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Gratitude, Connectedness, and Awe: The Spiritual Side of Sustainability

By Jay McDaniel

Jesus, Jazz, and Buddhism

A sustainable community can be a household, village, city, bioregion, or nation. It is a community that is creative, compassionate, participatory, ecologically wise, and spiritually satisfying, with no one left behind.

Such a community will support three desirable goals: social well-being, environmental well-being, and economic viability.

It can seem as if environmentalists focus on one of the three circles; that social workers and human rights focus on still another; and that economists focus on still another. Relative to context, some circles will indeed take priority over others. In the event of human rights violations, a focus on justice takes precedence over a viable economy and sometimes environmental concerns. But we at JJB believe that the three circles are connected and that sustainability is an integration of the three.

A sustainable community is Martin Luther King's vision of beloved community, with ecology and humane treatment of animals added.

I say a "humane treatment of animals" because sometimes concerns for sustainability focus on environmental well-being and human well-being while neglecting the humane treatment of individual animals. By individual animals we have in mind pets, farm animals, animals used in science, animals hunted and fished. They deserve kindness. A sustainable community is a humane, sustainable community.

Two Meanings of Sustainability

Of course, a sustainable community need not be called "sustainable" in order to be sustainable. It can be called a good community or a flourishing community or, as is the case in East Asia, a harmonious community.

Nevertheless, a sustainable community draws upon two important connotations of the word English word sustainable. It can be *sustained* into the indefinite future, given the limits of the earth and local bioregions to supply resources and absorb pollution, and it provides spiritual and material nourishment -- *sustenance* -- for human beings and their kindred creatures on the planet. Sustainability without sustenance is unsustainable.

There will not be and never has been a *completely* sustainable community. Sustainability as we are describing it is an ideal to be approximated, not a utopia to be fully realized. Even meaningful approximations cannot emerge once and for all or all at once. But when meaningful approximations occur, there is a flourishing of life.

The Environment as Context Not Issue

A flourishing of life is dependent on, and evolves within, a larger context: *the web of life itself*. Understood as the web of life, "the environment" is not simply an issue among issues but rather a context for many of the most important issues faced by human beings today. It is not a circle among three circles in a diagram offered above; it is a larger circle within which the three forms of well-being can develop.

Many people who are committed to sustainability have a sense of this larger circle, this web. They have a sense of two leading advisors to this website -- Catherine Keller and Jea Sophia Oh -- call *planetarity*. Jea Sophia Oh has written about this in her recent book: *A Postcolonial Theology of Life: Planetarity East and West* (Upland: Sopher Press, 2011). Drawing from Asian as well as Western sources, she shows how a sense of planetarity can help previously colonized peoples, and their colonizers as well, transcend the impulses of domination and develop creatively hybrid, life-centered forms of spirituality.

A Sense of Planetarity: The Earth Community as Extended Family

Jea Sophia Oh is right. A feeling of planetarity is one of the most important parts of a healthy, sustainability-oriented spirituality, and it is available to people who identify with particular religious traditions and people who do not.

"Spirituality" is a name the affective or emotional dimension of human life. This side of life consists of what Whitehead calls *subjective forms*. Subjective forms are felt evaluations of the world: feelings of approval and disapproval, attraction and repulsion.

A sense of planetarity is a felt appreciation of the more-than-human world: plants and animals, hills and rivers, trees and birds, combined with a recognition that we humans are included within a wider community of life. For some people the sense of planetarity may involve a sense of allegiance to the planet as a whole, but for most people it lies in a sense of felt kinship with other animals, or a sense of wonder in the presence of oceans, or mountains, or wetlands, or rivers, or deserts. Amid this appreciation people realize that they belong to something wider than human life, namely the community of life on earth.

People who have a sense of planetarity may or may not believe in a transcendent God, but they do indeed feel touched by something transcendent and beautiful. They feel like they belong to something more.

Indeed, for many people who believe in God (and I am among them) the sense of planetarity is a way into belief in God. It is through a sense of kinship with other life and with all life that they feel connected to a deeper Life.

Small But Included In the Ten Thousand Things

The sense of planetarity can be deepened by a sense of cosmic awe or cosmic wonder. People stare into the heavens on a dark and starry night and feel small but included in the Ten Thousand Things: that is, everything that exists. This *everything* is not limited to the earth; it includes the heavens, too.

Combined with this sense of awe, there is an intuitive recognition that the various things -- the hills and rivers, the trees and stars, the spirits and ancestors - are interconnected. Each grain of sand is part of the universe, but the universe is also present in each grain of sand. The wildflower may be part of heaven, but heaven is in each wildflower.

This sense of deep interconnectedness finds vivid expression in the Buddhist image of Indra's Net. Here we have the image of the universe as a vast network of jewels, each of which contains an infinite number of facets, each of which mirrors another jewel in the universe. Many Buddhists add that the jewels do more than mirror one another; they are present in one another.

Cosmic awe, then, is a sense of wonder at the vastness of the universe, combined with a sense that all things are interconnected.

Delight in Multiplicity

For many people the sense of planetarity and cosmic awe are combined with a delight in multiplicity. Among naturalists this delight comes from exposure to the sheer variety of forms of life on earth. There is something beautiful in the variety itself, and the variety becomes a reminder that differences can be as beautiful as similarities. Among others the delight can originate with an exposure to different cultures and different people, each with their distinctive forms of beauty. And among still others the delight comes from feeling different themselves, and sometimes from being unaccepted or oppressed in their difference. Out of the pain of "being different" comes the gift of taking delight in differences, of seeing beauty in difference.

Interestingly, this delight in multiplicity goes along with a sense that genuine harmony -- the kind of togetherness that is rightly prized in a sustainable community -- includes and requires multiplicity. There is an intuitive sense that things can be together without being identical. An appreciation for multiplicity leads advocates of sustainability to emphasize biological and cultural diversity. Without diversity there can be no sustenance.

