Father Karavellas said. "This is the first time a religious dignitary of that stature has entered Annapolis."

<http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/nov/02/orthodox-head-brings-green-message-to-dc/>

November 3, 2009

Ahead of London Summit, Secretary-General Tells Religious and Secular Leaders That Contributions of All People of All Beliefs Needed to Confront Climate Change

United Nations

Following is the text of a message from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the dinner on the eve of the Summit of Religious and Secular Leaders on Climate Change in London (2 November), delivered on his behalf by Janos Pasztor, Director of the Secretary-General's Climate Change Support:

It is a pleasure to send my warm greetings to the religious and other leaders who have gathered in Windsor.

Dag Hammarskjöld once said, “The United Nations stands outside -- necessarily outside -- all confessions. But it is, nevertheless, an instrument of faith. As such, it is inspired by what unites, and not by what divides, the great religions of the world.”

The values of tolerance and the equal worth of every human being are found in all the great faiths, in the UN Charter and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are truly universal.

As a single human family, we face many common challenges. They can be confronted only if we draw on the contributions of all people of all beliefs. Today, climate change is at the top of that list. I have travelled to the melting Arctic and the burning forests of the Amazon. I have seen advancing deserts in Mongolia and drying lakebeds in Chad.

Those who say tackling climate change is too expensive are wrong. We will pay an unacceptable price if we do not act now. Climate change will put growing pressure on water, food and land. It will reverse years of development gains, exacerbate poverty, destabilize fragile States and topple Governments.

We must reduce the emissions that are causing climate change. We must help the most vulnerable adapt to changes that are already under way. We must jump-start a new era of global green growth. As spiritual guides, as community leaders, as people who can fight prejudice and open minds, you have an important role to play.

I count on your support -- now, in the final run-up to the UN climate change conference next month in Copenhagen, and beyond -- in bringing about the transformation we need to build a sustainable, equitable and peaceful world. Please accept my best wishes for a successful event.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12584.doc.htm>

November 3, 2009

‘You Can – and Do – Inspire People to Change,’ Secretary-General says, Encouraging Summit of Religious, Secular Leaders on Climate Change to ‘Make Your Voices Heard’

United Nations

Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s speech, as prepared for delivery, to a Summit of Religious and Secular Leaders on Climate Change, in London today:

Thank you for your warm welcome. It is a privilege to be here at this important event.

I am grateful that Prince Philip has brought us together to contemplate our commitment to this Earth, our one and only home.

We are all familiar with Prince Philip's long-standing efforts on behalf of our natural environment.

He has served the Worldwide Fund for Nature as a patron and President Emeritus for many years.

He has helped raise awareness among people and Governments of the immense value of our environmental resources.

For too long, we have taken these resources for granted.

And we are still a long way from acknowledging their true value.

This forum can help in some way to redress the balance.

You bring with you today the strengths of diverse cultures and beliefs.

You speak to the heart of humanity's deepest needs, our concerns and hopes for the world.

You remind us of what unites us as a human family

Together, we must unite to face a momentous global challenge -- minimizing dangerous climate change and making peace with the planet.

I have long believed that when Governments and civil society work toward a common goal, transformational change is possible.

Faiths and religions are a central part of that equation.

Indeed, the world's faith communities occupy a unique position in discussions on the fate of our planet and the accelerating impacts of climate change.

As a secular organization, the United Nations has no common religion. But, like all the major faiths, we too work on behalf of the disadvantaged and the vulnerable.

We share the same ethical foundation: a belief in the inherent dignity of all individuals.

That is why we work in partnership with Governments, corporations, civil society and faith-based groups.

That is why we support the Alliance of Civilizations, which is fighting extremism and working to improve understanding and cooperation among nations and peoples.

It is why we work with organizations like the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, which is co-hosting this event.

We are united by the belief that what unites us as human beings is stronger than what divides us.

We believe that through discussion, cooperation, and common effort, we can build a more peaceful world.

The peace that comes from knowing where the next meal will come from... knowing your family is safe from violence and disease... knowing that your children can finish school and get a job.

The peace that will come from preserving the riches of this planet for coming generations.

That is why we are here today. Your conference comes together under the banner of "Many heavens, one Earth".

We are all part of the larger web of life.

Together, let us work to protect and respect our planet -- our only home.

Many of you have experienced first-hand the climate crisis we face.

You know that climate change affects us all, but not equally.

Look, for example, at the typhoons that have recently been battering Southeast Asia.

They have cost many lives. Tens of thousands of people have lost homes and the means of making a living.

These events remind us again that those most likely to suffer first and worst from the impacts of climate change are the poor.

The poor are also least responsible for the emissions currently in our atmosphere.

Protecting the poor and respecting our planet and the resources it provides is an ethical and scientific imperative.

It is consistent with the teachings of many religions.

Increasingly, it is also a matter of survival.

Next month, the world's Governments will gather in Copenhagen to find a way forward on climate change.

We must reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We must assist the poorest, the most vulnerable, to adapt to climate impacts already locked into the atmosphere.

It is a pivotal moment for our world. Copenhagen provides a unique opportunity.

If we tackle climate change properly, we can advance many other goals as well.

Green growth can make inroads against global poverty.

We can improve public health... food security... water security... energy security...

We can lay a foundation for peace and security for generations to come. We can define a more sustainable relationship with our planet.

It is an inter-generational issue. And it is a moral issue.

This is why the voices, the deeds and the teachings of the world's faith groups are so vitally important.

In the coming weeks, I urge you to make your voices heard loud and clear.

We must prevent further damage to our common home.

We need a global climate deal that is comprehensive, equitable and ambitious.

A deal that involves all countries working toward a long-term goal to limit global temperature rise to safe levels consistent with science.

I have called on the industrialized countries to take the first steps. Equity and historical responsibility require no less. But all countries must do more. Every country must be part of the solution.

Political leaders must understand that the public expects action -- now.

Faith communities can help communicate this message.

We need to reduce our impact on this planet. We need to live in a more sustainable manner.

Human-caused climate change is but one example of what occurs when we fail to do so.

The world's faith communities are among the oldest and most enduring of institutions.

We are here today to listen, to share and to celebrate your long-term plans to tackle climate change.

The word “celebrate” is important to highlight.

Through your commitments, we see how the world’s faith and religious communities are responding to the need for urgent climate action.

Three things strike me as I look around this room.

The first is the scale of your reach as stakeholders in the climate challenge.

Together, the major faith groups have established, run, or contribute to over half of all schools world-wide.

You are the third largest category of investors in the world.

You produce more weekly magazines and newspapers than all the secular press in the European Union.

Your potential impact is enormous.

You can establish green religious buildings. Invest ethically in sustainable products. Purchase only environmentally-friendly goods.

You can set an example for the lifestyles of billions of people.

Your actions can encourage political leaders to act more boldly in protecting people and the planet.

Second, you are among the most powerful educators in this world.

Your youth organizations reach hundreds of millions of young people around the world.

Nearly all your long-term plans include training young people on how to protect their planet.

Third, this celebration here at Windsor reflects the creative talents you bring to bear on this issue.

You can -- and do -- inspire people to change.

As we take the final steps on our journey to Copenhagen, that inspiration is critical.

I ask each of your faiths and religions to pray for a fair, balanced and effective way forward.

Your practical commitments can encourage political leaders to act more courageously in protecting people and the planet.

Together let us walk a more sustainable path -- one that respects our planet and provides for a safer, healthier more equitable future for all.

Thank you.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12585.doc.htm>

November 3, 2009

World's faiths can propel search for solution to climate change, says Ban

By United Nations Information Centre

The world's religions have a crucial role to play in the global fight against climate change, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, characterizing the battle with global warming as a “moral” issue.

With the climate change conference in Copenhagen – where nations are expected to wrap up talks on an ambitious new agreement – just over one month away, “it is a pivotal moment for our world,” Mr. Ban said at a gathering of secular and religious leaders at Windsor Castle in London.

‘Green’ growth can enhance efforts to tackle global poverty and improve food, water and energy security, he stressed.

“We can lay a foundation for peace and security for generations to come,” the Secretary-General said at the event, hosted by Prince Philip. “We can define a more sustainable relationship with our planet.”

Because the issue of climate change is inter-generational and moral, “this is why the voices, the deeds and the teachings of the world's faith groups are so vitally important,” he emphasized.

Any deal reached in Copenhagen must be “comprehensive, equitable and ambitious,” Mr. Ban said, urging faith communities to help communicate the message that action must be taken urgently.

The potential impact of faith communities, he said, is “enormous” because they have the ability to set an example for the lifestyles of billions of people and reach millions of young people through education.

“You can – and do – inspire people to change,” the Secretary-General said.

“Your practical commitments can encourage political leaders to act more courageously in protecting people and the planet.”

While in London, Mr. Ban also met with United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown, with whom he discussed climate change.

“We are going through a crucially important period for the whole of humanity,” he told reporters after his meeting with the UK leader.

He said is encouraged that European Union (EU) leaders, at their meeting last week, recognized the importance of providing technical and financial support for climate change.

“The developed countries should come out with ambitious targets for greenhouse gas emissions by 2020,” Mr. Ban said. “We must be able to have an agreement where all the countries should participate with the clear vision that all the countries should work for the long-term goal to save this planet from climate change.”

He also spoke out against the notion that combating global warming is too expensive in a message delivered by Janos Pasztor, Director of the Secretary-General's Climate Change Support Team, to a dinner last night preceding the Windsor Castle event.

“We will pay an unacceptable price if we do not act now,” he underscored, calling for support for the world's most vulnerable to adapt to changes already afoot.

<http://www.modernghana.com/news/247293/1/worlds-faiths-can-propel-search-for-solution-to-cl.html>

November 3, 2009

Medina to go green

Medina will be the first Islamic city to go green, the Grand Mufti of Egypt has announced, as part of a seven year plan to make the religion more environmentally friendly.

By Louise Gray, Environment Correspondent
Telegraph.co.uk

Speaking at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) conference at Windsor Castle, Sheikh Ali Gomaa, said Islam teaches its followers to protect the Earth.

He announced the plans for Medina as part of a seven year plan to make the faith more environmentally friendly by teaching about climate change in Islamic schools, using renewable energy in mosques and encouraging green habits in places of pilgrimage.

Medina, the second holiest city in Islam, will go green by improving public transport, providing clean water from taps so pilgrims do not continue to use plastic bottles and printing leaflets and the Koran on recycled paper.

Faith leaders from all the world's main religions have already declared it is a "moral imperative" for the world to fight climate change. The Archbishop of Canterbury has said going green is "good for the soul" and the Church of England have also announced a range of plans such as putting wind turbines on vicarages and encouraging congregations to recycle more.

But this is the first time that the Islamic faith has made such a strong announcement on places of pilgrimage.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa said it was a "religious duty" to go green.

"It is a religious duty to safeguard our environment and advocate the importance of preserving it," he said. "Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together. Environment-related issues ought to be a significant component of educational curricula. It is the duty of all religious scholars to acquaint themselves with the environmental crisis we are facing."

There are 1.4 billion Muslims worldwide and every year at least four million go on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

As an oil-producing nation, Saudi Arabia has not been seen as a "green destination". However the pronouncements of the Grand Mufti is likely to influence the deeply religious country and encourage millions of pilgrims to reduce their carbon footprint.

As a green city Medina will start using more renewable energy sources like solar power and conserving water in the desert region.

Martin Palmer, Secretary General of ARC, said Islam has always had a "green" message but it has not been emphasised until recently.

"People think the environmental message has always come from the West but the message is now coming from Muslim religious leaders and their own religious texts," he said.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/6487910/Medina-to-go-green.html>

November 4, 2009

World Faith Leaders Join Forces to Battle Global Warming

Environment News Service

LONDON, UK (ENS) - The world's religions have a crucial role to play in the fight against global climate change, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Tuesday, characterizing the battle with global warming as a "moral" issue.

It is a pivotal moment for our world," said Ban as he co-hosted with Prince Philip an inter-faith gathering of religious and secular leaders at Windsor Castle called Many Heavens, One Earth: Faith Commitments for a Living Planet.

At the event organized by Prince Philip's [Alliance of Religions and Conservation](#), leaders from nine of the world's major faith traditions are highlighting the Earth's fragility, and discussing initiatives to protect the planet against the ravages of climate change.

Prince Philip said, "The fact that the majority of the world's faiths ascribe the creation of the world to an all-powerful deity, implies that the leaders and followers of each faith have a moral responsibility for the continued well-being of our planet, and particularly for its natural environment. In recent times it has become apparent that the sheer size of the human population, and its consequent increasing demand for natural resources, is seriously threatening the future health of our planet and the welfare of all life on Earth."

Leaders from Baha'ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism gathered to commit to long-term practical action to save the environment.

During the three-day gathering, which concluded today, the leaders announced 31 long-term commitments to protect the living planet. Practical initiatives include new faith-based ecolabeling standards for Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism; the planting of 8.5 million trees in Tanzania; sourcing sustainable fuel for India's Sikh gurdwaras, which feed 30 million people every day; the greening of religious buildings; and the introduction of ecotourism policies for pilgrimages – still the world's biggest travel events.

With the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen just over one month away, the event is seen as a way to reach out to the 85 percent of humanity who follow a religion.

In Copenhagen December 7-18, nations are expected to finalize a new agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions that will take over when the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period expires at the end of 2012.

Any deal reached in Copenhagen must be "comprehensive, equitable and ambitious," Ban said, urging faith communities to help communicate the message that action must be taken urgently.

The potential impact of faith communities is "enormous," said Ban, because they have the ability to set an example for the lifestyles of billions of people and reach millions of young people through education.

"You can – and do – inspire people to change," the secretary-general said. "Your practical commitments can encourage political leaders to act more courageously in protecting people and the planet."

"We can lay a foundation for peace and security for generations to come," Ban said. "We can define a more sustainable relationship with our planet."

Among the commitments made by faith leaders, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Goma'a, unveiled a Muslim Seven Year action plan on the environment. Under the plan, one of Islam's most important cities, Medina in Saudi Arabia, is to become a model green city.

Other cities to be greened include Sala in Morocco and the Grand Mufti's own city of Dar Al Iftaa in Egypt, which he told his fellow religious leaders "had already started taking practical steps to go carbon neutral in 2010."

Sheikh Ali Goma'a said Muslims have "a religious duty to safeguard our environment and advocate the importance of preserving it. Pollution and global warming pose an even greater threat than war, and the fight to preserve the environment could be the most positive way of bringing humanity together."

Commenting after the announcement, ARC Secretary General Martin Palmer said, "This is part of a hugely complicated process - Islam saying to Islamic governments that this is how you should act Islamically. It also involves launching an umbrella association – the Muslim Association for Climate Change Action, MACCA."

Nigel Savage, founder of the Jewish environmental NGO Hazon, based in New York, told the gathering about the Jewish Climate Campaign and Pledge. This campaign encourages Jews to sign a pledge to make a greater commitment to transformation over the next few years.

"We're inviting every Jewish institution - every synagogue, school, JCC, camp, every Jewish organization, every Jewish-owned business, every Hillel, every youth group - to set up a Green Team," Savage said.

There are more than 100 million Buddhists in China, with more than 13,000 monasteries and around 200,000 monks and nuns. The Shanghai Eight Year Plan on Environmental Protection, created by the Jade Buddha Temple in Shanghai in collaboration with other monasteries, involves 90 temples and monasteries.

It involves actively promoting the idea of not using disposable fast-food containers, reducing use of chemical detergents, sorting and recycling waste, promoting pollution-free diets and food sourcing; mobilizing followers and monks into activities such as recycling, beach and mountain cleanups, tree planting and water conservation. The plan calls on people to start with small personal actions such as saving water as they wash, saving electricity, and not wasting food.

Daoists in China are installing solar panels at all their temples in China. The first Daoist ecological temple – at Taibaishan in Shaanxi Province – was built in 2007 with local sustainable materials: it is now a model for ecological temples being planned throughout China.

The Daoists also are prohibiting the use of ingredients from endangered animals and plants in their health care, food and medicine.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is taking the lead in promoting solar power in Armenia by installing solar power systems in churches and some public buildings such as kindergartens and bathhouses.

The Church of England discovered, in a 2007 audit, that the national carbon footprint of its 16,200 churches as well as clergy houses, halls and offices was 330,000 tonnes of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. It has pledged to reduce this by at least 42 percent by 2020, and by 80 percent by 2050. One example is St. Denys Church in Sleaford, Lincolnshire, which despite being Grade I listed and subject to rigid architectural controls, has installed solar panels on its lead roof using a frame with non-intrusive clamps.

Quakers in the UK have pledged that their historic conference centre, Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria, will come off-grid by 2012 through on-site small-scale energy production. They are investigating using their surrounding farmland to install commercial wind turbines.

The New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, a predominantly African-American church with a Sunday congregation of more than 7,000, is developing its new US\$41 million church to be energy-efficient, and its garden a center for teaching people about growing their own food as a means of returning to a simpler lifestyle.

The U.S. Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is working with its 18,000 parishes, 8,500 schools, 244 colleges and universities and dozens of hospitals to link with the U.S. government's Energy Star programme to buy green energy, and is initiating conversations with treasurers of Catholic institutions to discuss how Catholic investment portfolios can encourage green energy technology and support environmentally careful companies. Some 25 percent of the U.S. population is Catholic.

In total, the faiths own around seven to eight percent of the habitable land surface of the planet, and more than five percent of the forests. Many of the faiths, led by the Shinto, who are major forest-owners in Japan, have joined a program coordinated by ARC to create a Religious Forestry Standard for religious owned and managed forestry.

Greek Orthodox officials are promoting water saving devices in all church institutions and in all Orthodox homes. particularly important in arid countries of the Middle East.

Prince Philip expressed confidence that the commitments made at this gathering "will make a significant difference to the quality of life on Earth in the long term."

<http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/nov2009/2009-11-04-01.asp>

November 5, 2009

Sounding the trumpet

The Economist

A link-up between faith and greenery brings unlikely people together

NEW ORLEANS AND WINDSOR, ENGLAND - ENVIRONMENTALISM is a hard corner to fight in Louisiana, a state where oil, gas and chemical companies are big in the economy and politics. But it takes a lot to frighten Albertha Hasten, a larger-than-life campaigner for poor citizens, and above all for fellow African-Americans, who in her view suffer disproportionately from contamination of the air, water and soil.

In her small, rickety home town of White Castle, the tap-water often comes out “blacker than me”, she has complained. Mrs Hasten fights the cause of communities affected by oil spills in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and she makes indignant phone calls to the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, DC, to say federal pollution standards are being violated. And like many people in and around New Orleans, she fears the city could again be threatened if sea levels rise and hurricanes become even more frequent as a result of climate change.

Ask what emboldens her, as a black woman of modest origins, to challenge the sophisticates of Washington, and she answers like a shot: her deep Baptist faith. “When God calls you to do something, you have to work patiently until all is well.”

The revivalist hymns that Mrs Hasten sings with gusto are a long way, culturally, from the grave beauty of Byzantine Greek chants—but she was glad to meet the Patriarch of Constantinople, “first among equals” in the Orthodox Christian hierarchy, when he came to New Orleans to host a symposium, the eighth he has convened, on faith and the environment. “If I weren’t so fat, I’d have made you a good wife,” she teasingly told Patriarch Bartholomew who, as an Orthodox bishop, is celibate.

As environmentally minded clerics, and greens with a spiritual bent, confer in increasing numbers, in particular over climate change, acquaintances are being struck that transcend many ethnic, ideological and theological obstacles.

And such encounters are not just a curiosity. They might make all the difference to the planet’s future: such at least was the view passionately expressed by Ban Ki-moon, the secretary-general of the United Nations, who flew this week from Kabul—where he made an emergency visit because of a bomb attack on his staff, and a political crisis—to a faith-and-ecology celebration in Windsor Castle, one of the residences of the British royal family.

Departing often from his script, Mr Ban told an audience of gorgeously attired Bahais, Buddhists, Christians, Daoists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Shintos and Sikhs that “you are the leaders who can have the largest, widest and deepest reach” when warning people about climate change. Religions, he said, had established or helped to run half the schools in the world; they were among the world’s biggest investors; and the global output of religious journalism was comparable at least to Europe’s secular press. People close to Mr Ban say he is frustrated by the

reluctance of politicians to stake political capital in next month's Copenhagen meeting; perhaps spiritual leaders are his last hope.

Prince Philip—whose wife, Queen Elizabeth, is head of the Church of England—and Mr Ban (see picture above) formally approved plans presented by all the religions present to cut their own emissions and promote green ideas. These ranged from a Muslim initiative to make the *hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca less environmentally wasteful to a Daoist pledge to burn less incense. The Church of England spelled out its programme for cutting carbon emissions (from churches, halls and vicarages) by 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050.