Participating in a Cosmic Adventure

Nor can there be sustenance without a sense of adventure. Whitehead's philosophy is noted for its presentation of the universe as a creative advance into novelty. For Whitehead as for many East Asian traditions, there is a continuous creativity within the depths of matter such that, locally and globally, the present is never completely determined by the past. This creativity is evident in quantum indeterminacy, in the surprising and experimental nature of biological evolution, and in the creative way in which human beings and other organisms adapt to new

situations. It leads Whiteheadians to believe that, if the unfolding universe happened to be returned to certain initial conditions, whatever they might be, it might unfold a very different way the second time around.

Contemporary science offers a more specific narrative by which the creative advance into novelty can be appreciated. Three companions in process thinking -- Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Brian Swimme -- call it the *Journey of the Universe*. The Journey includes a galactic phase in which the stars and galaxies are evolving; a geological phase in which planets such as Earth are evolving; a biological phase in which life on Earth (and perhaps other planets) is evolving; and a cultural phase in which human and animal cultures are evolving.

The Journey of the Universe has a future as well as a past and we living beings on the planet Earth are small but included in this larger Journey. You can find an entire story on their project, linking ideas concerning the Journey of the Universe with Process Theology, in JJB: *Living in the Milky Way*: [\(GO\)](#).

Berry, Tucker, and Swimme propose that the story of the universe as informed by the natural sciences offers, for the first time in human history, a transnational and metareligious creation story which can inspire people's hearts and minds all over the planet and provide a larger context for the practical work of creating sustainable communities.

The story of the universe as told by the sciences can play an important role in the spiritual side of a sustainable community. The story can elicit a sense of awe and wonder at the vastness and beauty of a continuously creative universe, and the very quest for sustainable communities on our planet can be understood as one way of advancing the adventure of the universe on earth. In the very imagining of sustainable communities, in the very struggle to bring them into fruition, there is a creativity that participates in the larger adventure.

Gratitude for Beauty

Complementary to this adventure there is a gratitude for what already is. In particular there is a what, in JJB, we call *trust in beauty*. [\(GO\)](#)

The gratitude at issue may be conjoined with a sense that, beneath or beyond the beauty of the world, there is a Someone who is the source of beauty. But a person can feel grateful for the beauty even if he or she does not have a sense of this Someone, and her gratitude is one of the ways in which we is inwardly sustained, so that she can work and study, helping to bring about sustainable beauty.

The video by Louis Schwarzborg shows how this sense of beauty can be connected with time as well as space. The second part of the video features an elderly man who points out that each day of a human life is unique and irreplaceable. Today, he says, is the only time we will ever have Today. This capacity to appreciate the uniqueness, the irreplaceability of each day is an essential dimension of sustainable spirituality.

Another important part of the final part of the video is that it vividly displays human beings: their

faces, their laughter, their uniqueness, their beauty. A spirituality of sustainability includes a sense of wonder, amazement, at the unique beauty of individual people as shown in the video, and an impulse to respect and care for people. To treat them as persons and not things. To let them be themselves. To listen to their voices. To care for them. To live justly. Sustainability is about human well-being and environmental well-being. And about economic viability, too, which we deal with in a forthcoming article by John Cobb: *Can the Planet be Saved?* But to close this article, let's consider another question: Can religion be saved? We think it can.

The Role of Religion In Sustainability

Fresh food, a clean sky, with no hand raised except in greeting. This is how a poet Robin Morgan describes a sustainable community.

Her images remind us of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. He taught them to pray for the coming of a *basilea theou*, a state of affairs in which the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven. He said the will of God is that we love each other.

What would this look like? It would look like fresh bread, a clean sky, and no hand raised except in greeting. It would look like a sustainable community.

Should we follow the advice of Jesus and other religious teachers? Should we pray for sustainability? Is there something in the universe which is on the side of life and love and which can receive our prayers? Or is prayer a waste of time compared to what is truly needed is study, hard work, moral courage, lifestyle changes, education, and fresh public policy.

Perhaps prayer is irrelevant. Perhaps meaningful approximations of sustainability can emerge through study and hard work alone. Perhaps what is needed in the world today is not a willing cooperation with the winds of the spirit, but rather a willful engineering of a more sustainable planet.

Winds of the Spirit

Most of us in the JJB community doubt it. The JJB is a growing network of people, from fifty countries, who read this website on a fairly regular basis. Perhaps you are in the community, too.

Some of us are Christian, some Jewish, some Muslim, some Buddhist, some Bahai, some Hindu. Some of us are religiously unaffiliated or spiritual but not religious. But most of us believe that there is something in the universe on the side of life and love: a spirit of goodness and wisdom and beauty with which we can cooperate.

We have different names for this something more: the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of Goodness, the Tao, the Pattern that Connects, the Holy Spirit. Some of us conceive the spirit as a Something and some as a Someone. But we want to be in touch with the winds of this spirit and orient our lives around them, however understood. We want to live in willing cooperation with it and be healers in a broken world.

We worry when the spiritual side of life is neglected. We know many well-intentioned people who grow cynical or who burn out when they lose touch with the spirit of goodness and wisdom and beauty. A one-sided emphasis on human agency -- on sheer will -- easily devolves into cynicism or despair, because the world never quite conforms to willful aims. Or it devolves into an attempt to engineer the world in the image of one's own ego, all in the name of goodness. It helps to have trust in the availability of fresh possibilities for hope, even when things seem hopeless. It helps to have faith in the winds of the spirit.

Perhaps we rightly sense that prayer is one way -- not the only way -- of being in touch with the winds of spirit. The sensibilities mentioned above are additional ways: sense of planetarity, cosmic awe, delight in multiplicity, a sense of adventure, trust in beauty, gratitude for each day. In their own ways they are prayer, too. To have a sense of kinship with other animals, to feel small but included in a galactic whole, to be grateful for each day, is to make contact with something more in an intuitive and affective way. It is to pray.

Accordingly, at JJB we find ourselves wanting to talk about spirituality and sustainability. And also about religion.

On the one hand, we are interested in spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation which might help us be available to the winds of the spirit, and also in spiritual attitudes -- emotions and motivations -- which connected with the winds of the spirit and with the palpable presence of life on earth. For us these practices and attitudes are not substitutes for study and hard work, but rather underpinnings for study and hard work.