Nor was Windsor Castle the only grand British edifice to host green faith events recently. On October 29th, for example, the country's Anglican, Catholic and Jewish leaders gathered at Lambeth Palace, the home of Anglicanism, to promote their eco-theological wares with Ed Miliband, the climate-change minister; hours earlier Christians, Jews and Muslims had conferred at Marlborough House, a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace.

Not everybody likes the new concordat between environmentalism and religion. When Lord May, the former chief scientist of Britain, said in September that religion might be needed to secure humanity's future, he was denounced by fellow secularists as a traitor. Such talk would open the way for theocrats to terrorise humanity anew with divine wrath, his critics said.

Meanwhile America's evangelicals remain split between those who endorse the ideal of "creation care" and others who see concern with nature as pagan. And some secularists share the view of the late American writer Michael Crichton that environmentalism is a religion, with its own creed and its own versions of paradise and hell.

At its best, says Mary Evelyn Tucker of Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology, environmental theology goes deep inside the metaphysical ideas that underpin ancient faiths while also celebrating what believers actually do, from tending forests to limiting their food intake. Much eco-theology errs on one side or the other; it is either so philosophical as to leave most people baffled, or so down-to-earth (new bulbs for vicarages, for example) as to sound a bit banal.

But the connection between faith and greenery got a backhanded boost from a British employment tribunal this week. An ex-employee of a property firm said he was sacked for his ideas on climate change; the firm denied any such motive. The tribunal said his appeal could proceed under a law which bars discrimination on grounds of "religion, religious belief or philosophical belief."

http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14807115

November 5, 2009

Environmentalists and Business Leaders Take the Climate Express to Copenhagen

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Kyoto/Barcelona - More than 400 climate change negotiators, business leaders and environmental activists will travel together on board the Climate Express train to Copenhagen in a call for world leaders to agree a fair, ambitious and binding deal to address climate change when they meet at the UN climate summit in Denmark.

Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, will board the train alongside **Franny Armstrong**, the producer and director of the film 'The Age of Stupid', **Luo Hong**, the wildlife photographer and UNEP Climate Hero, and Apa Sherpa a WWF Climate Witness who holds the world record for the most ascents of Mount Everest, **Yoshio Ishida**, UIC Chairman and Vice Chairman of East Japan railways, **Jean-Pierre Loubinoux**, the Director General of the International Union of Railways (UIC). They will be joined by top rail executives including as well as other passengers from the media, to business leaders, to civil society (see Note to Editors).

The Climate Express train, will travel from Brussels to Copenhagen on 5 December and will be the final leg of the '**Train to Copenhagen**' project, organized by the International Union of Railways (UIC) with the support of the UN's Seal the Deal! campaign and WWF, the global conservation organisation. The 'on-track' conference aims to raise awareness of the transport sector's influence on climate change, and provides a key opportunity for the passengers on board to debate the key climate talks ahead, during workshops and round table discussions on the different aspects of sustainable mobility, and how this could be addressed in a post-2012 agreement.

The next generation climate regime, to be agreed upon in Copenhagen, must support the development of smart sustainable transport systems. Rail, as one of the most sustainable forms of transport, offers an efficient, low-carbon mass public transportation system, as well as safety and space efficiency. By drawing power entirely from renewable sources of energy, the journey on the Climate Express will be totally CO₂-free. If the same group of people flew to Copenhagen instead of taking the train, they would produce 115kg CO₂ per person.

Connie Hedegaard, the COP 15 host and Danish Climate Minister and **Søren Eriksen**, CEO of the Danish Railways (DSB), will welcome the Climate Express at arrival in Copenhagen.

Also as part of the 'Train to Copenhagen' project, the UIC Climate Change and Rail Seminar will kick off on 5 November in the Japanese city of Kyoto - the birthplace of the current Climate Change Protocol. The seminar, co-organized with the Asian railways, will highlight how transport can be part of the solution in the fight against global warming.

To underline what railways have to offer, a Global Rail Position Paper will also be carried by rail via Vladivostok, Moscow, Berlin and Brussels before reaching Copenhagen. Based on data gathered from international railways, the paper advocates a shift to rail from road and air as a crucial step to support transitions to low-carbon mobility.

During the journey through Russia, environmental experts and climate change campaigners will report on the signs of global warming underway via www.traintocopenhagen.org and on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/Trn2Cpnhgn>.

Mr Loubinoux underlines that "UIC believes that reducing transport emissions is a crucial step in combating global warming. We in the rail sector are ready to be part of the solution. Keep Kyoto on track and Seal the Deal!"

Notes to Editors:

About the *Climate Express* train

The *Climate Express* train will travel from Brussels to Copenhagen on 5 December, stopping in Cologne and Hamburg along the way. The 12-hour journey will feature workshops and round table discussions.

Personalities boarding the *Climate Express* train to Copenhagen on 5 December will include:

1. Mr. *Achim Steiner*, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director
2. Mr *Paul Magnette*, Belgian Federal Minister of Climate & Energy
3. Mr *Etienne Schouppe*, Belgian State Secretary for *Mobility*
4. Mr *Matthias Ruete*, *Director General*, Energy and Transport at the European Commission
5. Mr. *Yoshio Ishida*, UIC Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Japan East Railways
6. Mr. *Guillaume Pepy*, CEO of SNCF
7. Mr *Jannie Haek*, CEO SNCB-Holding
8. Mr *Marc Descheemaeker*, CEO SNCB
9. Mr *Francisco José Cardoso Dos Reis*, President of the Board of Directors of the Portuguese Railways (CP)
10. Mr. *Jean-Pierre Loubinoux*, UIC Director General.
11. Mr *Jean-Pascal Van Ypersele*, IPCC Vice-President
12. Mr. *Wang Shi*, the Chairman of the Chinese Society of Ecology and Entrepreneurs and Chairman of Vanke corporation
13. Ms. *Franny Armstrong*, the producer and director of the film *The Age of Stupid*
14. Mr. *Luo Hong*, the wildlife photographer and UNEP Climate Hero
15. Mr Apa Sherpa, mountaineer and WWF Climate Witness

About the Train to Copenhagen initiative

A number of UIC members are undertaking local Train to Copenhagen campaigns to facilitate transportation to the COP15 for national delegations and other participants, including special fares. Check your local railway company for more information or www.traintocopenhagen.org

About UIC

UIC is the International Union of Railways - the worldwide organisation for international cooperation among railways and for the promotion of rail transport at world level in order to meet the challenges of mobility and sustainable development. UIC has 200 members on all five continents and is headquartered in Paris (www.uic.org).

UIC is working continuously to further improve the environmental and sustainability advantages of the rail sector - including its energy efficiency. UIC is also leading the rail sector's work in adapting rail infrastructure to the consequences of climate change.

About UNEP

UNEP, established in 1972, is the voice for the environment within the United Nations system. UNEP acts as a catalyst, advocate, educator and facilitator to promote the wise use and sustainable development of the global environment. To accomplish this, UNEP works with a wide range of partners, including United Nations entities, international organizations, national governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society.

www.unep.org

About WWF

WWF is the world's leading independent conservation organization working to solve the most serious environmental issues facing our planet. WWF's solutions-focused and science-based approach underpins our call for a fair, ambitious and legally-binding global agreement on climate change to be agreed in Copenhagen.

About the Seal the Deal! Campaign

The UN-led Seal the Deal Campaign aims to galvanize political will and public support for reaching a comprehensive global climate agreement in Copenhagen in December. As well as featuring a series of initiatives worldwide in the run-up to the Copenhagen meeting, the campaign encourages users to sign an online, global petition which will be presented by civil society to governments of the world.

www.sealthedeal2009.org

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=602&ArticleID=6361&l=en>

November 6, 2009

God's Green Earth

National Public Radio

There may be a prayer for climate change prevention. Major world religious leaders and conservation organizations recently gathered in Windsor, England for the Many Heavens, One Earth conference to advance the fight against climate change. Host Jeff Young speaks with Martin Palmer, Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, about why these initiatives might have a greater impact on stewardship than scientific or political efforts.

Transcript:

YOUNG: From the Jennifer and Ted Stanley Studios in Somerville, Massachusetts - this is Living on Earth. I'm Jeff Young. Next month, political leaders meet for an international summit in Copenhagen to try and meld science and policy on climate change. But a recent gathering of world dignitaries looked at global warming from another perspective – religion. Leaders of the world's major faiths met at England's Windsor castle for an event called "Many Heavens, One Earth". They discussed climate action by churches, temples, mosques, and why protecting the planet is an article of faith.

[GOMAA: [ARABIC], TRANSLATOR: The Koran states "...do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set in order..."; SAVAGE: In Jewish tradition, the big vision repeated thrice daily at the end of the traditional prayers is [HEBREW]. To heal and improve the world is the divine realm; THOMAS: Our Christian faith mandates that we honor the creation that God put under our charge; VYAS: Hindu scriptures are replete with spiritual and poetic references to Mother Earth, where the trees, the mountains, and the rocks become shrines.]

YOUNG: Martin Palmer is Secretary General at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, which organized the event along with the UN Development Program. He joins us now from London. Mr. Palmer, welcome to Living on Earth.

PALMER: Thank you, Jeff.

YOUNG: Now, tell us about some of those religious leaders we just heard from there.

PALMER: The first one was the Grand Mufti of Egypt. He has enormous spiritual and intellectual authority within Islam, and he was speaking on behalf of the Muslim seven-year plan – setting out to green the Hajj, make sure the printing of Korans (15 million a year) is done on recycled paper, and so forth.

He was followed by Nigel Savage, who is representing the Jewish seven-year plan. Their commitment is to cut meat eating in the Jewish community by 50 percent by 2015 and to also link synagogues to local farms.

He was then followed by the dramatic Bishop Thomas, who comes from the New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore, USA, and their commitment involves a whole youth training program in environmental action and a whole program of empowerment of the poor and the dispossessed, so that they can actually become a voice and a force, themselves, to tackle environmental problems.

And then, the final speaker was Kusum Vyas, who represents the Hindu nine-year plan. They are building on the old Hindu tradition of vegetarianism, which we now appreciate as of huge ecological significance, and the Hindus are planning to develop their own environmental label, so that Hindus can buy ethically, environmentally, and faithfully.

YOUNG: How many faith groups, in all, were represented?

PALMER: We actually had somewhere in the region of 50 major faith traditions from around the world – it was a huge gathering and it was a gathering not to discuss what they might do, it was a gathering at which they launched their long-term plans to help save and protect the living planet.

YOUNG: So, this was not just a talk – they're going to practice what they preach, so to speak?

PALMER: Very good, you've put it that way. We as our maxim for the whole program a Confuciusist maxim, actually, that we developed with the UNDP, our UN colleagues that, first of all, practice what you want to preach, and then only preach what you're already doing. And so nobody came to this event unless they had developed systematic long-term plans which would embed environmental awareness, education, action, use of their investment portfolios, turning their lands to organic, developing forestry schemes for their forests for the major faiths.

YOUNG: And do you know, roughly, how many people those groups at the gathering represent?

PALMER: Before the event, we had 31 major commitments from faiths around the world, and the UN calculated that these schemes could affect the lives of potentially two billion people. However, we had left it open for the possibility of new partnerships, new groups that wished to say, we haven't got a scheme yet, but within the next year we will have one, and we had 19 new schemes that came forward – ranging from the Russian Orthodox church, remember they own something in the region of 30 million hectares of land in Russia, most of it forest and farm land – and some 18 commitments from major secular organizations, including the UN, the World Bank, WWF, and so forth.

YOUNG: So, two billion plus people potentially influenced by what these religious leaders say they're going to carry out here. We're getting up close to a third of humanity here.

PALMER: That's right. Well, bear in mind that 85 percent of the world professes a faith. And one of the problems for the environmental movement has been that it emerged, initially, out of the secular northwest Europe and it saw the world through its own eyes and assumed that everybody else considered that religion was, if not irrelevant, about as significant as if you liked and Indian take-away or a Chinese take-away.

And, because the UN said, you know, there is no way we are going to tackle climate change or any of the other major environmental problems unless we are in partnership with the major moral, spiritual forces of the world, who also happen to own eight percent of the habitable surface of the planet, are the third largest investing group in the world, have either run, founded or set up some role in over 50 percent of all schools, and publish more books per year than the whole of the rest of the publishing industry.

The question really is why on earth weren't they working with us before? And I think we've turned a corner. There is now a worldwide recognition that the faiths should be invited to the table as equals of any other sector of civil society. And a very strong sense, I have to say, that as we head towards Copenhagen, the nation states are rapidly losing the credibility that they can actually do anything, and it may be civil society and not least of all religion, which will actually have to try and negotiated our way out of this mess.

YOUNG: You know, along those lines, one statement at the event caught my ear. This is a piece of tape from the Reverend Sally Bingham:

BINGHAM: I believe that religious leaders talking about environmental stewardship from the pulpit will have far more influence than a scientist or a politician on their own.

YOUNG: Mr. Palmer, you obviously think she's right there. Why is it, though, that a religious messenger might be a better one on this issue than a scientist?

PALMER: Because people trust them. It's as simple as that. Scientists are, on the whole, not very good communicators. There are one or two exceptions.

They are not very good at telling stories, and one of the points that came out time and time again in our work in developing for this is that nobody was ever moved to change the way they live by a pie chart, but they are moved by a story.

And in a sense, the environmental world has relied on science and facts, bald facts if I can put it that way, for the last 40 years and the end result is we're in a worse case than we were 40 years ago.

Nobody actually changes what they do unless they are inspired, touched, given hope. And to some degree, what has happened has been that the environmental movement has tried to mimic the power of religion, and it has stolen from religion certain aspects. So, it's stolen the notion of sin: if you get up in the morning and you put on the radio, no doubt to listen to this program, you make a cup of tea – or rather being in America you make a cup of coffee because, sadly, you

don't know how to make tea – you then drive to work and you switch on your computer. You committed, according to environmentalists, four sins.

YOUNG: Hmmm, carbon sinners.

PALMER: Carbon sinners. They are very good at making us feel guilty they're very good at fear. The trouble is they're not very good at hope, salvation, liberation, redemption, and they're appallingly bad at celebrating.

YOUNG: Well, I got to say when you talk about climate change it's hard to see cause for celebration in this. I mean it's a pretty gloomy outlook.

PALMER: Well, it is and it isn't. You see, if there is nothing to celebrate, why would you bother? And the faiths are the oldest institutions in the world – they know more about how human psychology works than any other organization, which is why they've outlived every dynasty, every empire, they've outlived Communism pretty much, they've outlived the League of Nations, and as we gently point out to our colleagues in the UN, they will outlive the UN.

Now, how do they do this? They do this because they know that you can ask people to fast and you can ask them to repent, and then you feast. You have to fast and feast. If all you tell people they can do is fast, they give up. You've got to give people hope. There's a wonderful phrase in the psalms: without hope, people perish. And they perish because you cannot live with fear. Fear is disabling, it steals the energy from you. You've got to give people hope, not false hope, not say, oh don't worry it's all going to be fine it's no problem at all.

But you got to say, look what is it that will make me as an Anglican do something with my church? What is that will make a Jew in New York take seriously what his or her Synagogue should do? What is that will make a Hindu in Fiji address the environmental issues in their own country?

And there is hope. There is still the possibility that we can turn the tide on climate change. We can't stop some of it, but we can mitigate some of it. But there is also the belief that this world is not just material, which isn't to say, don't worry, you'll be happy in heaven afterwards, but it is saying, you know, as Hamlet says to Horatio in the great play by Shakespeare: There are more things in heaven and earth than are thought of in your philosophy.

YOUNG: So, when environmentalists and scientists look at, say, these recent polling figures in the United States that show fewer people appear to be getting the message here, despite their efforts, you would say that's because you guys don't understand the power of the parable and the importance of inspiration?

PALMER: Precisely. We have been telling people that it's hopeless for so long they've decided it's not worth worrying about. Moreover, climate change is only a symptom; it's not the problem. The problem, to use old-fashioned religious language, is sin, greed, and selfishness, and foolishness. That's the problem, the fundamental problem is that we are out of kilter with our

planet – we're out of kilter with God, we're out of kilter with our neighbors, and very often we're out of kilter with ourselves.

And so, the solution is not to tackle climate change, per say, the solution is in fact to offer people a vision of living hopefully and living more simply, living more faithfully and doing so not as either victims or perpetrators, but perhaps, as heroes.

YOUNG: Martin Palmer is with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. He's telling us about the gathering of "Many Heavens, One Earth". Thank you very much.

PALMER: Thank you.

<http://www.loe.org/shows/segments.htm?programID=09-P13-00045&segmentID=1>

November 8, 2009

Religious leaders hand 60 plans on climate change to the UN

Ecumenical News International

Leaders of nine major faiths have presented 60 ideas to lessen carbon emissions to the United Nations after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon singled out the religious community as key in fighting climate change - *writes Trevor Grundy*.

The Norwegian Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Development Plan in charge of development, Olov Kjoerven, on 4 November called climate change "the greatest threat that humanity has ever been up against".

He was speaking at an event organized by the Quakers in London. This followed a three-day meeting at Windsor Castle outside the British capital on how faith leaders can help change the environment. There Ban spoke, saying the world's major faiths occupy a "unique position" in future discussion on the fate of the planet.

Kjoerven noted, "Within the next few decades, larger and larger portions of the earth could be turned into uninhabitable areas. It is time for all of us and for politicians, global leaders, religious leaders, to step up to the plate and deliver a deal."

Welcoming the ideas put forward during the 2-4 November conference, the UNDP representative said that the U.N. has worked at climate change for the last 20 years. "We haven't made much progress quite frankly. Clearly there is something missing in terms of the efforts we have made so far," Kjoerven said.

That was why, he explained, the UNDP approached the Alliance of Religions and Conservation to help arrange a conference on the eve of the 7 to 18 December summit in Copenhagen.

Kjoerven declared: "The faiths have reached beyond any other constituencies. The day when the faiths through their institutions and investment portfolios decide to go from high carbon to low as a matter of principle will make an enormous difference and send a strong signal through the entire market about the way to go into the future."

ARC's secretary general, Martin Palmer, told Ecumenical News International that the conference had been better than anything he had expected.

"We knew that we were going to have 31 major commitments, such as the Church of England cutting back its energy use by 40 percent by 2015, or the Muslims 'greening' the Hajj or Jews cutting meat consumption in their community by 2015," Palmer told ENI. "Then, on the last day, there were 30 more commitments," Palmer enthused.

Tarek Wafik, Secretary General of the Forum of Dialogue for Partnership, received strong applause after telling how the entire Islamic world has accepted the action plan which will involve educating an estimated three million pilgrims who go to Mecca every year about the need to lighten their carbon footsteps.

"This," said Wafik, "could be an intensely educational process that merges with a great spiritual experience."

The need to have religious leadership in a fight against global warming was underlined by the Rev. Sally Bingham, the San Francisco-based leader of the U.S. Interfaith Power and Light campaign.

"Up until recently," Bingham said, "the religious community had abdicated its responsibility to care for creation." Bingham told the audience at Friends House in London, "I believe that clergy talking about environmental stewardship from the pulpit will have more influence than will scientists or a politician."

[With acknowledgements to ENI. [Ecumenical News International](http://www.ecumenicalnews.org/) is jointly sponsored by the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Conference of European Churches.]

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/10559>

November 8, 2009

Couple's book tackles evangelicals' questions on climate change

By Renee Schoof
McClatchy Newspapers
The Miami Herald

As an evangelical Christian living in Texas, climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe found that many conservatives had questions about climate change based on things they'd heard on talk radio.

So Hayhoe and her husband, Andrew Farley, the pastor of a nondenominational church in Lubbock, Texas, decided to answer the questions in a new book from religious publisher FaithWords, "A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-based Decisions."

"The observed increase in greenhouse gas levels, due to human production, is the only explanation we can find to account for what has happened to our world," Farley and Hayhoe wrote. "We've dusted for fingerprints. There's only one likely suspect remaining. It's us."

Although the leaders of other religious groups have been calling on the world to take action to prevent climate change from spinning out of control, evangelical Christians remain divided on it.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, for example, has taken a strong stand on protecting the climate. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, wrote in a commentary last month, "Climate change will only be overcome when all of us - scientists and politicians, theologians and economists, specialists and lay citizens - cooperate for the common good."

The National Association of Evangelicals, a group that represents millions of American evangelicals in about 45,000 churches, takes positions on other social issues but it hasn't taken a stand on climate change because there isn't a consensus among its members, said its director, Heather Gonzales.