Those of us who are religiously affiliated find ourselves turning how the religious traditions with which we are affiliated might help animate environmental consciousness and concerns for sustainability. Increasingly we turn to the The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University: (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/>). Its coordinators are Mary Evelyn Tucker (mentioned above) and John Grim of Yale University, who are interviewed in the video. Along with them, we believe that we are at a time in history when a new environmental ethic can emerge with help from the world's religions.

After all, the religions, too, are part of the journey of the universe as it unfolds on our small planet. They, too, are evolving over time. Our hope is that we can play a role in the religious traditions to which we belong and, in dialogue with science and art, help create sustainable communities. We trust that each religion, and every religion, has a constructive role to play. There is a wisdom in religion just as there is a wisdom in science. There is wisdom in animals, too. When it comes to finding wisdom for building sustainability, we can be grateful for wisdom wherever it is found. Seeking wisdom, too, is a form of prayer.

<http://www.jesusjazzbuddhism.org/gratitude-connectedness-and-awe.html>

January 2012

Ten Ideas for Saving the Planet: An Overview

By John B. Cobb, Jr.
Jesus, Jazz, and Buddhism

1. Reality is composed of interrelated events.
2. There are gradations of intrinsic value.
3. God aims at maximizing value.
4. Humans are uniquely (but by no means exclusively) valuable and uniquely responsible.
5. Education is for wisdom.
6. The economy should be directed toward flourishing of the biosphere.
7. Agriculture should regenerate the soil.
8. Comfortable habitat should make minimal demands on resources.
9. Most manufacturing should be local.
10. Every community should be part of a community of communities.

"If the creative energies in the heart of the universe succeeded so brilliantly in the past, we have reason to hope that such creativity will inspire us and guide us into the future...Our challenge now is to construct livable cities and to cultivate healthy foods in ways congruent with the Earth's patterns."

Mary Evelyn Tucker and Brian Thomas Swimme
Journey of the Universe (Yale University Press, 2011)

Along with Mary Evelyn Tucker and Brian Swimme, I am amazed at the creative energies in the heart of the universe. So was the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, whose wisdom has inspired me for many years. And along with them, I think that our challenge today is to construct livable cities and to cultivate healthy foods in ways congruent with the Earth's patterns. In order to do this, it is important to think planetarily as well as cosmologically. That's what I want to do in this essay. First let me address a fundamental question, "Is it too late?" Then I'll turn to the ten ideas presented above, adding more details.

To read the full article, visit:

<http://www.jesusjazzbuddhism.org/ten-ideas-for-saving-the-planet.html>

January 4, 2012

Making a Difference with Low Cost Green Actions at Oak Park Temple

By Melanie Weiss
Green Community Connections

Many religious congregations in Oak Park and River Forest are tackling green initiatives that reduce, reuse and recycle and at the same time show congregants the importance of living sustainably and caring for Mother Earth.

Oak Park Temple on Harlem Avenue is one example of a local congregation that has embraced a number of mostly low to no-cost green actions that are making a huge difference to the congregations' 500 families.

Bike Racks Installed

Oak Park Temple member Pamela Brookstein founded a volunteer group at the congregation called Green Chaverim about five years ago. Since then, the temple has become "greener." For instance, Oak Park Temple took advantage of a village program where the public works department will install bike racks at no charge on public property, so they added bike racks in front of the building. Please contact Bill McKenna at 358-5728 to get more information about this program.

Pamela also helped to establish a more user-friendly recycling program after receiving a donation of new recycling bins from Oak Park Public Works. Contact Karen Rozmus at 358-5708 for information on that program.

Garden Produce Shared with OP Food Pantry

In May, Oak Park Temple established a thriving garden, with volunteers tending to it on a rotating schedule and a portion of the bounty being donated to the Oak Park Food Pantry. "Each person would weed, water and pick what was ripe each week," explained Pamela. This fall during the Jewish harvest holiday of Sukkot, the Green Chaverim will cook a Shabbat Friday night dinner for members of the congregation using food harvested from the garden.

Another successful endeavor has been the commitment to using non disposable silverware and china at temple events. The congregation also hosts a Speaking of Green series that brings in presenters on a variety of green topics. This February Oak Park's Waste Reduction Manager, Karen Rozmus, will be the featured speaker.

Free Energy Audit

Oak Park Temple also applied for and received a free energy efficiency audit through the Delta Institute. "After the audit, we received a report that included many low cost to almost no

cost energy improvements that the temple can make,” explained Pamela. This program has limited funding available. More information on the Cook County Energy Efficiency Program, including its application deadline, is available at www.delta-institute.org/cookefficiency.

<http://greencommunityconnections.org/greening-oak-park-temple>

January 4, 2012

Euclid Ave UMC Digs Deep to Install Geothermal

By Frank Fletcher
Green Community Connections

Sunday, November 13, Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church dedicated its newly installed geothermal heating and air conditioning system. Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church is the first United Methodist church in northern Illinois and the first congregation in Oak Park to fully heat and air-condition with a geothermal system. (In addition, several houses in the area, and the new Madison Street Walgreen’s, have gone geothermal.) The church’s parking lot (414 S. Euclid Ave.) is where the well field for this geothermal heat pump heating and air conditioning system is located.

According to Euclid’s Pastor Marti Scott, “What better gift can we give our children than to protect Planet Earth for the children of the next generation. We must become fossil fuel free and significantly reduce our carbon footprint.”

The U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency tell us that a geothermal heat pump is the most energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly way to heat and cool a building. The ground and ground water over 100 feet down maintain a relatively constant temperature close to the overall long-term average air temperature above ground (between 50 and 60 degrees F), much as an underground cave or an unheated basement remain a fairly constant temperature. The ground and ground water thus offer a free source of heat in the winter and a free heat depository or “heat sink” in the summer using the same technology as an air conditioner or refrigerator use to move heat from inside to outside. This should slash CO2 emissions from the church by much more than half. While the church has many green programs and initiatives, this one will unquestionably make the biggest contribution to combating global warming.

The church finished its parking lot with permeable pavers to allow storm water to go into the ground instead of the combined storm and sanitary sewers to again help the environment.