The evangelical group Cornwall Alliance argues that concerns about global warming are unfounded and lobbies against legislation that would reduce U.S. emissions of greenhouse gases. The Evangelical Environmental Network, in contrast, accepts the scientific explanation of global warming and calls for reducing the pollution that's causing it.

This contrast in views prompted the Texas authors to write their book.

"When it comes to conservative Christians, I think the real question is who can we trust on this issue?" Farley said. "The scientist who has opposed us in the past, perhaps on issues such as evolution versus creation? Can we trust the local radio talk-show host on conservative radio who seems to be vehemently opposed to the idea that climate change is happening and speaks out quite passionately? Should I trust my local pastor who has a B-minus in high school biology?"

Hayhoe teaches in the Department of Geosciences at Texas Tech University, and she was a lead author of a U.S. government report on climate change in the United States that was released in June. She also was one of some 2,000 scientists on the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which reported in 2007 that there was unequivocal evidence of warming.

Farley, a conservative Republican, is the pastor of Ecclesia, a nondenominational Christian church, and teaches linguistics at Texas Tech.

"To get information on climate change, you have to go to the people who know the information. That's why we wrote this together as a climate scientist and a pastor," Hayhoe said. "He asked the tough questions. He said you've got to talk about this and this and this, and these answers have to satisfy me."

Many of the questions were from the arguments of conservative celebrities.

"Glenn Beck is saying this, Laura Ingraham is saying that, Rush Limbaugh is saying this, and these people are well-respected in conservative communities, so where are these talk-show hosts wrong and how can you show that they're wrong with data, not slick talk?" he said.

Their goal, he said, was to reach the average person with facts, "with no spin to it, no politics to it, no economic policy recommendations to it, stripped of all those and stripped of the common misconceptions as well, getting down to the core issue: Is it happening, are we causing it and how can we be sure?"

The book is a look at the scientific consensus that heat-trapping gases, mostly from the use of fossil fuels, are causing an increase in the Earth's average temperature. It explains how scientists reach their conclusions and why they rule out other possible explanations, such as the sun, volcanoes and natural cycles.

ON THE WEB

"Climate Literacy: The Essential Principles of Climate Science," a short guide by U.S. climate scientists: <http://www.climate.noaa.gov/education/>

"Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States," a U.S. Global Change Research Program report: <http://www.globalchange.gov/publications/reports/scientific-assessments/us-impacts>

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics/AP/story/1322858.html>

November 9, 2009

Can Jewish Tenets be a Model for a More Eco-Friendly World?

By Gil Shefler
Jewish Telegraphic Agency Wire Service

Have Jews been “green” for millennia without knowing it?

A Jewish delegation made the case this week to a climate-change conference in Britain, arguing for eco-friendly measures based on the Jewish tenets of Shabbat, kashrut and shmita, the injunction to let land lie fallow every seventh year.

Titled “Many Heavens, One Earth,” the conference at Windsor Palace in Britain invited representatives of nine religions from around the world to offer their perspectives on climate change and the environment.

The proposal of the Jewish delegation, which included members from Israel, North America and Europe, stressed the environmental benefits of Shabbat, arguing that non-Jewish communities can adopt the principle of a day of rest to help cut down on pollution.

“For the broader global community, the model of Shabbat is useful in demonstrating how to live, if only for one day a week, without consuming,” the proposal said. “If every resident in a major city chose one day of the week to refrain from driving, there would be immediate improvement to the city’s congestion, local air quality and carbon emissions.”

The proposal also included ways that Jews can be more environmentally conscious. For instance, the document urged observant Jews to consider ways of consuming more locally produced kosher food instead of products transported from afar. It also noted that the Jewish tradition of shmita is inherently green, as it helps prevent overuse of arable land, which may lead to erosion and poorer harvests.

The conference, hosted by Prince Philip, took place a month ahead of the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen and was aimed at increasing pressure on world leaders to reach an agreement on greenhouse gas emissions when they meet in the Danish capital.

“The challenges that the world faces today are considerable, and this conference gave a renewed sense of hope for what is possible,” said Nigel Savage, founder of the Jewish environmental group Hazon and one of the Jewish delegates to the conference. “It is clear that a significant point has been reached in the commitment of the communities to make a difference on climate change in the next seven years.”

On Nov. 19, Hazon plans to launch a coast-to-coast, “topsy-turvy” tour of a bus powered by vegetable oil. Starting in New York, the tour aims to spread Hazon’s message of environmentalism across the United States.

Savage said the gathering at Windsor represented a unique occasion for religious leaders and activists to come together peacefully to address a burning environmental issue.

Other attendees included U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Egypt’s grand mufti, Ali Gomaa. Among the Jewish delegates were Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, former Israeli minister Rabbi Michael Melchior and Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Naomi Tsur.

Perhaps the most ambitious goal included in the Jewish proposal was to “turn Israel into the first nation predominantly powered by renewable energy sources.”

“The state is presently 70 percent powered by coal,” said Yosef Abramowitz, president of the Arava Power Company, which is building Israel’s first commercial solar field in the Negev

desert. “Our recommendation is to go from 10 percent to 30 percent use of solar power, and we have a very specific way to get there.

“Everybody has not just to green their churches, synagogues and mosques, but to seal the deal at Copenhagen,” he said. “Otherwise we’re all complicit morally.”

This story reprinted courtesy of the [Jewish Telegraphic Agency](#).

http://www.jewishtimes.com/index.php/jewishtimes/news/jt/national_news/can_jewish_tenets_be_a_model_for_a_more_eco-friendly_world/15531

November 10, 2009

Irish Bishops launch pastoral reflection on environment

Independent Catholic News

Archbishop Dermot Clifford, Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, today launched *The Cry of the Earth*, a pastoral reflection on climate change from the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. The launch took place in St Francis of Assisi Primary School in Belmayne, Dublin, beside Father Collins Park, Ireland’s first wholly sustainable park.

Launching *The Cry of the Earth* Archbishop Clifford said: “We are all stewards of God’s creation. As political leaders from around the globe meet in Copenhagen next month for the UN Framework Conference on Climate Change to decide on a new global climate change deal, the Bishops of Ireland wish to raise awareness of our vital responsibility toward sustaining the environment. We need to protect the environment today and on behalf of future generations. Our response needs to be at an individual, community and governmental level.

“*The Cry of the Earth*, with an accompanying DVD, has been sent to all parishes and is available on: www.catholicbishops.ie. It reflects on our Christian responsibility towards the environment and outlines the scientific analysis of climate change, the theological and ethical principles as to why we as Christians have a duty to respond, and practical advice as to how we can act now to sustain the environment.”

Archbishop Clifford continued: “When the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, published his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* in July, he reminded us that 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 ... The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere.’”

The Cry of the Earth is a resource for those who care for a better environment. In it parishes are asked to establish groups to discuss various actions, such as:

- conduct an environmental audit of your parish

- increase our use of renewable energy, recycle more, waste less
- raise awareness in the parish of our carbon footprint
- show solidarity by supporting Trócaire's Climate Change campaign
- enrol in the Eco-Congregation Ireland environmental programme for Churches
- include the theme of care for God's creation in homilies, prayers of the faithful and examinations of conscience.

Columban missionary priest Father Seán McDonagh, a contributor to *The Cry of the Earth*, said at the launch: "On 3 November last the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, addressed 200 religious leaders at a Celebration of Faiths and the Environment at Windsor, London. He implored religious leaders to make their voice heard in the run up to the Copenhagen Conference in December. He told them 'you can inspire, you can provide, you can challenge your political leaders through your wisdom and through your followers.'

"The Cry of the Earth is an attempt by the Irish Bishops to respond to the challenge of climate change by drawing on the wisdom of contemporary science and our faith tradition which is rooted in the Bible and the witness of the Church down through the ages. The Cry of the Earth marries science, good theology, prayer and action. It calls for an 'ecological conversion' from everyone, especially in the way we used fossil fuel. This is a timely challenge one month before the Copenhagen Conference."

Professor John Sweeney, Director of the Irish Climate Analysis and Research Units, NUI Maynooth, also spoke at the launch and was a contributor to *The Cry of the Earth*.

Professor Sweeney said: "Belief in global climate change is not a matter of faith. The evidence that the planet is undergoing rapid climate change is factual and beyond scientific dispute. In terms of causation, for almost all the world's atmospheric scientists, the debate about the human contribution to climate change is now over.

"It is urgent that tackling the greatest challenge facing humanity this century be confronted by all sectors of society. How we do this raises difficult ethical and moral problems, not least in terms of how we assist the most vulnerable peoples and nations, many of whom are victims of our actions. It is here that religious leaders can provide principles to guide decision makers. This document emphasises the need to change our mentality towards the natural world, to respect the integrity of nature and to turn away from excessively consumptive lifestyles.

"These are very basic Christian principles shared with all faiths and call on us to extend a helping hand to our neighbour by recognising there is another way to share the planet. In the lead up to the pivotal Copenhagen conference, where the nations of the world will grapple with the difficulties of reaching a consensus on sharing the burden of greenhouse gas emission reductions, today's pastoral reflection is a welcome initiative to remind us that scientific and political action

should be underpinned by Christian principles.”

Mr Justin Kilcullen, Director of Trócaire, the Bishops’ overseas aid agency, said: “Climate change is not a distant threat. It is a daily reality and the people that are being hit the hardest are the poorest in the world. The Cry of the Earth is especially relevant ahead of the Copenhagen Conference. At this summit world leaders need to agree to take responsibility for the impact of climate change and commit financial support to developing countries to help them cope with its devastating effects.

“The role of the Catholic Church will be critical in the run up to Copenhagen, to remind world leaders of their moral duty to support those whose lives have already been devastated by climate change and commit to the lifestyle changes we all need to take for the common good.”

To coincide with the launch, the full text and summary versions of The Cry of the Earth has been sent to parishes throughout the country. The pastoral reflection is available on www.catholicbishops.ie in English, Irish and Polish, with an accompanying reflection in DVD format and two video interviews:

- Archbishop Clifford discussing the stewardship role of the Church and its people in relation to the environment;
- Professor John Sweeney, Director of the Irish Climate Analysis and Research Units at NUI Maynooth, explaining how climate change and global warming have been driven predominantly by human activity and the consequences for people, agriculture and for the economy in this country.

Additional resources on this web feature include suggested reading and information on the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of the environment.

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=15133>

November 11, 2009

Churches to ring the alarm on climate change

World Council of Churches
Press Release

As nations are spelling out their bargaining positions for the negotiations on a new international climate deal to take place in Copenhagen next month, churches around the world are trying to ring home the message that climate protection is an ethical and spiritual issue.

The 7-18 December United Nations summit in the Danish capital Copenhagen will set the agenda for the next stage of the fight against climate change. "This is the last chance the world has to keep global temperature increases below 2 degrees Celsius," says Alexi Barnett, campaign officer for Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, explaining the importance of churches' support for a successful outcome in Copenhagen.

That is why her organization has teamed up with Christian Aid and the [Presbyterian] Church of Scotland to get congregations in the northern part of the United Kingdom to heed a call by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and ring their bells on Sunday, 13 December.

On that Sunday, midway through the UN summit, the WCC invites churches around the world to use their bells, drums, gongs or whatever their tradition offers to call people to prayer and action in the face of climate change.

By sounding their bells or other instruments 350 times, participating churches will symbolize the 350 parts per million that mark the safe upper limit for CO₂ in the atmosphere according to many scientists.

Groups ranging from the Open Sanctuary at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Tilba Tilba, Australia, to the Lutheran congregation in Sibiu, Romania, have already pledged their participation. Some link the climate action with their traditional advent celebrations, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Epiphany Church in Hamburg, Germany, that will invite children to draw stars of hope while the bells will be rung and 350 drum beats will be sounded ahead of the congregation's advent concert.

As each group starts their own observation of the 13 December event at 3 p.m. local time, a chain of chimes and prayers will be stretching in a time-line from the South Pacific – where the day first begins and where the effects of climate change are already felt today – to [Denmark](#) and across the globe.

The politics of bells: controversy on the role of church in society

Even before the bells have started ringing, they have managed to stir a debate about the special perspective Christians bring to the climate debate. "In some countries, the question has been raised whether churches have the right to use their bells for what may be considered to be a political campaign," says Dr Guillermo Kerber, WCC programme executive on climate change.

"Those who support the campaign see the care of creation and of people's lives and livelihoods threatened by climate change more as an ethical and spiritual issue that, of course, has political implications, not in a partisan sense but referring to the common good," Kerber adds.

"We pray that decision makers everywhere take seriously the responsibility implicit in God giving humankind dominion over His creatures upon the earth," says Dr Mogens Lemvig Hansen, explaining why the Danish Lutheran Church of Vancouver, B.C., Canada, of which he is president, will ring its bells.

"Churches have a special role to play – and church bells have a role to play" in this debate, says Bill McKibben, a well-known writer and a Sunday school teacher in the United Methodist Church, in a [video message on youtube](#).

"Where I live, in the United States, before we had radio when somebody's house caught on fire we rang the church bells so that everybody would know and come out to do something about it. Well, something's on fire now", adds McKibben, whose book *The End of Nature* was one of the first to explain global warming to a mainstream audience when it came out in 1989.

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) have endorsed the campaign in a [joint letter](#) to the churches in Europe.

Also on 13 December, participants at the UN conference are invited to pray alongside the Danish Queen and church leaders from around the world in an ecumenical celebration at Copenhagen's Lutheran Cathedral.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion comprising some 80 million Christians worldwide, will preach the sermon. The celebration will be broadcast live on Danish television and on the website of the [Danish Broadcasting Corporation](#).

[More information on the bell ringing campaign](#)

[WCC activities ahead of the Copenhagen summit](#)

[UN Climate Change Conference](#)

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/churches-to-ring-the-alar.html>

November 12, 2009

World's churches urged to ring bells against climate change

Agence France-Presse World News

The World Council of Churches on Thursday called on churches around the world to ring their bells 350 times during the Copenhagen climate change summit on December 13 as a call to action on global warming.

The leading council of Christian and Orthodox churches also invited places of worship for other faiths to join a symbolic "chain of chimes and prayers" stretching around the world from the international date line in the South Pacific.

"On that Sunday, midway through the UN summit, the WCC invites churches around the world to use their bells, drums, gongs or whatever their tradition offers to call people to prayer and action in the face of climate change," the council said in a statement.

"By sounding their bells or other instruments 350 times, participating churches will symbolise the 350 parts per million that mark the safe upper limit for CO₂ (carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere according to many scientists," it added.

The chimes are meant to start at 3.00 pm local time in each location.

The WCC brings together 348 Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican churches representing about 560 million Christians in 110 countries.

The Council of European Bishops Conferences, which gathers Roman Catholic bishops and archbishops, is also supporting the campaign, according to a letter released by the WCC.

The UN summit in the Danish capital on December 7 to 18 is meant to produce a new global treaty to broaden cuts in emissions of greenhouse gases blamed for climate change, but the negotiations are still riven by disagreements.

The WCC acknowledged that plans for a bell ringing campaign have stirred controversy.

"In some countries, the question has been raised whether churches have the right to use their bells for what may be considered to be a political campaign," said Guillermo Kerber, WCC programme executive on climate change.

"Those who support the campaign see the care of creation and of people's lives and livelihoods threatened by climate change more as an ethical and spiritual issue that, of course, has political implications, not in a partisan sense but referring to the common good," he explained.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/worlds-churches-urged-to-ring-bells-against-climate-change-1819422.html>

November 14, 2009

Hindus criticize World Hunger Summit for ignoring religious leaders except Pope

Asian Tribune

Hindus have strongly criticized non-inclusion of world religious leaders, except Pope, in much-publicized and prestigious “World Summit on Food Security” of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations at Rome from November 16-18.

Acclaimed Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement released in the state of Nevada, emphasized that for successful implementation at the grassroots level of strategic decisions coming out of such a summit, involvement of world religions and their leaders was extremely important.

Pope was undoubtedly the leader of the single largest religious denomination of the world, but other religions and denominations also existed on this planet with huge following. FAO should have been more inclusive by inviting leaders of various religions and denominations, Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, stated.

Besides Pope, various heads of state are participating in this Summit which will try to find ways to eliminate hunger. It will include statements by heads of state/government, delegation heads, and special guests, followed by debate and discussions regarding minimizing negative impact of current crisis on world food security, global governance of food security, challenges of climate change on food security, measures to enhance food security, etc.

Rajan Zed further said that about one billion hungry and malnourished people were a moral blot on the humanity. Worsening world food insecurity situation and growing number of hungry in the world was simply unacceptable.

Zed stressed that everybody should have the right to food and basic social services. We the world had the resources and technology to tackle hunger; all we needed was an effective global governance, commitment, political will, wholehearted involvement, and partnership for food security. Some fundamental change in world policy was required, focusing on the most vulnerable.

Such summits should involve the faiths and give faith leaders a respectable role to play to achieve concrete results at the ground level and to see effective and smooth implementation of global agreements reached, Rajan Zed suggested. Religion was the most powerful and far-reaching force in our society and could prove very influential in handling concerns like world hunger, Zed added.

FAO claims to lead “international efforts to defeat hunger” and its mandate involves achieving food security for all; and to make sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active and healthy lives. Dr Jacques Diouf of Senegal is its Director-General in his third six-year term. Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about one billion adherents and moksha (liberation) is its ultimate goal.

<http://asiantribune.com/news/2009/11/14/hindus-criticize-world-hunger-summit-ignoring-religious-leaders-except-pope>

November 16, 2009

Indonesia: The home of "Green Islam"

By Peter Gelling
GlobalPost

Can Quranic teaching save the planet? Many in the world's most-populous Muslim nation think so.

IMOGIRI, Indonesia — Scattered on a forested hillside in this remote, almost pristine area of Central Java is the Ilmu Giri Pesantren, an Islamic boarding school that six years ago began offering a new kind of curriculum to a handful of local farmers.

Today, students of Islam, young and old and from all over the country, are flocking to this tiny, mostly outdoor campus to hear its founder, Nasruddin Anshory, preach about a Muslim's ordained responsibility to protect the environment.

"As a Muslim," he says to the students, who sit cross-legged in the dirt beneath the jungle canopy, feverishly taking notes, "you must do something."

Ilmu Giri rose to prominence during the 2007 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, where Anshory was celebrated for his teachings. But environmentalism had been taught in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, known as pesantren, since at least the 19th Century — long before anyone paid attention to melting ice caps or rising sea levels.

On the Island of Madura in East Java is Pesantren Guluk-Guluk, also called Al-Nuqayah, which was established in 1887. Its founder, Muhammad Syarqawi, originally opened the school to spread Islam on an island that was then a lawless and often violent place.

He soon found the real problem to be the small island's devastated environment. It was desperately dry and fresh water was scarce, forcing the inhabitants to fight over resources. So Syarqawi shifted his focus to teaching the island's villagers, with the help of the Quran, about conservation.

It was hardly a stretch, says Achmad Suaedy, director of the Wahid Institute, an organization founded by Indonesia's former president Abdurrahman Wahid that promotes peaceful and pluralistic Islam, and which has been working to promote "Green Islam" within Indonesia's pesantrens.

"There are numerous passages in the Quran that refer to environmental protection," he said. "There's the line, for instance, that equates a human life with that of a tree: 'Do not kill women, elders, children, civilians or trees.'"

In fact, the very origins of Islam are thought to be partly rooted in the early Muslims' need to preserve scarce resources.

“The advent of Islam as an organized religion occurred in the desert environment of Arabia, and hence there was considerable attention paid to ecological concerns within Islamic ethics,” said Saleem Ali, associate dean of graduate studies at the University of Vermont’s Rubenstein School for the Environment. “There is a reverence of nature that stems from essential pragmatism within the faith.”

Still Guluk-Guluk remained the only one of its kind for more than a century. It’s been only in the last five years, just as global awareness of climate change and other environmental issues have increased, that “Green Islam” here has really taken root.

Attendance at Guluk-Guluk has ballooned from 1,200 to more than 6,500 students. And a number of those new environmentalists have gone on to open their own schools in cities all over the country.

There are now ever-growing networks of pesantrens going green, making Indonesia the unlikely pioneer of environmental Islam. The Indonesian government, recognizing the potential benefits of having the country’s 17,000 pesantren adopt some form of environmentalist program, has begun to vigorously promote such curriculums.

State Environment Minister Gusti Muhammad Hatta announced earlier this month that about 90 pesantrens in Central Java would take part in his new “eco-pesantren” pilot program, with the hope of broadening it to still hundreds more in the coming year.

Hatta said there are about 4 million students attending pesantrens, the world’s largest network of Islamic boarding schools, who could take what they learn back to their home towns.