The whole project has been a community effort, with contributions and pledges from church members and friends and a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. There has also been support from the Village of Oak Park, Board of Trustees, Director of Building and Property Standards, the Sustainability Manager, the Energy Committee, the Environmental and Energy Commission, the Oak Park River Forest sustainability plan, PlanItGreen, and the Oak Park River Forest Interfaith Green Summit Network.

Research and planning for this project proceeded with the help and support of Faith in Place, Interfaith Power and Light's Cool Calculator Program, the congregation's Green Action Task Force and the unfailing support of Senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. Marti Scott, church staff and the congregation.

As Bob Romo, Senior Vice President of Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation said, "The faith community is where people are walking their green talk."

<http://greencommunityconnections.org/euclid-ave-church-goes-geothermal>

January 4, 2012

Community Gardening at Ascension

By John Owens
Green Community Connections

At Ascension Catholic Church in Oak Park the highlight of 2011 was the launching of the community vegetable garden. After a year and a half of planning, our raised beds were constructed as the Eagle Scout project of parishioner Robert Corbeil. Starting a little later in June, crops were soon thriving in compost from Growing Power. Our committee combined our locally grown harvest with contributions from the gardens of parishioners to provide fresh vegetables to the food pantry of our sharing parish, St. Martin des Porres, on Chicago's west side.

In November the group co-sponsored with the Shawnash Institute an enlightening program on the practice of aquaculture which is taking hold in several Chicago communities. Professor Emanuel Pratt of Chicago State described the practice and the efforts he is leading that address issues of nutrition and sustainability.

Amid the cold and snow of January Ascension's Community Garden group will be meeting to address membership, expanding our beds, education, advocacy and emerging local issues.

<http://greencommunityconnections.org/green-gardening-at-ascension>

January 4, 2012

Multifaceted Approach at Unity Temple

By Anne White
Green Community Connections

Reflecting our interdependent relationship with the Earth

The Green Sanctuary Committee at Unity Temple takes a multifaceted approach to environmental advocacy. The goal of all of our activities is to actively engage our Unitarian Universalist congregation in order to deepen our knowledge about environmental issues and to make changes in our own lives that better reflect our interdependent relationship with the Earth.

We host workshops on a variety of environmental topics, we screen films, we lobby in Springfield, we teach Religious Education classes, we start community gardens, we host a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), we run discussion groups, we publish weekly green tips, and we have developed guidelines for managing eco-friendly events.

We act on our stated values in concrete ways

The Committee also works toward making Unity Temple a sustainable institution that acts on its stated values in a concrete way. We have helped UT move toward greener building practices, such as minimizing disposable kitchen and food service items, purchasing green cleaning and office supplies, promoting fair trade, increasing recycling, and composting. We had an energy audit of the building done and will be working with staff to implement its recommendations.

For more information: contact Anne White, Chair, Unity Temple Green Sanctuary Committee at annewhitetreehugger@gmail.com

<http://greencommunityconnections.org/sustainability-at-unity-temple>

January 10, 2012

OPEN LETTER: The Union of BC Indian Chiefs fully supports the Save the Fraser Declaration, the Coastal First Nations Tanker Ban and the Indigenous laws banning Crude Oil Pipeline and Tanker Shipments through BC

Dear Premier Clark and Prime Minister Harper

We are writing with respect to Union of BC Indian Chiefs Resolution 2011-54, "Support for the Save the Fraser Declaration, the Coastal First Nations Tanker Ban and the Indigenous laws Banning Crude Oil Pipeline and Tanker Shipments through BC." which was presented, affirmed and endorsed by consensus at the UBCIC Chiefs Council on November 23rd, 2011.

The UBCIC Chiefs Council endorses the Coastal First Nations Tanker Ban and Save the Fraser Declaration that prohibit the transportation of crude oil by pipeline and tanker on the north and south coast and through the Fraser River watershed. As Indigenous Peoples, we continue to exercise our laws and jurisdiction to protect our lands, our waters, our coasts and our rivers, as we have done for thousands of years and both the Save the Fraser Declaration and the Coast First Nations Tanker Ban are grounded in our laws. Further, we draw your attention to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states:

Article 32:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources
2. States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the Indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

We urge your governments to reject the proposed Enbridge pipeline and Kinder-Morgan pipeline and to respect the laws and authority of BC First Nations and ultimately to protect the environment, fisheries and health and safety of all BC communities.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President

Chief Robert Chamberlin
Vice-President

Chief Marilyn Baptiste
Secretary-Treasurer

For the PDF copy of the letter, along with the Union of BC Indian Chiefs Resolution 2011-54 and Save the Fraser Declaration, visit:

http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/files/PDF/SaveTheFraserTankerBan_2011_54.pdf

January 18, 2012

Hindus commend Pope's environmental stand

Merinews

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, commending Pope for his powerful stand on environmental issues, 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.

Hindus have applauded His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for connecting environmental protection with poverty eradication for human development.

“Environmental protection and the connection between fighting poverty and fighting climate change are important areas for the promotion of integral human development”, Pope Benedict said in his recent annual "State of the World" address.

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, commending Pope for his powerful stand on environmental issues, 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. Zed urged Pope (his being the religious leader with largest following) to organize a world level environmental summit involving all world religions.

Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, 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 said and 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.

We may believe in different religions, yet we share the same home—our Earth. We must learn to happily progress or miserably perish together. For man can live individually but can only survive collectively, Rajan Zed says quoting scriptures.

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 moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal.

<http://www.merineews.com/article/hindus-commend-popes-environmental-stand/15864297.shtml>

January 30, 2012

India's richest shrine goes green

By Shilpa Kanna
BBC News

Surrounded by seven hills, high above lush green forests is the temple town of Tirumala.

The crown jewel is the dazzling gold-plated temple of Lord Venkateshwara. Located in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, this is not just one of Hinduism's holiest shrines, but also one of the richest.

It has an annual income of \$340m - mostly from donations.

Between 50-100,000 people visit this temple every day. This puts enormous pressure on water, electricity and other energy resources.

Now the temple is using its religious influence and economic might to change the way energy is used here.

Sustainable sources

Developing reserve forests around the temple to act as carbon sinks, the management has transformed the environment.

They are promoting the use of sustainable technologies and hope to influence public opinion.

LV Subramanyam is the executive officer of the temple trust.

"While we currently use a mix of conventional and non-conventional energy sources, our aim is make the place more reliant on sustainable sources of energy," he says

"Most of our devotees are progressive. In a religious place like Tirumala, we can set the example by going green. Probably the impact will be much more than normal government advertisements or publicity."

Inside the temple complex, a large multi-storey building is dedicated to just one thing - cooking free meals for pilgrims.

Several cooks work in tandem stirring large pots of rice, curry and vegetables. Nearly 50,000 kilos of rice along with lentils are cooked here every day.

Open all day, this community kitchen is the biggest green project for the temple.

Located on the roof of this building are rows of solar dishes that automatically move with the angle of the sun, capturing the strong sunlight.

Then the energy is used to convert water into high pressure steam, which cooks the food in the kitchen below.

Generating over 4,000kgs of steam a day at 180° C, this makes the cooking faster and cheaper. As a result, an average of 500 litres of diesel fuel is saved each day.

Credit score

By switching to green technologies, the temple cuts its carbon emissions and earns a carbon offset, or credit, which they can sell.

Carbon credits

- The Kyoto Protocol's clean development mechanism, an international tool created to fight global warming, gives developed countries incentives to invest in clean technologies and projects in developing countries
- In return, the companies from the developed countries get carbon credits for meeting their emission reduction targets, while the projects in the developing country get the capital and technology

Badal Shaw is the managing director of Gadhia Solar Energy Systems, which has set up the solar cookers. He estimates that this has resulted in a reduction of more than 1,350kgs of green house gases in the atmosphere.

"This was the first project to get a gold standard certification - it's a registered project and it is issuing carbon credits," he says.

"From a monetary value, carbon being a tradable commodity - the prices keeps going up and down ... we sold the carbon credits of this and various other projects to the German government."

Blowing on the wind

But it's not just the sun that the temple is tapping into. On top of a hill, the site is ideal for harnessing wind energy.

Companies like Suzlon and Enercon have donated turbines which generate a combined total of 7.5 megawatts of power.

A Tirupati-based company called Green Energy Solutions now wants to develop multiple wind farms to supply the entire temple's energy.

Madhu Babu, the founder of the group, says they want to tap into the pool of devotees worldwide, asking them to make a donation of green power to the temple.

The temple is unique because devotees are known to make generous donations of both cash and resources. While some have given diamonds in the past, others have given sheets of gold or bundles of cash.

"We have found that a lot of non-resident Indians are interested in donating sustainable technology instead," says Mr Babu.

"We want to facilitate such donations and translate them into wind farms, so that the entire temple town can be run on green energy."

Big appetite

India is growing rapidly and is hungry for energy, supplied largely by fossil fuels.

Global consultancy McKinsey predicts that the country's carbon emissions will double in the next decade.

This is why it is more important than ever for India to look at alternative sources of energy, says CB Jagadeeswara Reddy, the local government officer in charge of promoting non-conventional energy development.

The temple city has been identified as a future 'low-carbon footprint city' by European Aid and Development, which works under the European Commission.

But a lot of these technologies cost money and Mr Reddy says it's important to involve the private sector.

"It's important that we make technology accessible for people," he says.

"When pilgrims use the water and learn that sustainable sources of energy are being tapped into make the water, food, power available to them, it inspires them. They too will want to learn more about the technology behind it."

Clean-tech India?

As India is taking steps to limit its emissions, it's also one of the largest producers of carbon credits in the world.

According to a 2010 study by HSBC Research, India's share of the \$2.2 trillion market for low carbon goods and services in 2020 could be as much as \$135bn.

The report further predicts that India's clean technology market could create 10.5m green jobs, and is likely to grow faster than any other country.

Dr Prodipto Ghosh from The Energy Research Institute says there are already over 2000 companies in the country involved in research and innovation for the low carbon goods and services market.

He says that companies have a financial incentive to use clean development mechanisms, as they monetise projects which otherwise would cost the company a lot more.

While going green may not make economic sense for everyone, the carbon offsets or credits offer a lucrative incentive to do so. Businesses can exchange, buy or sell carbon credits in international markets at the prevailing market price.

This also is important in relation to the country's energy security.

India now spends 45% of export earnings on energy imports, and this is expected to increase even further.

While the temple assesses the savings that each of these investments can make, the pilgrims enjoy meals cooked using green sources of energy.

To fuel India's growth, there is an increasing demand for alternative sources. Whilst the temple might be one small step, the hope is that this could be a model that is replicated across the country.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-16746656>

January-February 2012

Quaker Eco-Justice Strategy: Equality and the Experiment of the Earth Quaker Action Team

By George Lakey

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Any great change must expect opposition because it shakes the very foundation of privilege.

What if it turned out that a time-honored Friends testimony, a success story in northwestern Europe, and an experiment by contemporary eco-justice Quakers, all turned out to be in alignment?

In the midst of the painfully hierarchical 17th century, Friends acted out their vision of social equality. In the 20th century Norwegians built equality into their national version of a “holy experiment.” And now, the Earth Quaker Action Team is asserting bold connections between equality and the needs of the planet. Those three moments in time add up to encouragement and a fresh angle on strategy.

The encouragement, ironically, starts with confronting the reality of social class. What I’ve found in years of doing diversity workshops with Friends is that the challenges brought by the testimony of equality bring us both resistance and relief. Resistance? Because we’ve all been socialized into oppressive patterns, and that’s our comfort zone. Relief? Because part of us always knows that those patterns are wrong, and we walk a bit taller when we’re tackling instead of avoiding the work.

When I think back to how challenged I was by the black freedom movement, then the women’s movement, and then the lesbian-gay-bisexual-transsexual (LGBT) movement (even though I’m gay), I remember both my resistance and relief.

At the beginning of a workshop on social class one Friend said, “Surely we’ve had enough of dealing with privilege! Who wants to tackle yet another way that inequality messes us up?”