“Indonesia is really the world leader in this area,” said Ali, adding that Islam generally trails other major religions in faith-based environmental initiatives.

At Ilmu Giri, the results of their environmentalist education have already begun to show.

Not long ago this hillside had been stripped bare by logging, which in turn gave way to a series of landslides that obliterated nearby villages.

“I remember the stories my parents told me about those landslides,” said Wardoyo, a young Ilmu Giri student who grew up here. “Now, Pak Nasruddin teaches us that if we have to cut down a tree, we must plant two more.”

Within several years of the school’s founding, the small farming community managed to “re-green” the entire hillside. Anshory’s students now plant thousands of trees every year.

<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/indonesia/091111/islam-environment-indonesia-green>

November 18, 2009

US evangelicals warm to climate change science in Capitol Hill campaign

The Guardian

Leading environmental scientists and evangelical Christians join forces to lobby senators in support of the climate bill

The handful of Senators trying to rustle up support for Obama's [energy and climate change legislation in Congress](#) could certainly do with some inspiration, or even divine intervention – so an initiative this week by scientists and evangelical leaders is especially timely.

Members of the two camps paired up in a campaign on Capitol Hill to lobby Senators to support the bill. Evangelicals are the bedrock of the Republican party and are often seen as sceptical of science, from global warming to evolution. So the initiative's core argument is: if evangelicals can find it in their hearts to support action on [climate change](#), why can't senators have a similar conversion?

As they began their rounds on Tuesday, Harry Reid, the Senate Majority leader, confirmed that a climate change bill would have to wait until next spring.

The delay suggests a further weakening of political will to cut America's greenhouse gas emissions, which Republicans and conservative Democrats say will deepen the economic recession.

But Richard Cizik, a former executive of the [National Association of Evangelicals](#), who is one of the leaders of the initiative, argues there is far broader support among religious communities for action on climate change that is widely understood. The younger generations especially are passionately concerned about the environment.

"These evangelicals have an intensity level that even some in the environmental community don't have. They believe this is their God-given calling," he said. "When you realise you have missed something – as I did when I had a conversion on these issues – you become like a new convert to the faith, a passionate activist."

For many, the connection between climate change and poverty in the developing world – a core issue for many churches – was crucial in forcing a rethink on climate change issues.

"There has been for some in this country a conflict between faith and religion and science and so climate change has been in certain ways a victim of the origins debate. Scientists believe in evolution, therefore I oppose evolution."

The Scientists and Evangelicals Initiative is an [effort to build bridges](#) on the climate change issue:

Ultimately, we believe that such collaboration will capture the imagination of people worldwide who will recognise the urgency of our concerns about the environment and be moved by our willingness to put aside whatever differences we may have to work together to protect it.

The idea of leading environmental scientists and evangelical Christians meeting and working together is initially often met with surprise and some anxiety as there are clear areas of disagreement between the two groups.

However, both groups have come to understand that the devastating effects of climate change and biodiversity loss disproportionately affect people who are poor and lack the financial resources to adapt to a changing climate. This is at the heart of our groups' shared sense of moral purpose.

Among the top targets of the evangelical-scientist lobbying effort is [Richard Lugar](#), the most senior Republican on the Senate foreign relations committee who said last week he could not vote for the current version of a climate change bill. "Senator Lugar we would hope would take a higher-profile leadership role," Cizik said. "We think there are ways to bring Republicans like Lugar on board." Lugar co-sponsored a senate briefing about the initiative with Senator John Kerry on Capitol Hill yesterday.

Other Republicans apparently are beyond redemption on the issue of climate change though. [Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma](#) has famously called global warming a "hoax". "I am not persuaded that Senator Inhofe will ever be convinced that the science of climate change is real and urgent," said Cizik.

Here is the list of evangelicals and scientists involved in this week's action:

- Eric Chivian, MD, founder and director of the Centre for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School. Shared the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. Named by Time in 2008 as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.
- James J McCarthy, PhD, Alexander Agassiz professor of biological oceanography at Harvard. Past president, American Association for the Advancement of Science. Former co-chair, Impacts Working Group, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- Nancy Knowlton, PhD, holder of the Sant Chair in marine science at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, and adjunct professor of marine biology, Scripps Institution of Oceanography.
- Thomas E Lovejoy, PhD, the first recipient of the newly created Heinz Centre biodiversity chair, who coined the term "biological diversity". Former chief biodiversity adviser to the president of the World Bank and assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.
- Paul R Epstein, MD, MPH, associate director of the Centre for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School. Adviser to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

- Richard Cizik, D Min, senior fellow at the United Nations Foundation, president of the group New Evangelicals, and former vice president for governmental affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Named by Time in 2008 as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.
- Gerald L Durley, PhD, an educator, psychologist, and motivational speaker, who is the pastor of the historic Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.
- Deborah Fikes, executive adviser to the World Evangelical Alliance. Board of directors and member of the Creation Care Advisory Team, NAE.
- Joel C Hunter D Min, senior pastor of Northland Church, a megachurch with a congregation of 12,000 in Orlando, Florida. Board of directors and chairman of the creation care advisory team, NAE.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2009/nov/18/evangelical-christians-climate-science>

November 19, 2009

Religious leaders join hands to address global warming, nuclear armament

Asian News International

New Delhi: Apprehending the threats posed by global warming and nuclear armament, religious leaders of different faiths on Thursday came together to voice their concern over these issues which, they said, were pushing the world to the path of destruction.

Addressing a conference on "Global Warming and Nuclear Disarmament" in the national capital, Swami Jayendra Saraswathi, the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt and Hazrat Maulana Imam Umair Ahmed Ilyasi, President of the All India Organisation of Imams of Mosques, highlighted the ill effects of nuclear armaments.

"Today, science is moving towards the path of destruction in the form of atomic power. In the ancient times, they used bow and arrow to destroy their enemies, but today due to science, the country is moving towards the path of destruction," Swami Jayendra Saraswathi said.

While, Hazrat Maulana Imam Umair Ahmed Ilyasi appealed to the world's religious leaders to fight the cause of global warming.

“Today, global warming has become such a threat that if all the religious leaders and citizens of the world do not come together to fight this, a day would come when all the beings on earth will come to an end. So, together we must take this forward,” Hazrat Ilyasi said.

The religious leaders of the world would undertake a world tour to spread awareness about global warming.

“We have started the initiative from India after which we will go to Vatican and from there we will go to Chief Rabbinate and from there Mecca and like this, leaders of all religious headquarters will go on a world tour. We will start the initiative from December 7 at the Copenhagen conference in Denmark,” Hazrat Maulana Imam Umair Ahmed Ilyasi informed.

Developing countries such as India and China are among the most threatened nations by climate change, but their huge populations means that they will still be heavily reliant on burning fossil fuels to try to lift millions of people out of poverty.

The U.N. Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that global warming could raise sea levels up to 58 centimeters and submerge low-lying islands by 2100. (ANI)

For more information on any ANI Service: email: ani@aniin.com or call us at our New Delhi News desk: 91-11-26189705, 91-11-26703000

http://www.aniin.com/v_Details.asp?StoryID=13273

November 19, 2009

British Envoy Tasks Religious Leaders On Climate Change

By Mohammed Aminu
All Africa Global Media

Sokoto — British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Mr Bob Dewar, yesterday challenged religious leaders and faith-based organisations in the country to raise awareness on the impact of climate change by ensuring that the environment is protected.

He also said scientists have estimated that climate change will cause catastrophic changes over the next 100 years while crop yields in Africa will decline by 50 percent by the year 2020, if no concrete action is taken to tackle the scourge.

Speaking at a lecture titled 'Climate Change and Faith' held at Usmanu Danfodio University , Sokoto, Dewar maintained that religious leaders have a strategic role to play in galvanising their

followers for action and educate them about climate change and its debilitating consequences on the environment.

"In Nigeria, religious leaders and followers have a moral responsibility in protecting the environment. Faith plays a critical role in every one's life, it unites Nigerians and faith leaders can have a material impact by ensuring that the environment is respected.

"Climate change is the single greatest challenge that the world is currently facing.

All religions believe in service to humanity, in actions that can help one's neighbour, thus in the presence of these difficulties, it becomes necessary that religious groups, civil societies and religious communities work together so that transformation can take place," he stated.

He lamented that the awareness on climate change is still very low in the country, pointing out that the poor are least responsible for the emissions but are largely punished and affected by global warming.

The British High Commissioner noted that people are really witnessing the consequences of climate change as rainfall patterns have become less predictable, while flooding and drought have increased to a very large extent.

Dewar revealed that the Sahel, which Nigeria is a key part, has been subject to the greatest drought that mankind has ever seen while farmlands and grazing reserves have been depleted, pointing out that climate change will endanger food production thereby leading to famine and starvation.

According to him, it was in view of the negative consequences that, the British government recently pledged to reduce carbon emissions in the United Kingdom by 80 percent by the year 2050.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200911190580.html>

November 20, 2009

Greek Orthodox: Utahns learning from 'Green Patriarch'

Bartholomew teaches rising generations to care for planet.

By Peggy Fletcher Stack
The Salt Lake Tribune

"To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin," says the gray-haired patriarch, staring into the camera. "For human beings to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, to contaminate the Earth's waters, its land, its air and its life -- all of these are sins."

As the black-robed religious figure speaks, two dozen or so youths at Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church in Holladay nod. They have come together on this Sunday afternoon to watch a new video about the worldwide leader of their faith, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who is becoming an international leader in the fight to preserve the planet.

Last month, Bartholomew, who has been dubbed the "Green Patriarch," spent more than two weeks in the United States, beginning in New Orleans with a symposium on religion, science and the environment. He also spoke on the banks of the Mississippi River, at Fordham, and at the United Nations and met with President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

It was part of his ongoing effort to bring together scientists, environmentalists, religious leaders and policymakers to work on what he sees as an impending ecological disaster.

The film follows him on his trips to the most ecologically threatened areas of the planet -- from Brazil's rain forests to the Baltic Sea, where the fish population has been severely depleted, to Greenland's melting glaciers.

In conjunction with his visit, Greek Orthodox youths nationwide, including in Utah, watched the 50-minute film. And they seemed to like what they saw.

"He is pretty cool," Michael Zoumudakis said. "I like how he walks instead of taking cars all the time."

The 69-year-old patriarch is an important role model for these young people, said the Rev. Michael Kouremetis, head priest of Utah's Greek Orthodox parish.

"I grew up among smokestacks and wouldn't hesitate to throw a McDonald's bag out the window. We had no environmental consciousness," Kouremetis said, addressing the kids. "Thank God for your generation."

Limited by Turkey

Bartholomew is the 270th leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which includes 300 million-plus believers worldwide and more than 2 million in the United States. While individual churches in each city and state are self-governed, they look to Bartholomew as the "first among equals," a leader believed to be in direct succession from the Apostle Andrew.

Beginning with the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, Constantinople, now Istanbul, has been the faith's world headquarters.

Since the 1920s, however, Istanbul has not been friendly territory for Christians. In that decade, the government expelled more than a million Orthodox Christians and stripped those remaining of their rights.

Only 3,000 Orthodox Christians live in Turkey today, where the Muslim-controlled government long ago confiscated nearly 94 percent of the church's property and closed down the church's only theological school. The leaders also have said that only Turkish nationals could hold the office of Ecumenical Patriarch.

Last year, members of Utah's Greek Orthodox Church persuaded the state's Legislature to issue a "human rights" resolution, urging Turkey to "grant the Ecumenical Patriarch appropriate international recognition, ecclesiastical succession and the right to train clergy of all nationalities." Other states passed similar resolutions.

In Turkey, only the patriarch is allowed to wear his black clerical robes in Istanbul's streets, Kouremetis said. All other priests and archbishops must wear suits.

Not long ago, Kouremetis was in Istanbul's St. Sophia's, which was once an Orthodox church, then a mosque and now a museum. The Utah priest felt moved to recite the Nicene Creed. Within a few minutes, two guards appeared at his side to escort him to a separate room and question him.

"It is against the law," they told him, "for Christians to pray in public."

Kid connection

Teens in jeans and hoodies at Prophet Elias glowed with pride Sunday at their activist leader.

"I am so pleased that our patriarch is talking about the environment rather than controversial issues such as abortion or gay marriage," Pilar Pappas said. "He could help unite people."

Andrew Katsohirakis added, "I feel proud that he makes efforts to include other religions."

Scientists long have been talking about the dangers of wrecking the environment, said Steven Katsohirakis, Andrew's brother. "Now he's making it a religious issue."

The young people agreed that even they could do a lot more -- like "greening" the popular Greek Festival.

They could give up the Styrofoam containers, use biodegradable implements, recycle water bottles and limit paper products.

"We need to do more," Pappas said. "We could all make a difference."

pstack@sltrib.com

About Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

» Born, Dimitrios Arhondonis, in 1940 on Island of Imvros (Gokceada).

- » Graduated in 1961 with highest honors from Theological School of Halki; named to the Holy Diaconate and received name Bartholomew.
- » Elected in 1991 as 270th Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch.
- » Proposed in 1992 to all Orthodox churches that every Sept. 1 be celebrated as a special day of prayer for the environment.
- » Co-sponsored the Peace and Tolerance Conference in Istanbul in 1994, bringing together Christians, Muslims and Jews.
- » Convened in 1995 first of seven symposiums to study the fate of waters, bringing together scientists, policymakers and religious leaders.
- » Established an Orthodox Archdiocese in Hong Kong in 1996, first official visit and presence in China since World War II.
- » Addressed Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2001 on "the contribution of religion to the establishment of peace."
- » Signed a joint statement with Pope John Paul II in 2002 protecting the environment.
- » Prayed in 2008 with Pope Benedict XVI in Sistine Chapel.
- » Met this month with President Barack Obama.

Source: www.patriarchate.org

http://www.sltrib.com/faith/ci_13826924

November 21, 2009

Bishops says climate change is spiritual matter

By Bishop William Chris Boerger
The Bellingham Herald

Extreme weather, rising sea levels, and drought are taking an awful toll on the poorest of people, while leaving no one unaffected. From Alaska to Georgia to Kenya, the bill for global warming pollution is coming due.

Scientists now predict that summer arctic sea ice may be completely gone within ten to twenty years. While frightening, that prediction may not mean a lot to those of us who live near the shores of Puget Sound.

My synod is very aware, however, what this means to a Lutheran community in Alaska. The tiny native village of Shishmaref on the Chuckchi Sea near Nome is being washed away, no longer protected by arctic sea ice. The permafrost on which it sits is melting because Earth's climate is warming.

This tiny community has been perched on the Bering Strait for generations, but now village leaders are making arrangements to move the entire community to a new location to escape the rising sea levels. Every house, church, and tiny business has to go somewhere else.

While Shishmaref is relocating inland because of rising sea levels, our brothers and sisters in the northeast of Kenya are starving from drought. Throughout human habitation in East Africa - which has been long indeed - the rains would fail occasionally. During the past 10 years, because of climate change, these droughts are increasing in frequency and severity. Living without enough water has caused famine and a life of despair. The gains that so many of us have worked on to alleviate poverty in the region are being lost to a warming and destabilized climate.

The Christian faith teaches us that what we do for the least among us we do for Jesus Himself. He is the poor man at the gate: Lazarus waiting to rise.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church supports strong climate protection legislation at the national level because the damage done by global warming pollution can only be resolved by government action. Recently, U.S. Senators Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and John Kerry, D-Mass., introduced a bill that sets limits on carbon pollution while paving the way for a healthy, clean American economy: The Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act. This important bill sets a strong target of 20 percent reductions in carbon pollution by 2020, and upholds the EPA's power to regulate dirty coal plants.

There is a lot to like about this bill. By putting a cap on carbon dioxide emissions, it will encourage American businesses to invest in clean technology. This cap means that we will limit the amount of smoke that can be dumped into the air, and that polluters will pay a price for the damage they do. This bill will also create family-wage green jobs in energy efficiency, like insulating and retrofitting buildings.

Right now, Washington state spends \$16 billion each year on imported fossil fuels. The Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act will support our local entrepreneurs to design renewable energy technology. Wouldn't it be better to spend those \$16 billion on wind turbines in Kittitas County or solar cells manufactured in Mt. Vernon?

It is a good moral choice when that which protects the poor and vulnerable from harm also protects our own economy and our own children.

There is no more time to study the issue; the damage is already upon the poorest among us, and will come to the wealthy nations soon enough.

The moral responsibility as people of God requires us to behave in ways that protect His Creation. I call on Washington Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell to work hard to pass

the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act this year. America can lead the world in setting limits on greenhouse gases that harm our atmosphere and climate while directing our future economic growth toward healthy and clean energy.

The great Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, realized that by standing in protection of the most vulnerable of Gods children we stand in protection of ourselves. He had the courage to speak out against Nazi atrocities when he could have easily looked away - and paid for it with his life.

By passing the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act this year, Senators Murray and Cantwell can care for Earth's climate and poorest people while insuring a clean and healthy future for our own children. We ask them to act on our behalf this year, and not to look away.

Chris Boerger is bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, based in Seattle.

<http://www.bellinghamherald.com/615/story/1166717.html>

November 30, 2009

Dalai Lama calls on governments to prioritize climate change as international summit looms

By Kristen Gelineau
Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — The world's leaders must prioritize the issue of global warming above all else, the Dalai Lama said Monday, adding that he feels encouraged by next month's climate change summit in Copenhagen.

The revered Buddhist figure and Nobel Peace Prize winner, in Australia for a series of lectures on universal responsibility and the environment, said politicians must focus their energy on finding a solution to climate change.

"Sometimes their number one importance is national interest, national economic interest, then global (warming) issue is sometimes second," he said during a news conference. "That I think should change. The global issue, it should be number one."

The Dalai Lama plans to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his Nobel Peace Prize in Australia on Dec. 10. He will present seeds he has blessed to attendees of his talks as a symbol of individuals' responsibility to act on climate change.

The 74-year-old Tibetan spiritual leader said he couldn't predict what the outcome of the United Nations summit would be, but was heartened by the very fact that it is being held.

"I think it's very, very encouraging," he said.

The Dalai Lama's trip to Australia comes as the nation's leaders remain locked in a bitter debate over the fate of a contentious bill aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions. Last week, several top opposition party officials resigned over their leader's support for the legislation.

Australia is one of the world's worst carbon dioxide polluters per capita because of its heavy reliance on its abundant coal reserves. As the driest continent after Antarctica, it is also considered one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has made climate change issues a priority of his leadership, and said he wants the legislation passed as an example to the world before the Copenhagen summit.

The government plan would institute a tax on industries' carbon emissions starting in 2011 and limit Australia's overall pollution. The government wants to slash Australia's emissions by up to 25 percent below 2000 levels by 2020 if the U.N. can agree on tough global targets at Copenhagen.

www.baltimoresun.com/news/nationworld/world/wire/sns-ap-climate-dalai-lama,0,5787193.story

December 1, 2009

The Road Back to Sustainable Living

By James Treat
Muscogee Nation News

Hundreds of American Indian and Alaska Native leaders gathered last month for the Native Peoples Native Homelands Climate Change Workshop.

Meeting ahead of the United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen, they hoped to exchange insights, discuss strategies, and add their voices to the increasingly heated debate over global warming.

The four-day workshop was organized around the theme "Indigenous Perspectives and Solutions," exploring both sides of our environmental crisis: how climate change is affecting native communities, and how native communities are addressing climate change.

Major funding came from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Nancy Maynard, director of NASA's Tribal College and University Project, welcomed participants by emphasizing the shared vision of space scientists and indigenous peoples who "see the earth as a unified, living system."

Other sponsors included some of the leading organizations in Indian country: the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, the National Congress of American Indians, the Intertribal Council on Utility Policy, the Indigenous Environmental Network, and Honor the Earth.

The workshop was hosted by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community at their Mystic Lake Casino Hotel near Minneapolis.

* * *

The program was packed with informative presentations on the many environmental challenges confronting native peoples and native homelands. Plenary addresses featured some of the leading climate scientists and indigenous environmentalists in North America.

Concurrent sessions on the first day addressed various topical issues: water resources, habitat restoration, community development, local economies, solar and wind energy, alternative fuels, and science education. On the second and third days, regional break-out sessions allowed participants to discuss climate change impacts and adaptations with their native neighbors.

Tribal college students from around the country were on hand to present their environmental research projects, many of which are supported by federal funding. The White House sent three representatives from the Council on Environmental Quality for an open-mic “listening session” that ran several hours overtime.

I’m happy to report that Mvskoke country was well represented at this important event.

The Climate Change Workshop was co-chaired by Dan Wildcat, a Yuchi citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation who teaches at Haskell Indian Nations University. Mia Torres, a Mvskoke student at Haskell, opened the proceedings on the first morning by singing the familiar hymn “Heleluyan Yvhikvres.”