A belly laugh from other Friends greeted the statement. One said, “But maybe we can learn something from what we’ve already tackled!”

When I read about Friends refusing to doff their hats to their “superiors,” or use titles, or use the pronouns that the authorities and the rich demanded, I’m grateful for that Quaker clarity. They knew that class is a biggie. Actually, they might be surprised at our attempt to maintain a culture of silence about it.

Maybe we should make billionaire Warren E. Buffett an honorary Friend for his breaking through the silence in such a plain-spoken way. He found that he paid a lower percentage of his income in taxes than the secretaries and clerks in his office. “There’s class warfare, all right,” Buffett said, “but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.”¹

At the 2011 Friends General Conference Gathering over eighty Friends from around the country were bursting with stories about how the rich are winning in their states—not just in Wisconsin, although Madison Friends might have bigger bruises than some.

Not all rich people actively support policies that hurt the rest of us. Bill Gates' dad makes public statements asking to be taxed more and, hopefully, there are wealthy Quakers who are adding their names to the list being compiled by Responsible Wealth/United for a Fair Economy.²

Nevertheless, Buffett does know his class better than I do. Eco-justice organizers need to know too, because as Ed Dreby contends, dealing with climate change will require very great economic change. The quote above from Lucretia Mott puts these two realities together.

As the privileged have become more savvy about what climate change really implies, their opposition has become much more aggressive. Even our ecological President (pragmatist that he is) left climate change out of the State of the Union Speech in 2011.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce (controlled by Warren Buffett's class) opposes measures that would increase environmental sustainability, provide good universal health care, keep middle class families in the cities, give working class families a chance, and provide full employment. Only a class analysis can predict the stands the Chamber takes.

The Chamber spent more on the 2010 election than the Republican and Democratic National Committees combined. The result is that the already staggering gap in the U.S. between the rich and the poor is steadily increasing, which gets the testimonies section of the "Quaker Meter" flashing more insistently than an ambulance light.

Vision: Good news from Norway on the equality front

PEOPLE OF FAITH are not required to have assurance of success before embarking on a great task. The early Friends who tackled the Puritan theocracy of colonial Massachusetts certainly didn't have any! Still, as someone who has pursued some lost causes in my time, I do cheer up when I learn that someone, somewhere, has made a gain.

Even after Norwegian Quakers left their country for more hospitable lands, Norway still had some people who had a vision of equality. At the beginning of the twentieth century their country was terribly poor—a majority lived in slums and rural poverty. Only three percent of Norway could grow food; the climate was rough; it had few natural resources; and its population of three million gave it a very small internal market. The main ways Norway learned to earn income—fishing, lumbering, using its water power to refine aluminum, building and operating merchant ships—left it at the mercy of global market forces like the rise and fall of the price of wood.

NORWAY'S HOMOGENEITY (mostly white Lutherans) reduced the creativity that would be more available in a culturally diverse nation. Norway had a small group of very rich owners and a fairly small middle class; most Norwegians were workers and farmers. The income difference between the rich and the poor was dramatic. A vision of equality, however, lived.

The workers, with allies, mobilized a large-scale nonviolent struggle to change the class situation. Seven decades later (the 1970s, before Norway's oil-drilling in the North Sea), Norway had virtually eliminated poverty, put everyone into decent housing, provided good free health care for all, provided free university education, created a flourishing infrastructure despite the ice and snow, provided for everyone's decent retirement, created a full employment economy, and other achievements too numerous to mention here.

They did this even though they suffered a devastating war with Germany and an occupation that set them back economically, a time when the U.S. economy prospered. Now, in comparison with the U.S., Norway has higher productivity and is running ahead of its Kyoto climate change agreements. It is also one of the highest *per capita* contributors to development in the Global South and support for the UN.

How did the Norwegians do this? They went ahead and nonviolently fought the class war. The people won, put the economic elite out of political power, and took control of the direction of the economy.

Making the power shift wasn't easy; when the privileged called out the troops, people got hurt and lives were lost. However, Norwegian workers didn't allow their fear to get the best of them; they used their nonviolent weapons of strikes, boycotts and protests to end the political domination of the super-rich. When the working class with its allies took charge, Norway was able to make a national decision to abolish poverty and move beyond a society of dramatic class difference.³

Norwegian economists then worked mainly for the working class instead of the super-rich, and found that overcoming poverty is not rocket science. The dozens of concrete economic tools they used to move toward equality are available.⁴ The Swedes and Danes also confronted their super-rich and took similar strides toward equality. They created more equality and well-being than the U.S. without the lubrication of North Sea oil. All three countries in the mid-twentieth century freed themselves to pursue the common good by overcoming the resistance of Lucretia Mott's "privileged." Based on track record, overcoming is the only way it can be done.

In the 1970s, Norway faced the environmental challenge and gave leadership in the United Nations to wake up the rest of the world to climate change. The freedom they had to do that was no accident; they had pushed the super-rich out of power so the privileged couldn't prevent Norway from addressing a critical issue on the horizon, as they persistently do in the U.S.

Norway hasn't become a utopia. Breivik's murderous attack on the Labor Party in July 2011 reflects residual religious/racial intolerance that still lives in the Norwegian right wing. In the 1980s the neo-liberalism of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher became attractive enough for the Norwegian Conservatives to win power. The Conservatives de-regulated and allowed a financial bubble that drove Norway toward the cliff. Labor regained power, seized the banks that were most responsible for the disaster, fired the senior management, made sure stockholders couldn't benefit, and refused to bail out other banks. The result: while European and U.S. giants were reeling in 2007-08, the Norwegian financial sector was safe, because it had been cleansed by the democratic wisdom, hard-won from Norway's brief flirtation with neo-liberalism.⁵

Most Norwegians believe that the job of an economy is to create the experience of abundance for all; economics in the U.S. is called “the dismal science,” because it is all about scarcity, a spiritual violation if there ever was one.

A few years ago the leadership of the city of Oslo became concerned about a trend of increasing car purchases, with attendant traffic, emissions, carbon footprint, etc. Their solution was to dramatically lower public transportation fares and increase service. The result was a decrease in car ownership and traffic! Even though Norway is one of the nations least threatened by climate change in the world, it has been an environmental leader. That’s because it has freed itself from domination by the economic elite that elsewhere misleads and is devoted to inequality.