Vicky Karhu, co-director of the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative, presented their work in an afternoon session on indigenous agriculture. Ben Yahola, MFSI’s other co-director, blessed one of the midday meals with a rousing invocation delivered in the Mvskoke language.

Ben also shared information about the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Green Government Initiative, which was enacted by the National Council on July 25 and authorized by Chief Ellis on August 5.

This new law is a vital first step on the road back to sustainable living in Mvskoke country. It’s encouraging to know that our elected leaders are ready to reclaim their role as one of America’s original green governments.

* * *

The workshop concluded with a discussion of the future of climate change in Indian country.

These concerns have been summarized in the Mystic Lake Declaration, which acknowledges that “all sovereigns must work together to adapt and take action on real solutions that will ensure our collective existence” on a warmer planet. “Unless our homelands are in a state of good health our peoples will not be truly healthy. This inseparable relationship must be respected for the sake of our future generations.”

In keeping with indigenous traditions, the emerging green economy must value life-enhancing activity, where “wealth is based not on monetary riches but rather on healthy relationships, relationships with each other and with all of the other natural elements and beings of creation.”

The Mystic Lake Declaration will be delivered to the Copenhagen summit in December: “We invite humanity to join with us to improve our collective human behavior so that we may develop a more sustainable world.” You can read the full text of this landmark document, and add your name to those who have endorsed it, by following the links at <http://portal3.aihec.org/sites/npnh/Pages/Default.aspx>

Let’s hope that world leaders will take action before it is too late.

<http://mvskokeycountry.wordpress.com/2009/12/01/december-2009/>

December 1, 2009

Kyoto’s ghost

Twelve years ago, it appeared the tide had turned on climate change. It hasn’t. Can Copenhagen accomplish what Kyoto couldn’t?

By David G. Hallman
The United Church Observer

The Kyoto Protocol could have and should have reduced the threat of human-induced climate change. It didn’t, and now its initial phase is about to expire. This month in Copenhagen, Denmark, the United Nations is hosting another climate change conference. The goal is to create a new treaty, a successor to Kyoto.

Even though the signs, to many, aren’t positive, we all need to pray that Copenhagen does better. As climate change grows more dire, and the hopes of the world are once again pinned on UN decision-makers, my memories go back 12 years to that now-famous gathering in Kyoto, Japan.

At 3 a.m. on Dec. 11, 1997, 12 hours past the planned adjournment time and after two weeks of conflict-ridden negotiations, the chair brought down his gavel. The Kyoto Protocol was a done deal. For the first time, the major polluting countries of the industrialized world had agreed to specific targets for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to human-induced climate change.

By that point, I was pretty bleary-eyed. As co-ordinator of the World Council of Churches' climate change program, I had not only been monitoring the 18-hour daily negotiations over the two weeks but also was the facilitator of our WCC delegation of representatives from around the world and one of the organizers of the numerous multi-faith events that we sponsored with Buddhist, Shinto, Christian and other religious partners in Japan.

The applause that erupted in the cavernous Kyoto Convention Centre at 3 a.m. was infectious. I think everyone, though sleep deprived, felt at that moment some real hope for the Earth, whether they were a UN official, a government negotiator, a journalist or one of the hundreds of representatives of non-governmental organizations, businesses and faith communities.

I'm retired and no longer co-ordinate the United Church's environment and energy activities nor head up the WCC's climate change program. So I won't be going to Copenhagen to participate in this December's crucial negotiations. But the World Council of Churches will be there in force. The churches' message is that securing a forceful treaty that can reduce the threat of climate change is urgent, made even more so by the failure of most wealthy nations to live up to their Kyoto commitments.

From the very beginning of the churches' work on climate change, we grounded our education and advocacy in the recognition that climate change is an issue of justice. Historically, rich nations have contributed far more to the problem than have poor nations. Further, poor countries will suffer more from the consequences of climate change largely because they lack the resources to help protect themselves and to adapt.

When the UN climate summit was held in 2003 in New Delhi, India, Nafisa D'Souza, an Indian member of the WCC's Working Group on Climate Change, organized a parallel conference of impoverished peoples from across the country. It was heart wrenching to listen to their testimonies of how climate change was already impacting their lives.

I've been encouraged over the years at how well the justice perspective has been acknowledged in the church. Ever since the early days of workshops in church basements, people seemed to understand instinctively when we talked about climate change as having major ethical dimensions.

The UN Climate Change Secretariat at the 1997 Kyoto Climate Summit asked me to address the plenary. I remember sitting up late into the night in my room preparing. I focused on the justice theme, arguing that "justice means being held responsible for one's actions . . . justice means being held accountable for promises you make . . . justice means being held responsible for the suffering you cause to others . . . justice means an equitable sharing of the Earth's resources."

Canada has failed in the global court of justice. The Canadian government agreed in Kyoto to reduce our domestic emissions of greenhouse gases by six percent from 1990 levels by the end of the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012. Since then, Canadian emissions have skyrocketed to about 30 percent higher than they were in 1990.

I've participated in many consultations in which representatives from various industries have argued that taking dramatic action to tackle climate change would devastate Canada's economy. But other industrialized countries, especially in Europe, have shown that substantial emission reductions are possible. Technical reports from Canadian organizations such as the Pembina Institute and the David Suzuki Foundation demonstrate that Canada can reduce emissions without sacrificing sustainable economic development.

Another issue in Copenhagen will be whether large developing countries such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico should be required to take on mandatory emission reduction targets like the industrialized nations. Here again the justice issue has bearing. On that last night of intense negotiations in Kyoto, I remember the head of the Indian delegation making the forceful argument that there is a big difference between the "luxury emissions" of the wealthy nations and the "survival emissions" of the poorer nations.

The majority of people in developing nations still live in abject poverty. These countries need to have the capacity to help raise their people's standard of living and provide the basic necessities of life.

The developing nations make a good case when they ask why they should take on mandatory targets when many of the richer industrialized countries have so far failed to meet even the modest goals that they agreed to in Kyoto.

Many Canadians seem prepared to make changes in their lifestyles. My experience is that people are open to asking the question, "What is enough?" I sense that the current tough economic times have not diminished this reflection. If anything, I see an accelerated shift of people's priorities away from consumerism and toward investments in relationships, community and nature.

Every country, whether rich or poor, can make a positive contribution to addressing climate change, and many developing nations are doing so already. Indeed, China and India are among the global leaders in renewable energy research and development.

The WCC Working Group on Climate Change that I facilitated for many years has always been a great forum for groundbreaking theological and conceptual analysis. In recent years, we have been working with environment and development organizations to explore concepts for addressing climate change in the context of global poverty. One such concept is called "greenhouse development rights" and proposes strategies for simultaneously addressing the climate change challenge and the development challenge.

A third issue that will figure prominently in Copenhagen is adaptation. Viewed from the justice perspective, wealthier societies, which bear the primary blame for precipitating human-induced climate change, have a moral responsibility to help the poorer nations adapt to the already-occurring and anticipated impacts of climate change.

Jesse Mugambi, a former professor of religion at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, has been a long-term member of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change. In a recent e-mail to me, he cited some of the impacts that Kenya is already experiencing. Drought is interspersed with

devastating storms and floods. Ice caps on Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro that have existed for centuries are now disappearing, thus eliminating the vital supply of water for agriculture, urban areas and hydroelectricity. “Global warming for us is not a theoretical issue for debate,” he wrote.

We should all pray that Copenhagen is a justice summit where the global community takes big steps to make up for the inadequate implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and to commit to much more aggressive strategies for dealing with the causes and impacts of climate change. It can be done, and the values and ethics that we bring as communities of faith are indispensable ingredients to a long-term solution.

http://www.ucobserver.org/ethics/2009/12/kyoto_ghost/

December 1, 2009

Hindus & Jews advocate inclusion of world religions in ambitious Copenhagen Climate Summit

Sampurn Media

Hindus and Jews have strongly criticized non-inclusion of world religious leaders in much-publicized and prestigious “COP 15—United Nations Climate Change Conference Copenhagen” starting December seven.

Rajan Zed, acclaimed Hindu statesman; and Rabbi Jonathan B. Freirich, prominent Jewish leader in Nevada and California in USA; in a joint statement in Nevada today, emphasized that for successful implementation at the grassroots level of environmental decisions coming out of this Conference, involvement of world religions and their leaders was extremely important.

Currently the Conference sessions are open to government representatives only with United Nations system bodies and accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs), inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and press as observers.

Without the blessings of leaders of various religions and denominations of the world, the high-flown and ambitious global agreements coming out of such conferences many times were practically reduced to “paper plans” and “sweet talk” in many parts of the world. Involve the faiths and give faith leaders a respectable role to play to achieve concrete results at the ground level and to see effective and smooth implementation of global climate agreements reached at this Conference, Zed and Freirich suggested.

Rajan Zed, who is the president of Universal Society of Hinduism, and Rabbi Jonathan Freirich, said that religion was the most powerful and far-reaching force in our society and could prove very influential in handling concerns like ecological responsibility. Faiths jointly coming out in support of the environment would be a remarkable signal, they added.

Senseless use of natural resources, extravagance, greed, etc., were some of the major causes of this ecological crisis and these could be effectively dealt with by world religions. Current trend of one percent increase in emissions every year, if left unchecked, would be catastrophic for the environment and humanity, Zed and Freirich warned.

Rajan Zed pointed out that ancient Hindu scriptures, especially *Atharva-Veda*, were highly respectful of mother nature.

Conference of the Parties (COP), Fifteenth session, of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held at Bella Center in Copenhagen (Denmark) from December 7-18, will enter into a binding global climate agreement applicable to period after 2012.

<http://www.newkerala.com/news/fullnews-2316.html>

December 2, 2009

Canadian church-based group says Ottawa cut its funding for foreign projects

By John Cotter
The Canadian Press

TORONTO - A Canadian church-based group that does human rights and environmental sustainability work says the federal government has cancelled its funding for overseas projects without warning or reason.

Kairos, an ecumenical social justice group representing 11 different churches and organizations, said the decision by the Canadian International Development Agency will force it to stop operating in troubled areas such as Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, central America and the West Bank.

"We are disheartened that this long-standing relationship and decades of support by the Canadian government has ended," said Mary Corkery, Kairos' executive director.

"Kairos and the millions of Canadians we represent through our member churches and organizations do not understand why these cuts have been made."

Corkery said a CIDA official called Kairos on Monday afternoon to say the group's application for \$7 million to cover its overseas costs until 2013 would not be granted. When she asked why, Corkery said the official told her that Kairos no longer fit within CIDA's priorities.

Kairos and earlier church groups have been receiving federal money for such overseas work since 1973.

"It is just shocking that after such a long relationship an organization of the size and scope of Kairos wouldn't have more than that phone call," she said.

Later this week, a Kairos delegation is to travel to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen to help lobby for an agreement that would include cuts to greenhouse gas emissions.

Last May, a Kairos delegation of church leaders toured Alberta's oilsands region to see how the projects are affecting aboriginal people and to help determine if they are environmentally sustainable.

The delegation included leaders from the Anglican, Christian Reformed, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian and United churches, as well as representatives from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

At the time the group said it planned to share its impressions with their congregations, reach a consensus position and present it to the federal government as early as this fall.

The group met separately with officials from the four main federal parties in Ottawa last week and called for greater action on climate change and for a halt to new oilsands projects.

"We basically told our concerns about climate change and we thought it would be important for Canada to be represented (in Copenhagen)," she said.

"In terms of the oilsands, we asked for a halt for new approvals. Not to stop anything that is happening, but that there would be a halt to new approvals."

Last year Kairos published a position paper that questioned the amount of taxes Ottawa allows the oilsands industry to defer on the capital cost of projects.

Corkery would not speculate on whether these activities and policy positions had soured the group's relationship with the Harper government. She said Kairos wants to know what it did wrong.

"Why did you cut us? That's the question. We need them to put it on the table."

Corkery said Kairos would issue a news release later Wednesday and its members churches and groups were also preparing to make statements.

Officials at CIDA and International Minister Beverley Oda's office were not immediately available for comment.

http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=cp_hf5hr5a4d89&show_article=1&catnum=2

December 3, 2009

Vatican delegation to join UN climate change conference

By Gustavo Solis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The Vatican's delegation to the U.N. climate summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, was being headed by an experienced diplomat and included experts on the environment.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations, was to lead the five-person Vatican delegation at the Copenhagen conference, Vatican Radio reported. Archbishop Migliore was scheduled to speak to the UN during the Dec. 7-18 conference.

The delegation included climate expert Marcus Wandinger, who has published numerous articles on environmental issues, and an official of the Vatican Secretariat of State, Paolo Conversi, who teaches human ecology at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University.

Caritas Internationalis, the umbrella organization for more than 150 Catholic charities, also will be represented at the climate summit. Caritas and the Catholic International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity have called for a "fair, effective and binding agreement in Copenhagen" that is based on several essential criteria:

-- A commitment by developed countries to pledge at least \$195 billion in public financing per year by 2020 to help developing countries adapt to climate change.

-- An international commitment to keep global warming well below 2 degrees C (about 3.6 degrees F), and to reach a peak in greenhouse gas emissions in the period 2013-2017.

-- Agreement by developed countries to a greenhouse gas emissions target of more than 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, to be reached mainly by domestic emission reductions.

-- That Copenhagen outcomes be legally binding and enforceable.

The two Catholic charity organizations represented other Catholic agencies campaigning for a new deal on climate change. Caritas is bringing bishops and other representatives from 25 countries to encourage governments to seize the "once-in-a-generation chance to save the human family from a future of climate chaos."

Archbishop Migliore spoke to the U.N. General Assembly about climate change last November. He said a new global strategy must seek long-term solutions and help alleviate poverty by giving special attention to developing countries.

In the speech he warned against fostering short-term economic growth without regard to the environment, saying "we should not burden future generations with our overstated energy consumption."

December 4, 2009

World religious leaders to gather December 7th to mobilize on climate change

Global Peace Initiative of Women
Press Release

New York, NY - A multi-faith delegation of key religious and spiritual leaders from around the world will gather in Copenhagen, Denmark from December 7-13, 2009 during the UN COP-15 Summit. The delegation's goal is to deepen the conversation on climate change by recognizing that this environmental crisis is rooted in a profound moral and spiritual crisis.

The key message of the religious leaders will be the need to bring climate change action to the grassroots. They see their role as helping the public understand the moral and spiritual issues at stake and inspiring them to make changes in their lives. The religious leaders will call for a new global partnership between political, economic, scientific and spiritual leaders to strengthen efforts to implement the framework put in place during the conference. They will call upon all sectors of society to work for the strongest possible plan of action, and they will share plans for mobilizing their communities back home. Many of the religious leaders are calling for a shift in attitude toward the earth, citing the importance of renewing the understanding of our role as "stewards" of earth's resources.

The multi-faith delegation includes Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Indigenous leaders. Included are religious and spiritual leaders from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Denmark, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Senegal, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam. The largest delegation will be from the United States, and it will be led by the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, former General Secretary of the National Council of Churches and one of the founders of the Religious Partnership for the Environment.

The religious leaders will participate in a series of workshops including "A New Partnership between Science and Religion," "Sacred Activism – Mobilizing Spiritual Communities to Address Climate Change" and the "Moral Dimensions of Climate Change." During the discussions, religious leaders will lay out specific steps that individuals can take to help shift the way we relate to earth's resources. One action that will be presented is a more mindful consumption of meat. According to a recent report from the Worldwatch Institute, the meat industry emits more carbon into the atmosphere than the entire global transportation system. It is also a major emitter of methane, which is a greater contributor to climate change than is carbon dioxide.

The delegation of religious leaders is being organized by the Global Peace Initiative of Women, an international, multi-faith network of women religious and spiritual leaders. Most of the funding for the program has come from the Japanese lay Buddhist organization, ITRI.

“Governments alone will not be able to address the problem,” says Dena Merriam, founder and convener of GPIW. “This is the first such global crisis that demands a response from each one of us. Much will depend on the individual. We must change not only our carbon habits but the way we think and relate to the Earth. We must come again into a caring relationship with the life forces that sustain us. Nature can heal itself, but will we help or hinder that healing process? That is the question.”

Global Peace Initiative of Women

The Global Peace Initiative of Women is a New York-based nonprofit with a network of over 5,000 women and men in over 30 countries. Since its founding in 2002 at the United Nations in Geneva, GPIW has been working in many of the world’s conflict areas, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel/Palestine and Sudan, bringing women spiritual leaders to these regions to support peace dialogues. Based on the premise that to resolve deep conflicts, spiritual resources are needed to supplement and support political and economic efforts, GPIW’s network of spiritual leaders will continue this work to address some of the underlying causes that block resolutions to long-term conflict. For more information, please go to <http://www.gpiw.org/copenhagen.html>.

<http://www.shambhalasun.com/sunspace/?p=13341>

December 4, 2009

Britain's chief rabbi calls for environmental Sabbath ahead of climate talks

By Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's chief rabbi has called for a Sabbath devoted to the environment ahead of the climate talks due to be held next week in Copenhagen.

Jonathan Sacks says he wants the Sabbath beginning Friday night to be focused on environmental issues and has asked Jews across the U.K. to pray for sustainable habits of consumption and energy use.

The 61-year-old rabbi says he realizes that there are disagreements over climate change but that "there are some risks you just don't take ... and one is the risk of endangering the very viability of life on earth."

The rabbi spoke as world leaders prepare to meet on reducing emissions at an upcoming U.N. summit in Denmark, which begins Monday.

<http://www.wgntv.com/news/nationworld/sns-ap-eu-britain-green-sabbath,0,3177211.story>

December 6, 2009

Religious groups active in climate debate

By Brian Winter
USA Today

COPENHAGEN — Sunday started like any other day for Sister Joan Brown — with a period of prayer and meditation just before dawn at her home in [Albuquerque](#).

Then, instead of going to Mass, the [Franciscan](#) sister boarded a plane to [Copenhagen](#). When she arrives Monday, she'll join 20,000 other attendees at a [United Nations](#) summit on climate change, where she hopes to persuade leaders including President Obama to reach a worldwide agreement to cut pollution levels.

"Many people can't afford to make this trip," says Brown, who is using frequent flier miles and staying with a Danish family to cut costs. "But all our voices are needed, and this is one small way I can speak to the greatest moral and spiritual issue of our time."

FAITH & REASON: [What's a good citizen to do?](#)

She will be among numerous preachers, rabbis, ministers and other faith-based figures who are bringing a spiritual presence — and, often, a strong point of view on the political issues — to Copenhagen. At a time when political leaders are struggling to pass environmental legislation in the USA and elsewhere, in large part because of the potential economic costs, U.N. Secretary-General [Ban Ki Moon](#) says religious leaders "can have the largest, widest and deepest reach" when it comes to influencing the outcome of the summit.

The main goal in Copenhagen is to forge a long-range global deal to cut emissions of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide, which climate data suggest is causing the Earth to warm. Representatives of 192 countries will attend, including Obama, who plans to arrive next week.

So how does Brown, an ecology minister in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, plan to make her voice stand out? For starters, she and a crowd of supporters held a candlelight vigil before her departure and wrote letters to New Mexico's U.S. senators, expressing concern over climate change.

Once she's in Copenhagen, she'll blog. And she'll do her best to navigate the dizzying two weeks of conferences, side events, parties and concerts that will make Copenhagen seem almost like the [Woodstock](#) of the environmental movement.

"I'm going to speak the truth to the delegates there, and try to educate people back here," she says. "It's our obligation for posterity to leave a world that exudes the beauty of the Creator for future generations."

COPENHAGEN: [U.N. optimistic about climate pact](#)

FORUM: [Share your climate summit predictions](#)

GRAPHIC: [How global warming occurs](#)

Other religious leaders in Copenhagen will include [Rowan Williams](#), the Archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual head of the Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion; [Richard Cizik](#), a former vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Jim Ball, head of the Evangelical Environmental Network; South African cleric and Nobel Peace Prize winner [Desmond Tutu](#); and representatives from the National Council of Churches (NCC), which encompasses more than 100,000 Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical and other congregations with 45 million members across the USA.

In all, as many as 100 religiously affiliated representatives from the USA plan to attend the summit, estimates Tyler Edgar, assistant director for the environmental arm of the NCC. Worldwide, she says that number will likely run "in the hundreds."

There is a wide range of views among — and within — different faiths as to the fundamental questions in the environmental debate: to what extent climate change is occurring, whether human activity is responsible for it, and what, if anything, should be done as a result.

Some are actively pushing against Copenhagen's agenda.