<http://www.quakerearthcare.org/Publications/QuakerEcoBulletin/QEBCurrentIssue/QEB01.html>

January-February 2012

N.Y. Quakers hold non-violent direct action training on 'fracking'
Acting to end hydrofracturing in natural gas development

By Angela Manno
Quaker Earthcare Witness

The room filled up slowly on Saturday morning, November 12, 2011, at Brooklyn (N.Y.) Friends Meetinghouse. These were seasoned activists and newcomers to hydraulic fracturing, the newest form of extreme fossil fuel extraction, taking its place alongside deep-water oil drilling, mountaintop removal coal mining, and tar sands extraction.

I had been anticipating this day for many months, having realized that efforts over many months to maintain a ban on hydraulic fracturing—a serious threat to the groundwater in New York State—have fallen on legislators' deaf ears. Petitions, phone calls, and the clear majority of state residents against fracking had not made an impression. Recently New Yorkers learned that permitting is underway to bring fracked (and most likely radioactive) gas into New York City through a high-pressure gas pipeline for the purposes of converting New York to natural gas.

The time had come to explore new ideas and approaches. The Friends in Unity with Nature committee of the New York Quarter and the Peace Committees of 15th Street Friends Meeting agreed to co-sponsor a non-violent direct action training (NVDA) program.

There was a great diversity in the group of 22 participants--Quakers, Buddhists, psychologists, artists, and seasoned activists--people I had worshipped with, campaigned with, meditated with, and socialized with. Some of the most experienced activists in New York City were present.

Training for Change trainer Daniel Hunter, who has been facilitating trainings in NVDA campaigning and actions for Quakers in Pennsylvania on stopping mountaintop removal and hydraulic fracturing, opened the morning with introductions.

With the first introductions, I knew this was going to be interesting:

"I have no one at home, my kids are grown. I don't have anybody around to embarrass anymore," exclaimed the first participant. The person next to her said, "I've got a wife and children, and it's about time I embarrassed them!"

As I heard Friends speak, I recalled Friend and activist George Lakey's words to me:

"No amount of consciousness-raising or discussion can ever take the place for Quakers of getting their bodies out of the chair and in motion, outside their comfort zone, taking a stand. One reason why a vigil is a waste of time for Quakers these days is that it is a ritual the kind of ritual that early Friends scorned when they saw Anglicans doing it. Friends need to act, in situations of uncertainty, where they are slightly out of control, where nicely phrased locution is not the currency."

These Friends and non-Friends were more than ready to act!

ONE OF THE FIRST EXERCISES was to create a Fracking Timeline to see how far the movement has come in three years. People came up to the board in front of the room and wrote down the dozens of milestones that have given the movement its shape. We were amazed at the progress, which consisted mostly of generating awareness. These included: the release of the Academy Award-nominated documentary *Gasland* and later with the New York Times' ongoing investigative series, "Drilling Down," that exposed this issue to the world; the conference on fracking and its health impacts at Mount Sinai Hospital; various lawsuits; and the upcoming November 21st meeting of the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC).

Though there was a great depth of knowledge of people in the room, non-violent direct action was new to most all of us.

Concepts were introduced, including the need to designate a "target," someone who is able to give you what you want. Once you have determined your target, you can apply one of several of NVDA tactics (which one you use depends in part on where you are in your story line, since they escalate in pressure):

1. Symbolic acts (marches, rallies, street theater, mock elections)
2. Non-cooperation (student strike, consumers' boycott, tax withholding)
3. Alternative cooperation (citizens' document search, non-violent land seizure, citizens' arrest)

At times we broke into smaller groups, to dream up new tactics and designate immediate and long-term targets and goals. All agreed that the ultimate goal was to ban fracking, and at the very least to close the "Halliburton loophole," which allows fracking to go on unhampered by the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Clean Air Act, Superfund Act, Resource Conservation & Recovery Act (hazardous waste act), and Environmental Policy Act. Without these exemptions, it was noted, fracking would come to an end because it would be too expensive.

It was also noted that beyond prohibition of fracking, the true goal was to get off fossil fuels and nuclear energy altogether and for the entire world to be powered by sustainable energy, aka "WWS" Wind, Water & Solar. Mark Z. Jacobson and Mark A. Delucchi outlined and quantified this and showed it to be completely feasible in their 2009 study, "A Path to Renewable Energy by 2030," published in the November 2009 issue of *Scientific American*.

The immediate goal was to focus on the upcoming Delaware River Basic Commission meeting in Trenton on November 21.

The training participants were not a coherent group, however. We were unable to form one action/ decision-making group to take up one of the actions, so I gathered the ideas from the brainstorming sessions and sent them out to people so that they could form action groups around the issue(s) that most spoke to them. Only one person responded. Some others were happy just to have come to educate themselves, another felt they needed an action to be within a more coherent campaign strategy.

Others were planning to work with 350.org and United for Action on one action that was generated. We called it the "Obama Phone Bank Action": The plan was to go into Obama re-election offices as groups of volunteers, make calls to his constituents, and do a survey. We would ask, "The Delaware River Basin is about to get fracked. Would you support Obama to put pressure on the DRBC to say no and on Congress to close the Halliburton loophole?" We would ask them to call the White House, reminding them, "You voted for him." We would record the answers in writing, record the calls on I-Phones, and put them up on YouTube.

As it turned out, the DRBC meeting was cancelled, due in part to the wavering of Governor Markell of Delaware (one of the five votes on the Commission), along with the first threat of mass civil disobedience that was to take place at that meeting. Too bad the action plan was brilliant, but it can be used again in another form.

People expressed the sense that we were dealing simultaneously with a human rights issue, a nature's rights issue and, as Daniel pointed out, a democracy issue, since we the people were not able to gain access to information that we needed to make an informed decision, such as the chemicals contained in the fracking fluid and the Army Corps of Engineers' study on the effects of fracking.