E. Calvin Breisner, a founder of the Cornwall Alliance, a coalition of clergy, scientists and academics, says recent data show the human role in causing global warming is minimal or non-existent. Religious figures who say otherwise, without a full background in science and economics, "risk an abuse of their moral authority," Breisner says.

Edgar, who also is traveling to Copenhagen, sees things differently. Broadly speaking, America's religious communities have shed their long-standing suspicion of the environmental cause "as that hippie, tree-hugging thing," she says.

In the past three years or so, many have rallied behind the belief that "we are all called upon to protect God's creation and God's people" by acting to stop climate change, Edgar says.

It's unclear whether such lobbying will be able to overcome a rough couple of months for the green cause.

In Copenhagen, Obama plans to present a goal of cutting U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 by about 17% compared to levels in 2005. But to make good on that target, he'll need the Senate to pass an energy bill next year over the objections of many [Republicans](#), who say it could result in dramatically higher energy costs for businesses and consumers. The legislation has been stalled for months.

Then there's the "Climategate" controversy, in which hackers recently obtained and published e-mails exchanged among prominent scientists who say the Earth is warming. Sen. [James Inhofe](#), R-Okla., is seeking congressional hearings into whether the e-mails show the scientists deliberately censored opposing views, and manipulated data in order to exaggerate their claims.

If anyone can help move the debate, it's faith-based leaders, says Sen. [Joe Lieberman](#), I-Conn.

"This is a very religious country. God the Creator still does better in polls than any politician," says Lieberman, who backs legislation to mandate lower carbon emissions. He says he first began to embrace the environmental cause 20 years ago because of his own spiritual beliefs.

Lieberman, who is Jewish and has deep ties with evangelicals, says religious leaders and constituents could still help swing some Senate votes, especially among Republicans. "This helps put the issue in the broader context ... of exercising our responsibility to protect God's creation ... and that helps us," he says.

'A profound moral issue'

Ball, who arrives in Copenhagen on Friday, says he plans to spend most of his time "hanging out in the hallways" of the Bella Center conference hall, where international delegates will be negotiating a deal. He'll be looking to speak with senior Obama administration officials and members of Congress.

Ball's pet cause is a proposal for rich countries, including the USA, to send poorer countries money — at least \$10 billion a year will be needed, the U.N.'s Ban says. The funds would help the countries overhaul their economies to pollute less, and cope with possible consequences of climate change such as lower agricultural yields, or rising seas that could devastate island nations.

"Our role is to remind (politicians) that this is a profound moral issue, and that the basic moral teachings of religion apply to these environmental problems," Ball says.

Such talk is relatively new. It wasn't long ago that, broadly speaking, religious and environmental groups were at odds — an echo of the age-old tension between religion and science, exacerbated by the Bill Clinton-era culture wars of the 1990s. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, a New Jersey-based group, cites two recent turning points — the 2006 release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, the environmental movie featuring former vice president [Al Gore](#), and the devastating impact the previous year of Hurricane Katrina, which [Gore](#) and others argue was made more deadly by warmer ocean water.

"When religious communities see human beings, particularly poor human beings, getting whacked like that, it's a real wake-up call," Harper says. "People saw the humanitarian side of this issue in a way they'd never seen before."

The debate is playing out worldwide. Last month, Harper attended a summit called "Many Heavens, One Earth" at [Britain's](#) Windsor Castle that sought to rally global religious leaders ahead of Copenhagen. The conference brought together leaders from nine major faiths — Bahai Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shinto and Sikhism.

The power vested in those groups is enormous. Together, the world's churches and other faith groups control 7% to 8% of the world's habitable land, are involved in more than half of all

schools, and hold more than 7% of global financial investments, according to the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, the British group that organized the Windsor conference.

That explains why religious groups are uniquely positioned to not only influence the political debate, but also be an active part of environmental solutions, says Olav Kjørven, an assistant secretary-general at the U.N. who was at Windsor. He says religious institutions can use their influence to promote investment in industries that emit less carbon, support education on environmental issues in schools, and make places of worship more environmentally friendly.

"We hope to spread that message to Copenhagen," Kjørven says. "The faiths are ready to move on these issues."

Concerns about cost

There are others in the religious community who believe the proposals on the table at Copenhagen would hurt, rather than help, the world's poor.

Breisner, a theologian, says "efforts to control future temperatures by reduced use of fossil fuels would cost trillions of dollars, condemning future generations in poor countries to abject poverty."

Sen. Inhofe says that efforts to bring churches into the "liberal environmental lobby" are failing, at least in his home state.

"I can't find one pastor of an evangelical church who isn't fired up on my side of the issue," Inhofe says.

Indeed, recent polls suggest some of the public urgency on the issue is fading. A survey completed in October — before the "Climategate" scandal broke — by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press found that 65% of Americans believe that global warming is a "serious" or "very serious" issue, down from 73% in April 2008.

That's still a majority, says Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist at Texas Tech University and co-author of *A Climate for Change*, which examines the global warming debate, and potential solutions, from a faith-based perspective. She says a better understanding of science has compelled senior religious leaders to join the environmental cause, even if some within their own congregations remain unconvinced.

"If you look at the heads of all major denominations — even Southern Baptists — you'll see that there's a real movement toward acknowledging the role that human activity is playing in climate change," she says.

Byron Johnson, director of the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University, says there is evidence of a generational split on environmental issues among Evangelicals.

In a recent poll, his institute found that 73% of young Evangelicals agree with the statement that "Global climate change will have disastrous effects" — compared to 59% of older Evangelicals.

That's no big surprise, Inhofe says. "These young ones, their entire lives, all they've heard is that global warming doctrine," he says, shaking his head.

"The schools are just filling their heads with this issue."

The political debate

Sen. [Sam Brownback](#), R-Kan., says he has been "touched" by the role that religious leaders are playing in the environmental debate — and says they may help forge some kind of middle ground.

Brownback says he is not fully convinced that man-made climate change is occurring, but welcomes "prudent" steps recommended by some religious leaders to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

"I think their premise is right," Brownback says. "The question becomes: How do you tackle the issue?"

He ruled out passage of the energy bill that passed the House last spring, saying it would damage the economy — a stance echoed by Inhofe and many other Senate Republicans.

Brownback says he prefers a focus on innovative technology that he says could be just as effective in reducing greenhouse gases.

The White House — as well as governments in the [European Union](#), China and much of the developing world — says anti-pollution efforts will be insufficient unless they set firm targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Whatever happens, people of faith around the world will be watching closely, says Mary Dickey, a spokeswoman for Odyssey Networks, a media organization that is sending a three-person video crew to Copenhagen to cover religious implications of the debate.

"You wouldn't believe how passionate people are about this," Dickey says.

"Faith leaders are going to be a big part of the debate at Copenhagen, and beyond."

http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2009-12-06-climate_N.htm

December 7, 2009

Hindu Declaration on Climate Change

Hindu Press International

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, December 8, 2009: Melbourne's Parliament of the World's Religions is proving to be the most influential of modern times, and the widest ever. Hindus have shown unity and extraordinary leadership releasing today the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change, marking a definitive stance of Hinduism as a religion that is aware of humankind's role and responsibilities in Earth's ecosystem.

The Declaration was read out at the finale of the Convocation of Hindu Spiritual Leaders, a meeting of Hindu Leaders open to the public. The Hindu Convocation was the first of its kind. Then, all present chanted AUM to acknowledge their assent.

The room resonated with the oldest of all mantras echoing in support of the Declaration. Our team reports it as a historic moment, a meeting of globalization and tradition, a confluence of Hinduism's timeless reverence and gratitude for the environment merging into a new global awareness.

Leaders Present Included Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati, Swami Avdheshanand Giri Ji Maharaj, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Sri Swami Mayatitananda Saraswati, Sri Karunamayi Vijayeswari Devi, Dada J.P. Vaswani, Dadi Janki, Sri Paramahansa Prajnanananda Giri, Swami Amarananda, Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji, Yogini Sri Chandra Kali Prasada Mataji, Swami Sandeep Chaitanya and others. Karan Singh, who was not present, also endorsed the Declaration and participated in its creation.

Presented for Consideration to the Convocation of Hindu Spiritual Leaders

Parliament of the World's Religions, Melbourne, Australia, December 8, 2009

Earth, in which the seas, the rivers and many waters lie, from which arise foods and fields of grain, abode to all that breathes and moves, may She confer on us Her finest yield. (Bhumi Suktam, Atharva Veda xii.1.3)

The Hindu tradition understands that man is not separate from nature, that we are linked by spiritual, psychological and physical bonds with the elements around us. Knowing that the Divine is present everywhere and in all things, Hindus strive to do no harm. We hold a deep reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space—as well as all the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are bound to each other within life's cosmic web.

Our beloved Earth, so touchingly looked upon as the Universal Mother, has nurtured mankind through millions of years of growth and evolution. Now centuries of rapacious exploitation of the planet have caught up with us, and a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option. It is a matter of survival. We cannot continue to destroy nature without also

destroying ourselves. The dire problems besetting our world—war, disease, poverty and hunger—will all be magnified many fold by the predicted impacts of climate change.

The nations of the world have yet to agree upon a plan to ameliorate man's contribution to this complex change. This is largely due to powerful forces in some nations which oppose any such attempt, challenging the very concept that unnatural climate change is occurring. Hindus everywhere should work toward an international consensus. Humanity's very survival depends upon our capacity to make a major transition of consciousness, equal in significance to earlier transitions from nomadic to agricultural, agricultural to industrial and industrial to technological. We must transit to complementarity in place of competition, convergence in place of conflict, holism in place of hedonism, optimization in place of maximization. We must, in short, move rapidly toward a global consciousness that replaces the present fractured and fragmented consciousness of the human race.

Mahatma Gandhi urged, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." If alive today, he would call upon Hindus to set the example, to change our lifestyle, to simplify our needs and restrain our desires. As one sixth of the human family, Hindus can have a tremendous impact. We can and should take the lead in Earth-friendly living, personal frugality, lower power consumption, alternative energy, sustainable food production and vegetarianism, as well as in evolving technologies that positively address our shared plight.

Hindus recognize that it may be too late to avert drastic climate change. Thus, in the spirit of vasudhaiva kutumbakam, "the whole world is one family," Hindus encourage the world to be prepared to respond with compassion to such calamitous challenges as population displacement, food and water shortage, catastrophic weather and rampant disease.

<http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/xpress/hindu-press-international/2009/12/07/hindu-declaration-on-climate-change/>

December 7, 2009

Church bells to ring climate alarm as faith joins science in Denmark

By Peter Kenny
Ecumenical News International

Geneva - When church bells start ringing in Copenhagen, and all around the world, on Dec. 13, they will not be heralding an early arrival of Christmas. Rather they will peal out a call to action and prayer to respond to impending climate change.

More than 100 world political leaders, as well as faith leaders and supporters of action to deal with climate change, are converging on the Danish capital. There a crucial United Nations meeting began on Dec. 7 to set the international agenda on climate, so that the city can live with the nickname of "Hopenhagen" that it has been given by one group of campaigners.

On Dec. 13 before participating in a climate change service, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu and activists from around the world will present a global petition to Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The event is organized by the global Countdown to Copenhagen Campaign, which includes church-related development organizations, partner groups in the Global South and the World Council of Churches, in cooperation with Hopenhagen, the name of the campaign.

Representatives of nearly 200 nations will look to powerful countries to pave the way for rules and action to deal with climate change, and there to cajole and persuade the leaders will be thousands of representatives of advocacy groups.

Mingling and working with many of the activist groups will be representatives of major faiths, including bishops, imams, rabbis and priests. During the 11 days there will be workshops, services and protests.

Churches will chime in with their main attempt to awaken the world about the need to look after the planet, by sounding their bells or other instruments 350 times at 3 p.m. wherever they are.

The 350 chimes represent the parts per million that mark what many scientists say is the safe upper limit for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Groups that include the Open Sanctuary at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Tilba Tilba, Australia, the Lutheran congregation in Sibiu, Romania, and Kairos, an ecumenical organization in Canada, are to participate.

Some are linking the climate action with their traditional Advent celebrations, that precede the celebration of the birth of Jesus around Dec. 25. The Evangelical Lutheran Epiphany Church in Hamburg, Germany, is to invite children to draw stars of hope while the bells will be rung and 350 drum beats will be sounded ahead of the congregation's Advent concert.

As each group starts their own observation of the Dec. 13 event at 3 p.m. local time, a chain of chimes and prayers will be stretching in a time-line from the South Pacific where the day first begins and where the effects of climate change are already felt, across the globe to Denmark and beyond.

"In some countries, the question has been raised whether churches have the right to use their bells for what may be considered to be a political campaign," said Guillermo Kerber, the World Council of Churches program executive on climate change. "Those who support the campaign see the care of creation and of people's lives and livelihoods threatened by climate change more as an ethical and spiritual issue that, of course, has political implications, not in a partisan sense but referring to the common good."

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Nov. 3 told leaders from the world's major faiths at a meeting near London that they occupy a "unique position" in discussion on the fate of the planet, and that their communities count on this crucial issue.

In a speech at a three-day conference on faiths and the environment organized by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation and the United Nations Development Programme at Windsor Castle near London, Ban spoke before around 200 leaders representing nine of the world's major religious communities.

"The world's great faith communities occupy a unique position in discussion on the fate of our planet and the accelerating impacts of climate change. You are the leaders who have the largest, widest and deepest reach," Ban said. "You can inspire, you can provoke, you can challenge your leaders, through your wisdom, through your followers."

Ban noted, "Together the major faiths have established, run or contribute to more than half of all schools worldwide. You are the third largest category of investors in the world. You produce more weekly magazines and newspapers than all the secular press in the European Union. Your potential impact is enormous." And Ban added: "You can - and do - inspire people to change."

Ban said, "Science has made it quite clear - plainly clear - that this climate change is happening and accelerating much, much faster than one realizes."

One delegation of world religious leaders, led by the U.S.-based Global Peace Initiative of Women, will travel to the Copenhagen meeting to discuss how the religious community can mobilize action against climate change.

They will participate in a series of workshops, including "A new partnership between science and religion," "Sacred activism - mobilizing spiritual communities to address climate change," and the "Moral dimensions of climate change."

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/81808_117571_ENG_HTM.htm

December 8, 2009

Inter-religious Forum Calls for Nuclear Abolition

By Neena Bhandari
Inter Press Service

MELBOURNE - For the global religious community, the use of nuclear arms is an overwhelmingly important ethical issue for the human family. Thus, nothing less than the immediate abolition of such weapons is needed from the highest levels, said speakers at the Parliament of the World's Religions currently underway in this Australian city.

The Parliament, considered the world's biggest inter-religious gathering, brings together people of various faiths to tackle issues relating to peace, diversity and sustainability. It opened on Dec. 3 and runs until Dec. 9 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Its theme, 'Make a World of Difference: Hearing each other, Healing the earth', reflects the urgent need for religious and civil society groups to act on crucial issues threatening the world's survival, nuclear arms being one of them.

Considered the most significant human-made destructive force on the planet, nuclear devices pose a spiritual as well as existential threat to humanity, participants said.

"The time for us to act decisively is now," said Dr Sue Wareham, immediate past president of the Medical Association for Prevention of War in Australia, and Australian Board Member of the international campaign to abolish Nuclear weapons (ICAN).

Noting that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) will have its five- yearly review in May 2010, Wareham said, "Progress towards nuclear disarmament will be critical at this meeting if we are to prevent further spread of the weapons, which should no longer be seen as status symbols or legitimate military weapons, but rather they should be seen for what they are — illegal and inhumane instruments of terror."

ICAN's goal is the adoption of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, a treaty to prohibit the development, testing, production, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons.

"Such a treaty is feasible and necessary," Wareham said during the session on 'The necessity of nuclear disarmament and steps toward its achievement'. "It is about reclaiming the right of every person to live free from fear of nuclear holocaust. This is a human rights, environmental, economic, health, political and security issue and above all it is an ethical issue."

In June, the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon stressed that nuclear disarmament is "the most urgent political problem" that the world faces. In September, the first ever U.N. Security Council Summit on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament resolved to "create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons in accordance with the goals of the Non-Proliferation Treaty".

Many civil society organisations around the world have galvanised to ensure that the 2010 NPT review sees real progress.

"We need a massive global uprising against nuclear weapons as was done to abolish slavery, to save humanity from annihilation," said Ibrahim Ramey, director of the Human and Civil Rights Division at Muslim American Society (MAS) Freedom Foundation in Washington, D.C.

MAS Freedom has adopted the support of global nuclear abolition as one of the 12 points of its national (United States) legislative agenda for 2008-2012. "In light of the revelation of the Quran and the need to affirm the most positive of Muslim social values, we must demand the abolition of nuclear weapons, and the conversion of massive nuclear (and conventional) military spending

into resources for social uplift and the sustaining of human life," Ramey said.

In 2008, the United States spent some 52.4 billion U.S. dollars for the maintenance of its nuclear arsenal while more than 37 million Americans live in poverty and nearly 50 million live without health insurance.

"Relatively new nuclear weapons states like India and Pakistan are both immersed in great levels of persistent poverty and insecurity while they devote scarce resources to building dangerous and unsustainable nuclear arsenals that can never be used without the certainty of inevitable mutual annihilation," Ramey pointed out.

Ramey called on the global community to get involved in networks pushing for nuclear abolition and put pressure on national governments to support the NPT. He said Article 6 of the treaty specifically compels the nuclear weapons signatory states to enter into negotiation for the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons.

He likewise urged nations to encourage bilateral declarations of "no first use" by states parties to global conflicts, especially in the ongoing hostilities and disagreements between Israel and Iran, and India and Pakistan.

In the U.S., Ramey said, "We are calling for an executive order by President Barack Obama to de-alert U.S. nuclear forces by separating nuclear warheads from strategic missile delivery systems, thus reducing the danger of an accidental nuclear launch against potential adversaries."

He said people of all faiths and non-faith must support organisations like Soka Gakkai International (SGI) in their efforts to intensify the campaign against nuclear arms. In 2007 SGI launched its "People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition" initiative to rouse public opinion and help create a global grassroots network of people dedicated to abolishing nuclear weapons.

The Tokyo-based SGI, a Buddhist association with over 12 million members in 192 countries and one of the world's longstanding advocates of nuclear disarmament, has intensified its global campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The campaign, which began in 1957, has picked up steam following President Obama's public declaration that the "United States (the only country to launch a military strike with nuclear weapons) will take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons." "While we need states and governments to take responsible action to reduce the nuclear threat, civil society clearly has an important role to play," said Hirotsugu Terasaki, SGI's executive director of the office of peace affairs in Tokyo.

"In an ultimate sense, nuclear arms are product of and made possible by a particular form of human egotism—the self-centredness that is ready to sacrifice others in order to protect our own interests or society. Unless we uncover and disarm this aspect of the human heart, a genuine and enduring solution to this threat of nuclear arms will not be possible," Terasaki added.

At the heart of the SGI's nuclear abolition efforts is the desire to appeal to people's better nature and to restore confidence in the power of dialogue. Terasaki argued that "the logic of states and their competing interests would lead to the conclusion that the possession of such weapons

enhances a state's security position." Yet civil society "refuted this logic, stressing the injustice of weapons that harm non-combatants more than soldiers and continue to do so long after a conflict has officially ended."

Various religious communities, like SGI, have engaged in an extensive range of grassroots activities, petition drives, and developed educational tools, including volumes of nuclear survivors' testimonies, DVDs and publications showing what individuals can do to mobilise public opinion for global nuclear disarmament.

Speaking on 'Nuclear Weapons Abolition: Response and Advocacy by Religious Communities', Kimiaki Kawai, program director for Peace Affairs at SGI, expressed belief that "the initiatives for nuclear abolition should not be driven by passive, negative emotions such as fear or guilt." Instead, they should become "a positive endeavour to build a culture of peace motivated by human conscience and high moral concerns."

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=49579>

December 8, 2009

US religious groups urge strong action to reduce greenhouse gases

The National Religious Coalition on Creation Care
Press Release

Copenhagen, Denmark - As the climate summit opens in Copenhagen, a coalition of religious organizations will present a collection of statements to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon urging strong action to reduce greenhouse gases. This will emphasize that climate change is a moral and ethical issue because it deals with lifestyle issues and choices that all people must face.

Major U.S. religious organizations over the past several years have issued numerous statements about the threats posed by changes caused by humans to the world's climate. Roman Catholics, Jews, Mainline Protestants and most Evangelicals are united in seeing spiritual implications to the problems represented by human actions.

Speaking on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, from Washington, DC, declared, "climate change is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem." Catholic bishops are very concerned and they will be promoting a new Climate Covenant. They will take the message on the seriousness of climate change to every Catholic parish in America.

Cardinal McCarrick's statement reflects the position of Pope Benedict XVI who has spoken repeatedly about the climate problem. "Attention to climate change is a matter of grave importance for the entire human family," said Pope Benedict XVI before a gathering in Saint Peter's Square.

Rabbi Warren Stone, representing the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care (NRCCC), and also serving as the environmental chair for the Central Conference of American Rabbis, declared, "Our religious traditions compel us to act boldly for justice. This is something we all share in common and it is a shared source of strength and inspiration upon which we must draw. There is no one fixed or easy answer. Now is the time to act."

Rabbi Stone will present these statements to the Office of Secretary Ban Ki-Moon and urge him to press for rapid and bold action to address the rising levels of greenhouse gases.

The Rev. Michael Livingston, president of the National Council of Churches, observed that "While not all of us agree on much," the churches within the NCC "do agree on the need to protect God's creation. It has become clear that global warming will have devastating impact on those in poverty around the world."

The Rev. Owen Owens, past chair of the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group and co-chair for the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care, emphasized the importance of addressing climate change. "This is one of the most serious issues society faces." The way each person lives is at the root of the problem. "Pursuing a wise and responsible lifestyle becomes a moral and ethical issue on which churches have a responsibility to speak." This, he explained, is why every major religious organization has a statement on climate change and calls for strong action to hold off this threat to the future welfare of our planet.

Dr. Thomas English, Creation Care Educator of the Presbyterian Church (USA), from San Diego, Calif., states that the midrange predictions of global warming will result in mass extinctions of plants and animals by the end of the century. These extinctions will profoundly disrupt the food web for people over the entire Earth. This unprecedented collapse of food supply will lead to a collapse of the economic system of many countries. People will attempt to ease their suffering by migration to other countries. Global migration will increase international tensions causing nations to war with one another. The apocalyptic disruptions would undoubtedly lead to thermonuclear warfare. This catastrophe can be avoided by the world's leaders taking action now to halt the increases of greenhouse gases.

Evangelicals too have addressed the climate problem, although with a less consistent voice. Three years ago, 86 top U.S. evangelical Christian leaders launched the Evangelical Climate Initiative, which calls upon all Christians to push for legislation to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The Rev. Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, says that global warming is also a social justice issue. He added, "Climate changes, in terms of famine, in terms of the inability to grow crops, in terms of the flooding of islands, most affects the poor.... So we here in America probably can do many things to exempt ourselves from the immediate consequences, but the front edge of disaster is most going to affect those who have the least."

Anderson is one of the evangelical leaders who challenged the Bush administration on global warming. As a signatory to the "Evangelical Call to Action" (on climate change), he argues that there's no real scientific debate about the dangers of climate change. The group is

calling on the government to act urgently by, among other things, passing federal legislation to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Mrs. Connie Hanson, an evangelical Presbyterian and president of Christians Caring for Creation, in Pasadena, California, urged strong action by those in Copenhagen. "Climate change is already disrupting the lives of many people and it is threatening many of God's precious creatures, often the most vulnerable of the Lord's children."

The Rev. Richard Cizik, former vice president for the National Association of Evangelicals, estimates that about 84 percent of evangelicals already support mandatory limits on greenhouse gases. He has said that this is not a matter of political persuasion so much as "moral leadership."

Eastern Orthodox Christians are also concerned about climate change. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has convened a series of international symposia to study environmental problems generally and climate change specifically. His findings have led him to declare that climate change is "a profoundly moral and spiritual problem." "We paternally urge every person to realize their responsibility and to do whatever they can to avert the increase of the earth's temperature."

Following the lead of Patriarch Bartholomew, the Rev. John Chryssavgis, from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, says that there is no longer room for negotiating with nature. "At the Copenhagen Summit, we must assume courageous initiatives in our attitudes toward the treatment of the earth's resources and assume generous leadership in supporting the burden of the poor."

Rabbi Warren Stone, who serves as co-chair for the NRCCC, observed that Copenhagen will serve as a stage for the next step in the world's response to climate change. "We are called by our religious traditions to serve as a bold voice for justice. Climate change will have a dramatic impact on hundreds of millions of the poorest people on our planet, especially those who live in coastal areas.

"In Judaism there is a profound and powerful mandate for caring for the Earth. In a world where matters of faith often seem to divide us, there is no issue which aligns us more deeply than our shared dependence upon this tiny planet.

"It is our moral responsibility to the world community," continued Rabbi Stone, "to take decisive action now! A treaty and legislation, though helpful, will not be enough. We need to change our way of life toward sustainability. Religious communities understand the importance of spiritual values as guiding our choices. We need to shift the way we live toward more sustainability. Our common future demands nothing less. Now is the time for a cultural shift in our way of living."

Statements in the packets for delegates, assembled by the new national religious coalition, will represent the positions of Mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, Jews, Southern Baptists, Eastern Orthodox Christians and United Methodists, among others, all of

whom have strong statements regarding the importance of action to hold off climate change.

This press advisory was assembled by Warren Stone in Washington, Fred Krueger in San Francisco, and Jim Davidson in St. Paul, with Margaret Bullitt-Jonas in Amherst, Mass., Connie Hanson in Los Angeles, and Tom English in San Diego.

For press contact or further information, please contact Frederick Krueger at (707) 573-3161.

http://news.nsw.uca.org.au/2009/US-religious-groups-urge-strong-action_08-12-09.htm

December 9, 2009

Copenhagen 1943 and Copenhagen UN 2009

By Rabbi Warren Stone
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Sixty-six years ago, on October 2, 1943, when Jews were celebrating the High Holidays, Hitler ordered the arrest and deportation of Denmark's 8,000 Jews. Danish Christian citizens were outraged and courageously rescued almost the entire Jewish population. In an act of collective resistance, the Danes ferried their fellow Jewish citizens on small boats across the sea to safety in Sweden. Over 99% of Danish Jews survived the Holocaust.

Thirty years ago, I went to the bank of the waters where Jews were rescued by Danes who transported them by sea from the Danish Island of Zealand over the Oresund Straits into Sweden. The moment brought tears to my eyes, particularly after traveling throughout Europe, visiting the camps and feeling acutely the demise of European Jewry.

Today just one day before the world Jewish celebration of Chanukah I returned to the port and remembered the story of the rescue of Danish Jewry. I gave an interview to Denmark's most popular Sunday radio station equivalent to our NPR thanking the Danish people for this act in 1943 and for their sponsoring the COP15 talks. Denmark has been a visionary leader in environmental activism. Today I will take a boat with UN delegates to visit one of their major wind farms. I will also take a moment in reflection and prayer to remember this gravely challenging time in our Jewish history and the courage of the Danish Christians in rescuing the Danish Jews.

During the UN COP, 15 climate talks will be held in the country which displayed such courage on our behalf. So, too, today, may the UN representatives and the many thousands attending the alternative Klimaforum in Copenhagen take the lead to collectively shout out the need for the world's rescue against the potential calamity of climate change. As Jews light the Chanukah candles may they symbolize our our world effort and hopeful vision to create a low carbon future for humanity.

Rabbi Warren Stone is co-chair of the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care and founding chair of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Committee on the Environment. Rabbi Warren Stone serves as rabbi of Temple Emanuel in Kensington, Maryland. He is representing the Reform Jewish Movement at the Copenhagen Climate Talks. This post originally appeared at RJ.org and is reprinted with permission. Read more of our blog posts from and about COP 15 [here](#).

http://blogs.rj.org/rac/2009/12/copenhagen_1943_and_copenhagen_1.html

December 9, 2009

Stormwater solution: Rain gardens green a church parking lot

By Pamela Wood
The Christian Science Monitor

A church parking lot sent runoff into a nearby creek. Now it contains rain gardens to absorb and treat the stormwater.

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — When Gerald Winegrad was a kid, he played baseball on grassy fields behind St. Mary's Catholic Church and School in downtown Annapolis. Over the years, as the church congregation and school enrollment grew, those grounds were paved over and turned into parking lots. Those parking lots serve as a highway for rainwater, sending it rushing into nearby Spa Creek, where it deposits chemicals, nutrients, and sediment and fouls the water.

Now there's been effort to undo some of that damage. With a grant from the state government, a partnership installed nine rain gardens to absorb and treat the stormwater.

"This is hopefully just the beginning," says Anne Guillette, of Pasadena-based Low Impact Design Studio, who drew up the plans for the rain gardens.

Curbs were cut away to direct water into the scooped-out areas, which were filled with water-loving plants. The rain gardens allow the stormwater to percolate gradually into the groundwater, just as it did before the area was paved over.

"They will capture the runoff," says Mr. Winegrad, a former state senator who heads the St. Mary's environmental stewardship committee.

The work was largely being paid for with a \$104,000 grant from the state's Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund. Initially called the "green fund," the fund is a pot of money for on-the-ground pollution-control projects.

The church also kicked in at least \$5,000, besides volunteer labor. Students at the school water and maintain the plants.

The parking lot at St. Mary's was identified as a potential project during a study of the creek watershed that was commissioned by the Spa Creek Conservancy. It's large and therefore sends a significant amount of pollution to the creek.

Volunteers with the conservancy worked on the project with the St. Mary's environment committee, the Redemptorists who own the land, and the folks who operate the historic Charles Carroll House next door, where one of the rain gardens will be located.

There also were additional layers of approval because of the site's historic nature. Another complicating factor was that the church needed to make sure no parking spaces would be lost in the project.

Shepherding the project through all the approvals was Spa Creek Conservancy volunteer Mel Wilkins. He says that in urban cities and towns like Annapolis, doing these kind of "retrofits" is the best way to help the environment.

The project at St. Mary's is one of several retrofits coordinated by Spa Creek Conservancy volunteers. Heritage Baptist Church on Forest Driver already has rain gardens, and projects are in the works with The Rockfish restaurant in Eastport and the St. Anne's Parish House up the street from St. Mary's.

Editor's note: For more on gardening, see the Monitor's [main gardening page](#), which offers articles on many gardening topics. Also, check out our [blog archive](#) and our [RSS feed](#). You may want to visit [Gardening With the Monitor on Flickr](#). Take part in [the discussions](#) and get answers to your gardening questions. If you join the group (it's free), you can upload your garden photos and enter our contests.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Gardening/2009/1209/stormwater-solution-rain-gardens-green-a-church-parking-lot>

December 10, 2009

Matt Frei's diary: Evangelical and environmental?

By Matt Frei
BBC News

Washington - If the green movement truly wants to convert America it needs to convert more evangelical Christians. Let me explain.

According to a BBC News/Harris Poll, the number of Americans who worry that carbon emissions are slowly heating our planet like a lobster pot has actually declined in the last eight years by 25%.

Despite Hurricane Katrina, which rang alarm bells about the connection between climate change and menacing weather, Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* and a photo album of environmental horrors from melting ice caps to rising sea levels to receding glaciers, fewer Americans are convinced today that the planet is in peril because of human behaviour.

Global warming has cooled off alarmingly on the list of priorities.

'Miserable hoax'

Climate Gate - the brouhaha over some scientists padding some of their evidence - has been seized on by the usual suspects like Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma, who is prouder than ever to call global warming a miserable hoax.

But it is also fanning the embers of scepticism. Even the New York Times said it was a disaster at the very time when the Copenhagen summit should at least take the science for granted if not the politics.

In Europe, the environmental lobby has for long been part of the mainstream of course.

In Germany, the Green party has helped to further its agenda by making or breaking coalition governments.

Indeed, its agenda has been stolen by the more established political parties.

In Britain, the opposition Tories are now sounding greener than the governing Labour party.

In Europe, the colour green doesn't need to justify itself.

Alternative arguments

Not so here. As a result America has been adept at coming up with alternative arguments why limiting the amount of carbon we spew into the atmosphere is a good idea.

There is the economic argument of green jobs, touted - among others - by the Obama administration.

There is the national pride argument: "We can't let the Chinese invent, produce and sell something that we as the world's most powerful and innovative economy should call our own."

There is the national security argument. "Even if you hate tree-huggers, you do agree - don't you? - that America should wean itself off Middle East oil and thus become less beholden to the very dictators who are fuelling hatred of their most needy client.

There is the geopolitical argument: why depend on a commodity that makes the likes of Hugo Chavez, Vladimir Putin and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad more powerful?

They're all sound but clearly none of them have convinced the great American public in sufficient numbers.

The poison of partisan politics and the culture wars are largely to blame.

Bridging the divide

I interviewed a lumberjack from Wisconsin this week who virtually admitted to me that he would be in favour of carbon caps and preserving the forest he had spent a career cutting down if the climate change crowd weren't also in favour of gay marriage and abortion.

In America, the planet has fallen into the cracks created by a bitterly divided political landscape.

It is time to bring God into the debate.

In recent years, He has become conflicted in America between driving a Prius and driving a gas guzzler.

The evangelical movement is split between those conservative Christians who suspect that climate change is an evil secular plot, concocted by the devil, Al Gore and "the global government crowd" - in the words of Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher - and those who passionately believe that good Christians need to be good custodians of the planet.

Two years ago I went to Liberty University in Virginia, the home of the late Jerry Falwell and asked a lecture room full of students if they believed in the threat of global warming. Not a single hand went up.

I travelled up the road to the Eastern Mennonite College at Harrisonburg and asked a similar number of Christian students the same question. Almost every hand shot up.

Green pastor

This week, I spoke to Pastor Tri Robinson from the Vineyard Church in Boise, Idaho, who described to me his journey from scepticism to conviction about the need to tackle climate change via the Bible.

This is a growing trend inside the evangelical movement.

Pastor Tri described himself as both a "tree-hugger and a social conservative".

He is against abortion and for caps on carbon emissions. And he prays that he won't have to choose between the two at the next election.

But that is exactly what awaits him because for now there is no prominent conservative politician on the horizon who is, to put it bluntly, both pro-life and pro-planet.

Remember how the last Republican convention was electrified by the call to "drill baby drill"?

Pastor Tri and his flock are looking for a political home.

The candidate who is able to give them one, who can straddle the divide between social conservatism and environmental activism, who can recruit God in the service of the planet, is onto a winner.

Matt Frei is the presenter of [BBC World News America](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/world_news_america/8405108.stm) which airs every weekday on BBC News, BBC World News and BBC America (for viewers outside the UK only). And you can hear Matt present Americana on and the every week.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/world_news_america/8405108.stm

December 13, 2009

A religious perspective on climate change

By Stephen Scharper
The Star

Long before Al Gore blazed an inconvenient trail into our collective moral imagination, and two decades before the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, United Church of Canada theologian David Hallman was clanging the tocsin of climate change, often to an indifferent public.

As the World Council of Churches point-person on global warming, Hallman could often be seen at environmental gatherings, from church basements to UN summits, reusable coffee mug attached to his belt, reporting on the work of climate scientists and stitching together the World Council of Churches' interests in justice, peace and "the integrity of creation."

Hallman was among the vanguard in an international Christian movement that spoke out against not only the devastating ecological impacts of climate change, but also its impact on many of the world's poorest and most marginalized peoples, from Bangladesh to Nunavut.

These "bioneering" faithful spoke a different language than the scientists and policy-makers they engaged in climate change conversations. They spoke of the Earth, not as a resource, but as home, perceiving our planet's ecosystems as a divine gift, rather than merely a profitable commodity. Building upon the insights of recently deceased Roman Catholic priest and "geologian" Thomas Berry, these ecologically sensitive faith spokespersons viewed the universe not as a "a collection of objects" to be bought, sold, used and discarded, but as a "communion of subjects."

This Sunday, the alarm bell sounded by David Hallman and the WCC nearly three decades ago will be joined by myriad church bells in Copenhagen and across Canada at 3 p.m., to coincide with an ecumenical service at the COP15 climate change colloquy. Churches throughout Copenhagen and the world, it is hoped will ring their bells 350 times, in recognition of the 350 parts per million of carbon in our atmosphere deemed acceptable by climatologists. Until 200 years ago, these scientists argue, the atmosphere pumped along with 275 ppm, but today we stand at 390 ppm, and it is getting rather warm in here.

This clarion gesture is a further example of how religious traditions are reinventing and reshaping older ritual forms to deal with our present ecological challenge; in this case, combining the empirical and the empyrean, the hard science of climate change with the sonorous sacral richness of ecclesial bells.

What these actions denote is that climate change is not only a question of science, to be remedied by technological innovation, but a profoundly moral and spiritual crisis, in which the most affluent and industrialized nations are helping render the lands of the poorest on the planet uninhabitable.

The weight of suffering involved in climate change falls ponderously upon the poor. The Maldives islands, for example, are almost completely subsumed by rising seas, and in Bangladesh, around 1 million are displaced every year by flooding, with an impoverished government unable to provide new housing, leading to a surge in homelessness that parallels the rise of the oceans. Moreover, the majority of Bangladeshis live on land less than 10 meters above sea level, and 35 million live in coastal areas. If nothing is done to delimit climate change, these people are in grave danger of losing their homes and their livelihoods.

And that is not all. With a sea level crescendo of 40 centimetres, which the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says is likely in this century, the number of people in coastal areas who could potentially be flooded out of their homes is 94 million, 60 million of whom live in Southeast Asia.

As Christian ethicist Michael Northcott states in his hard-hitting study, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Climate Change*, "global warming is the Earth's judgment on the global market empire, and on the heedless consumption it fosters."

What these religious voices are observing is that the climate crisis runs along the same fault lines of social, economic and political oppression, and it is to the seamless garment of social and ecological concerns that they should turn their rituals, prayer, advocacy and activism.

David Hallman and others in these movements have kept faith in Kyoto, even when Canada's political leadership has not. Their religious traditions, at least theoretically, are subject to a

higher authority than popular opinion and moneyed interests. Their cycles generally are long-term, rather than simply the next election, and in many of their traditions there is a particular concern for the poor and marginalized. It is traditions such as these that can be heard amidst the tolling of church bells from Copenhagen to Canada, the sounds of those who, thankfully, unite their faith with the fate of the Earth.

Stephen Scharper is attending the COP15 meetings in Copenhagen on behalf of the University of Toronto's Centre for Environment.

<http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/737870>

December 13, 2009

Archbishop of Canterbury says fear hinders climate change battle

By Riazat Butt
The Guardian

Rowan Williams tells Copenhagen service corporations and governments are afraid to make choices to bring real change

People are so paralysed by fear and selfishness they cannot save the planet, the archbishop of Canterbury said on Sunday during a church service in Copenhagen.

[Rowan Williams](#) was preaching in the Danish capital as crucial UN [climate change](#) talks entered their second and final week.

He said that fear paralysed individuals, corporations and governments from making the choices needed to affect real and lasting change.

"We are afraid because we don't know how we can survive without the comforts of our existing lifestyle. We are afraid that new policies will be unpopular with a national electorate. We are afraid that younger and more vigorous economies will take advantage of us – or we are afraid that older, historically dominant economies will use the excuse of ecological responsibility to deny us our proper and just development."

Yesterday church bells in Denmark and other countries rang 350 times to represent the figure many scientists believe is a safe level of carbon dioxide in the air: 350 parts per million.

Joining Williams at Copenhagen's Lutheran cathedral was Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and religious leaders from Tuvalu, Zambia, Mexico and Greenland. Williams, who led the ecumenical service, said a paralysing sense of fear and selfishness would deny future generations a "stable, productive and balanced world to live in" and instead give them a world of "utterly

chaotic and disruptive change, of devastation and desertification, of biological impoverishment and degradation."

There was even a sense that people were not frightened enough by this apocalyptic vision and cautioned against this approach, saying it would "drive out one sickness with another."

"It can make us feel that the problem is too great and we may as well pull up the bedclothes and wait for disaster. It can tempt us to blaming one another or waiting for someone else to make the first move," he added.

But humans were not "doomed to carry on in a downward spiral of the greedy, addictive, loveless behaviour" that had brought mankind to this crisis and he urged people to scrutinise their lifestyles and policies and how these demonstrated care for creation. He called on people to consider what a sustainable and healthy relationship with the world would look like.

His message for conference delegates centred on trusting each other in a world of limited resources. "How shall we build international institutions that make sure that resources get where they are needed – that 'green taxes' will deliver more security for the disadvantaged, that transitions in economic patterns will not weigh most heavily on those least equipped to cope?"

Williams has had a busy few weeks: railing against the UK government for its religious illiteracy, condemning proposed anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda, grappling with fresh dissent in the Anglican Communion and travelling to the landmark environment summit. In an interview with Channel 4 News last Saturday Williams warned that there were no "quick solutions" to global warming and said that there was a finite amount that individuals could do to make a difference.

He said: "I don't think there are any quick solutions, any absolutes here, but I think these are the sorts of issues about energy use particularly, whether it's travel or domestically, that have to be really up in front of our minds."

Foreign holidays were not an "easy call, frankly" while he decreed that everyone should use public transport as much as possible while at the very least enquire about ecologically sustainable travel.

He said that high-energy consuming vehicles in a city where there were alternatives were an irresponsible way of dealing with the crisis.

"We use a hybrid car for that reason as my official car in London. I'm also coming back from Copenhagen by train on this occasion rather than flying," he added.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/dec/13/archbishop-canterbury-copenhagen-service>

December 14, 2009

Faith Groups Build Giant Ark on National Mall

By Michelle A. Vu
Christian Post

WASHINGTON – A diverse group of religious people unveiled a giant ark on the National Mall Saturday to press world leaders in Copenhagen to create a strong, binding proposal to tackle climate change.

Organizers say the 19-foot-high ark is a warning that if world leaders do not come up with a strong plan to deal with the climate change problem, then the ark might very well be how individuals will have to live in the future.

“While a ‘Real Deal’ is ‘Climate Plan A,’ the ark depicts ‘Climate Plan B’ and the lack of current options for a fair, ambitious, and binding deal coming out of Copenhagen,” reported Avaaz.org and Faithful America, the two groups that organized Saturday’s vigil.

Speakers at the unveiling spoke about how their religious communities are helping to raise awareness about the climate change issue and how rising sea levels are forcing thousands of island dwellers to abandon their home and become refugees.

“We have no more time,” said Kim Huynh, who emphasized that the Polynesian island nation of Tuvalu on which she was born is at risk of be submerged under rising sea levels. The tiny Pacific island nation has already seen parts of its coastline disappear under the ocean, forcing some of its citizens to become climate refugees.

“How will President Obama deal with the [climate] refugee crisis?” Huynh asked as she called for U.S. lawmakers to support binding cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and help finance climate adaptation for developing countries.

The Rev. Derrick Harkins of Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, meanwhile, said people of faith – both liberal and conservative – believe that creation is a gift from the creator. The Bible, Harkins said, tells believers that God blesses mankind with the creation but that we also need to be good stewards of the gift.

“We are on the brink of crisis,” Harkins said, emphasizing what the ark represents. “Millions of people are already victims of climate change.”

Following Harkins’ remarks, people wrote on the ark a message of what they hope will come out of the climate talks in Copenhagen, where national government delegations who agreed to shape an ambitious international response to climate change in 2007 have been meeting to agree on a post-2012 climate agreement that will replace the current Kyoto Protocol.

Afterwards, people gathered in front of the ark for a candlelight vigil.

The ark event in D.C. was one of some 3,000 simultaneous candlelight vigils in over 130 countries calling for a “real deal” in Copenhagen.

In the city hosting the climate talk, religious leaders also gathered for a candlelight vigil Saturday evening.

Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu said at the Copenhagen vigil, “We have just one world and we want to live in a beautiful world.”

The next day, Sunday, Tutu handed over to Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, over half a million signatures for climate justice. The signatures were collected by the Countdown to Copenhagen campaign, a coalition of ecumenical development and humanitarian aid organizations.

“For the sake of your children, of your grandchildren, care for this one world we have... Let us have a legally enforceable deal, not a political deal,” said Tutu at a media conference Sunday.

Tutu and other religious leaders called for an agreement in which developed nations commit to reducing their 1990 carbon dioxide emission levels by 40 percent by 2020 and by 80 percent by 2050. Developed countries should also contribute \$150 billion per year to assist developing nations to reduce their carbon emissions and adapt to the consequences of climate change, they urged.

But not everyone at the Copenhagen conference agrees that a binding proposal limiting carbon emissions is urgently needed. Some people believe that while humans are mostly to blame for climate change, the effects are not as devastating as mainstream scientists claim. Rather, the global warming witnessed could be caused naturally by changes such as alternations in the Earth’s orbit and solar energy and solar wind output.

Some scientists even claim that increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is not having a negative effect on the earth.

Despite ongoing debate over the existence and cause of global warming, the Christian community largely agrees that people have a responsibility to care for God’s creation and, even in America, there is more support than opposition for a policy to set limits on carbon emissions.

According to the Pew Research Center, 57 percent of Americans said that there is solid evidence that global temperatures are rising while 33 percent said they don’t believe that there is solid evidence.

And while only 56 percent of global warming believers say humans are to blame for climate change, half of Americans overall favor setting limits on carbon emissions and making companies pay for their emissions, even if this may lead to higher energy prices. Thirty-nine percent, meanwhile, oppose imposing limits on carbon emissions under these circumstances.

The U.N. climate conference, which has drawn participants from 192 countries representing governments, the business community, and civil society, began on Dec. 7 and will end this Friday.

Approximately 15,000 are taking part in the summit.

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20091214/faith-groups-build-giant-ark-on-national-mall/>

December 14, 2009

Copenhagen unites Anglicans hoping to combat climate change

By Matthew Davies
Episcopal News Service

As church bells rang throughout the world Dec. 13 to mark Christianity's commitment to combating climate change, Anglican leaders were making their voices heard about global warming in Copenhagen, Denmark.

[The United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) Dec. 7-18 in the Danish capital welcomed world and faith leaders, including Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Both spoke at a Dec. 13 ecumenical worship service in Church of Our Lady, Copenhagen's Lutheran cathedral, about the religious imperative to cut carbon emissions and save the planet from further environmental degradation.

At the same time, church bells tolled 350 times around the world to symbolize the 350 parts per million that many scientists say mark the safe upper limit for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

"We cannot show the right kind of love for our fellow humans unless we also work at keeping the earth as a place that is a secure home for all people and for future generations," said Williams in his sermon at the cathedral service, attended by other religious leaders, members of the Danish royal family and Denmark's Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen.

"[A]sk how the policies you follow and the lifestyle that you take for granted look in the light of the command to love the world you inhabit," Williams said. "Ask what would be a healthy and sustainable relationship with this world, a relationship that would in some way manifest both joy in and respect for the earth. Start with the positive question – how do we show that we love God's creation?"

A visible commitment

On Dec. 12, about 100,000 campaigners braved the cold weather to join a four-mile march through the streets of Copenhagen for climate justice.

Speaking to Christian Aid during the march, Williams said he had come to Copenhagen because "it is important for faith communities to be visible; it's important for the leaders of faith communities to be visible ... The world isn't ours. The world is something we're part of – we don't own it."

The issues being addressed in Copenhagen are also about justice, Williams said. "Climate change weighs most heavily on those least powerful, least advantaged in the world. There's a clear imperative there."

Williams told an indigenous Ecuadorean farmer that her voice and the voices of the world's poor were critical to achieving a strong climate deal for the most vulnerable communities, according to a press release from Progressio, an international organization that lobbies the world's decision-makers to change policies that keep people poor.

Fabiola Quishpe, 42, who spends much of her time farming in her rural village high in the Ecuadorean Andes, is noticing the effects of a changing climate in her community.

"It's very important to hear your voice directly," Williams told Quishpe.

People like Quishpe "are the people who carry the consequences of our decisions," Williams said. "Very often, they pay for what we've done. Therefore, to hear their voices is a way of letting those without power have access to some of those who do have power and are making the decisions."

Petitioning for justice

On Dec. 13, Tutu handed more than half a million signatures calling for climate justice to Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

A delegation of concerned leaders from around the Anglican Communion was led by the Rev. Jeff Gollhofer, program associate for the environment and sustainable development in the Office of the Anglican Observer at the United Nations. Drawn primarily from the Global South, the delegation included Eliud Njeru Njiru of Kenya, a member of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, and the Rev. Grace Kaiso, general secretary of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa.

Representation from the developing world is critical because of the disproportionate impact of climate change, Golliher explained. "We need to be sure that we have the whole world's voice, because the solution ... needs to include them. They should be equal partners."

Also traveling to Copenhagen was a portfolio of statements from faith groups collected by the National Religious Coalition for Creation Care. Rabbi Warren Stone, coalition co-chair, planned to present the statements to the office of U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. Statements in the delegates' packets represent the hopes for action of a wide range of Christian and Jewish groups.

Other Episcopal leaders in environmental ministry expressed hope that the United States delegation would "demonstrate a willingness to push the envelope on the commitment we will make" as the Rev. Fletcher Harper of Green Faith, an interfaith education and action organization, put it.

"I hope that the U.S., which among all the nations on earth on this issue has been so recalcitrant for so long, will demonstrate a new moral resolve with the help of our president," said the Rev. Benjamin Webb, director of the Center for Regenerative Society in Cedar Falls, Iowa. "The whole world yearns to hear and see such leadership from America."

-- Matthew Davies is editor and international correspondent of the Episcopal News Service. The Rev. Phina Borgeson contributed to this story.

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79901_117774_ENG_HTM.htm

December 15, 2009

Ecological protection fits well with core Catholic values

Irish Times

RITE & REASON: THE LIKELIHOOD of a climate change deal at Copenhagen is, unfortunately, receding mainly because neither the US nor China is willing to make the required cuts. While President Barack Obama has agreed to attend, the US offer to reduce carbon emissions by 17 per cent on 2005 figures by 2020 is derisory, writes Fr Sean McDonagh.

Chinese premier Wen Jiabao promised China would reduce its carbon intensity by 45 per cent by 2020. All that this means is that China's carbon emission will not grow as fast as the economy.

Unless the US and China agree to cut emissions significantly, the goal of keeping the global temperature rise below two degrees will not be achieved. Achim Steiner, of the UN Environment Programme, has said the costs to humanity and the planet of failing to reach an agreement at

Copenhagen would be “extremely high”. In a letter to The Times, 11-year-old Joseph Baverstock-Poppy put it more graphically and poignantly: “I am 11 years old and when I am 31 my house will probably be flooded and the quality of my life ruined . . . Politicians must achieve something in Copenhagen that works and helps my generation – the future. We all need to do something now before it is too late.”

UN secretary general Ban-Ki moon has pleaded with religious leaders to lobby governments to set high targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions; to contribute generously to the Adaptation Fund that was set up to help poor countries adapt to environmental changes; and to make clean technology available to poor nations.

In this light, the publication of *The Cry of the Earth*, the Irish bishops’ pastoral reflection on climate change, is timely. It calls on the Government to support a treaty which includes a 25-40 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions and the provision of money for the Adaptation Fund.

The reflections in *The Cry of the Earth* are grounded in solid Catholic theology. While many believers are familiar with the call to good stewardship of creation in the Bible, and especially in *Genesis 2:15*, many would not be aware of the rich theology of creation in Catholic belief.

In *The Cry of the Earth*, the bishops focus on creation as the work of the Trinity. In the Incarnation, Christians believe God entered into the material world in the person of Jesus. In preaching about the coming of the Kingdom of God, Jesus envisaged a world where peace, justice and harmony would reign. The bishops insist human wellbeing must not be achieved at the expense of plundering ecosystems. Furthermore, in the resurrection of Christ, all matter is transformed and taken up into the life of the Trinity. This is the wellspring of Christian hope in the face of the ecological crisis. But while hope is a gift, it also calls for committed action.

The bishops propose: 1. setting up groups to study the document; 2. calling Catholics to support Trócaire’s Climate Change Campaign; 3. an environmental audit of Catholic parishes; 4. joining with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (ctbi.org.uk); 5. enrolling Catholic parishes in eco-congregations (ecocongregation.org); and 6. promoting “Creation Time”. This will involve devoting the four or five Sundays each year before the feast of St Francis to celebrating the Earth as a sacred planet filled with God’s vibrant presence.

Such collaborative ministry has the potential to revitalise the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Fr Seán McDonagh is a Columban priest, author and environmental activist

<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2009/1215/1224260710693.html>

December 15, 2009

Rich nations must assume environmental duties: pope

By Philip Pulella
Reuters

VATICAN CITY - Industrialized nations must recognize their responsibility for the environmental crisis, shed their consumerism and embrace more sober lifestyles, Pope Benedict said on Tuesday.

The pope's call for more environmental commitments came in his message for the Roman Catholic Church's annual World Day of Peace, to be marked on Jan 1 and whose theme is "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation."

The message is traditionally sent to heads of state, government and international organizations and its importance this year is more significant because its release coincided with the U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen.

"It is important to acknowledge that among the causes of the present ecological crisis is the historical responsibility of the industrialized countries," he said in the message.

While saying that developing countries "are not exempt from their own responsibilities with regard to creation," and had a duty to gradually adopt effective environmental measures, the bulk of his criticism was aimed at rich nations.

Speaking of the need for all nations to address the issue of energy resources, he said:

"This means that technologically advanced societies must be prepared to encourage more sober lifestyles, while reducing their energy consumption and improving its efficiency."

He said no nation or people can remain indifferent to problems such as climate change, desertification, pollution, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions.

Environmental concerns too often took a back seat to what he called "myopic economic interests," adding the international community and governments had a moral duty to "send the right signals" to effectively combat misuse of the environment.

"Humanity needs a profound cultural renewal; it needs to rediscover those values which can serve as the solid basis for building a brighter future for all," he said.

"Our present crises -- be they economic, food-related, environmental or social -- are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated."

He called on all people to "move beyond a purely consumerist mentality" so that they could "rethink the path which we are traveling together" and adapt "a lifestyle marked by sobriety and solidarity" between the haves and the have nots.

Environmental issues deserved the attention of the world community because they were human

rights issues that could influence the right to life, food, health and development.

"Sad to say, it is all too evident that large numbers of people in different countries and areas of our planet are experiencing increased hardship because of the negligence or refusal of many others to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment," he said.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5BE1UR20091215>

December 16, 2009

Hindus laud Pope for environmental stand

Merinews

Religion was the most powerful and far-reaching force in our society and could prove very influential in handling concerns like ecological responsibility. Faiths coming out together in support of the environment would be a remarkable signal.

Hindus have applauded Pope Benedict for connecting environmental protection with peace promotion in his message for the celebration of World Day of Peace, which falls on January one.

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada on Wednesday, December 16, commended His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for his powerful stand on environmental issues and for his statement: "The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations".

In this message posted on The Holy See website on Wednesday, Pope Benedict said: "Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?"

Zed, who is the president of the Universal Society of Hinduism, said that to effectively curb environmental degradation and save the planet, religions of the world had to come together to form a joint global strategy. He urged Pope Benedict to organise a world level environmental summit involving all world religions.

Rajan Zed pointed out that religion was the most powerful and far-reaching force in our society and could prove very influential in handling concerns like ecological responsibility. Faiths coming out together in support of the environment would be a remarkable signal, he believed and so, urged all world religious leaders, religions and denominations to openly bless the environmental causes. Ancient Hindu scriptures, especially Atharva-Veda, were highly respectful of mother nature, Zed added.

Pope Benedict heads the Roman Catholic Church, which is the largest of the Christian denominations. Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about one billion adherents and moksha (liberation) is its ultimate goal.

<http://www.merineews.com/article/hindus-laud-pope-for-environmental-stand/15791213.shtml>

December 18, 2009

“The Way Humanity Treats the Environment Influences the Way it Treats Itself”

Vatican Radio

On Thursday Archbishop Celestino Migliore Apostolic Nuncio - Head of the Vatican’s Delegation to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen - called for clear and firm political will to adopt common binding measures and adequate budgets for an effective mitigation of ongoing climate change.

Over 300 world leaders have flown into the Danish capital in an effort to salvage a Climate Change pact in the last hours of the two week conference.

A draft text is considering a target of limiting global warming to a maximum 2 degrees Celsius, backed by a new fund of \$100 billion a year to aid developing nations.

Ahead of their final meeting Archbishop Migliore told the conference participants that “the moral crises that humanity is currently experiencing, be they economic, nutritional, environmental, or social oblige us to establish new guidelines.

He also noted that while global governments are slow to reach agreement on new programs to counter climate change, individuals, groups, local authorities and communities are not.

He noted how worldwide communities have “already begun an impressive series of initiatives to give form to the two cornerstones of the response to climate change: adaptation and mitigation”.

He said “While technical solutions are necessary, they are not sufficient. The wisest and most effective programs focus on information, education, and the formation of the sense of responsibility in children and adults towards environmentally sound patterns of development and stewardship of creation”.

He also outlined how the The Holy See, in the albeit small state of Vatican City, is making significant efforts to take a lead in environmental protection by promoting and implementing energy diversification projects targeted at the development of renewable energy, with the objective of reducing emissions of CO2 and its consumption of fossil fuels.

In addition, the Holy See is giving substance to the necessity to disseminate an education in environmental responsibility.

These efforts, concluded Archbishop Milgliore, “are about working on lifestyles, as the current

dominant models of consumption and production are often unsustainable". "The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself".

<http://www.oecumene.radiovaticana.org/en1/Articolo.asp?c=343131>

December 19, 2009

Nations Seal a Deal on Climate Change at UN Talks

UNEP

Copenhagen - After a marathon all night session, talks aimed at injecting new and more wide-ranging momentum into the international effort to combat climate change ended with a positive outcome.

Countries attending the UN climate convention's summit in the Danish capital agreed to 'take note' of a document entitled the Copenhagen Accord.

For the first time in the history of climate change cooperation, developing countries including Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and the small and threatened Republic of the Maldives outlined intentions to decouple emissions from economic growth.

Developed countries including the United States will also outline a range of emission reductions targets up to 2020 by 1 February 2010. Both commitments and intentions in terms of greenhouse gas reductions will be subject to international monitoring and verification.

Countries accepted to work towards limiting the rise in global temperatures to below 2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. However, emission reduction commitments by 2050 were in the end not included in the final document.

Importantly, the Accord outlines support for technology transfer and capacity building for developing economies while also putting forward a financial package aimed at assisting developing ones adapt to climate change and to begin de-carbonizing their economies.

Additional resources of US\$30 billion, covering the period 2010-2012, will be available immediately and developed nations also supported a "goal of mobilizing jointly US\$100 billion a year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries".

The Accord recognized the crucial role of forests in addressing climate change, saying there was a need to recognize reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) via the immediate establishment of a mechanism to enable the mobilization of financial resources from developed countries.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agricultural Organization and the UN Development Programme are spearheading the UN REDD programme which is already assisting close to a dozen developing countries prepare for a REDD regime.

UN-REDD dovetails with other initiatives, including the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility.

The culmination of two weeks of talks and two years of negotiations, today's outcome was welcomed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said: "The U.N. system will work to immediately start to deliver meaningful results to people in need and jump-start clean-energy growth in developing countries."

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UNEP, said: "This was perhaps not the big breakthrough some had hoped for, but neither was it a breakdown which at times seemed a possibility. The litmus test of developed countries' ambitions will in a sense come immediately. If the funds promised in the Accord start flowing swiftly and to the levels announced, then a new international climate change policy may have been born."

He said that the outcome represented a compromise of a myriad of differing national and economic interests including developed, developing, least developed and small-island developing states.

"Trying to take over 190 countries through the same door towards a more cooperative global warming policy has proved challenging but, ultimately possible and do-able. Time will be the true judge as to whether 19 December 2009 was indeed an historic date for accelerating a response to combating dangerous climate change and for more sustainable management of economically important ecosystems, such as forests," said Mr. Steiner.

He said he hoped the outcome would also restore certainty to global carbon markets by demonstrating a scaled-up international commitment to climate change while assisting to focus and to catalyze the investments -including private sector ones-towards a low carbon economy.

Mr. Steiner said the aim of limiting a global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius had fallen short of the calls of many countries, including ones in Africa and small-island developing states who had been urging for temperatures to be pegged no higher than 1.5 degree Celsius.

But he said hoped that with the Accord underway, it may be possible to accelerate the international response and ambition on reducing greenhouse gases in order to achieve a far lower overall temperature rise in 40 years time than below 2 degrees Celsius.

For More Information Please Contact:

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Notes to Editors:

United Nations Climate Change Conference

<http://www.unep.org/climatechange/CopenhagenCOP15/Day12/tabid/2658/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

UN-REDD www.un-redd.org

Seal the Deal 2009 <http://www.sealthedeal2009.org/>

The UN-led Seal the Deal campaign, working with various civil society groups, coalesced around 13 million signatures from all around the world asking for a fair, equitable and ambitious deal.

These signatures were collected, along with people's stories, videos, photos and testimonies citing the impact of climate change upon their livelihoods and health, and placed on an electronic data stick within a silver "people's orb". The Orb having been present throughout various events during the two-week climate summit to represent civil society, has been taken to New York with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Speaking on Saturday, Mr. Ban said he welcomed the deal. "It may not be everything we hoped for, but this decision of the Conference of Parties is an essential beginning and we must transform this into a legally binding treaty next year. The importance will only be recognised when it is codified into international law," he said.

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=606&ArticleID=6430&l=en>