Other features that are part of a successful campaign that we discussed include transparency, identifying "pillars of support" those people who allow your opponents to do what they do, escalating pressure, presenting ultimatums, putting your opponent into a position in which he/ she must choose, and a consideration of timing (whether to use surprise or threaten with an action over a long period to build tension). An example of the latter is Gandhi's Salt March in British-occupied India.

Feedback on the program was highly positive, from: "One of the best training / organizing programs I've attended" to "Inspiring" to "I enjoyed the training immensely, the wisdom of the trainer, and the opportunity to meet the other people in attendance."

My sense is that this event enriched people's understanding of the new direction that the movement to end fracking will take. Everyone came away with a sense of new possibilities, from the veteran "fractivists" to newcomers.

<http://www.quakerearthcare.org/Publications/BeFriendingCreation/BFCCurrentIssue/BFCpage01.htm#Fracking>

February 20, 2012

Building Sustainable Future Needs More Than Science, Experts Say

By Stephen Leahy
Nation of Change

Contrary to popular belief, humans have failed to address the earth's worsening emergencies of climate change, species' extinction and resource overconsumption not because of a lack of information, but because of a lack of imagination, social scientists and artists say.

At a conference for the [American Academy for the Advancement of Science](#) (AAAS) here in Vancouver, British Columbia, experts argued that the path to a truly sustainable future is through the muddy waters of emotions, values, ethics, and most importantly, imagination.

Humans' perceptions of reality are filtered by personal experiences and values, said David Maggs, a concert pianist and PhD student at the Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

As a result, the education and communication paradigm of "if we only knew better, we'd do better" is not working, Maggs told attendees at the world's largest general science meeting. "We don't live in the real world, but live only in the world we imagine."

"We live in our heads. We live in storyland," agreed John Robinson of UBC's Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability.

"When we talk about sustainability we are talking about the future, how things could be. This is the landscape of imagination," Robinson told IPS. "If we can't imagine a better world we won't get it."

This imagining will be complex and difficult. Sustainability encompasses far more than just scientific facts – it also incorporates the idea of how we relate to nature and to ourselves, he said.

"We haven't yet grasped the depth of changes that are coming."

Because human decisions and behavior are the result of ethics, values and emotion, and because sustainability directly involves our values and ethical concerns, science alone is insufficient to make decisions about sustainability, said Thomas Dietz, assistant vice president for environmental research at Michigan State University.

Information plays a much smaller role than we like to think, Dietz explained. In order to truly address big issues like climate change or sustainability, we need to talk at a society-wide scale about our values and reach mutual understanding about the values needed for sustainability.

"However, we don't like to talk about our values or feelings, because it threatens our personal identity."

Engaging the public

Treating nature as an object, separate and distinct from us, is part of the problem, said Sacha Kagan, sociologist at Leuphana University in Germany. The current environmental crisis results from technological thinking and a fear of complexity that science alone cannot help us with, Kagan said.

The objectification of the natural world began during the Age of Enlightenment about 300 years ago. People saw the world and their place in it in very different ways before that, said Robinson.

Today, he said, sustainability will not be achieved without "engaging people in numbers and at levels that have never been done before".

New social media tools like Facebook may help with such a monumental task, as "people certainly don't like to come to public meetings".

Current approaches to help the public understand the implications of climate change, such as graphs or iconic pictures of polar bears, have limitations and are ineffective, said Mike Hulme, a climate scientist at the University of East Anglia in the UK.

"We need to find new ways to think about the future under climate change," said Hulme.

Art could be one such approach, suggested Dietz. It would serve not as propaganda but as a creative way to engage our imaginations. "Art can provoke thinking and actually change people's perceptions of the complex issues associated with sustainability science," he argued.

"When we're considering questions about preserving biodiversity versus creating jobs, art can help us examine our values and have a discussion that's broader than just scientific facts."

It is tempting to believe the arts can help by softening and 'pretty-fying' the message and bringing it to a wider audience, said award-winning photographer Joe Zammit-Lucia.

"We need to go much further to provide a different worldview that can help us re-frame the issues," said Zammit-Lucia.

Society's choices are driven by people's cultural perceptions of reality, which in turn are based on their values and their cultural context, he said. While helpful, scientific knowledge and experts are also part of the problem: by dominating the sustainability discourse, they narrow people's visions of what's possible.

"I also don't buy in the idea we need to make the right decisions. What we need is the right process, ways in which the public can fully participate," he concluded.

<http://www.nationofchange.org/building-sustainable-future-needs-more-science-experts-say-1329748830>

February 22, 2012

Brazil Named Global Host of World Environment Day 2012

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi (Kenya) - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) today announced that Brazil, with one of the fastest growing economies in the world, will host World Environment Day 2012 (WED) on 5 June.

This year's theme '*Green Economy: Does it include you?*' invites everyone to both assess where the Green Economy fits in their daily lives and evaluate whether development through these pathways towards a Green Economy can deliver the kinds of social, economic and environmental outcomes needed in a world of seven billion people, climbing to over nine billion in 2050.

Brazil had previously hosted WED in 1992, on the eve of the first Earth Summit, when world leaders, government officials and international organizations met to refocus, recalibrate and deliver a route map towards sustainable development.

"In celebrating WED in Brazil in 2012, we are returning to the roots of contemporary sustainable development in order to forge a new path that reflects the realities but also the opportunities of a new century," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director.

"Three weeks after WED, Brazil will host Rio+20 where world leaders and nations will gather in order to design a future that takes sustainable development from theory and patchy success to the locomotive of transformational change-a pathway that can grow economies and generate decent jobs without pushing the globe past planetary boundaries," he added.

With a country of 200 million people, Brazil is the fifth most populous nation in the world and has the fifth largest land mass on the planet with 8.5 million square kilometers

In recent years Brazil has taken enormous steps to tackle issues such as deforestation in the Amazon through enforcement efforts and monitoring initiatives by the Brazilian government.

Indeed by some estimates, Brazil recently realized one of the biggest greenhouse gas emission reductions in the world as a result of its achievements in reducing deforestation rates.

According to *UNEP's Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, the country is also at the forefront of building an economy that includes recycling and renewable energy and the generation of green jobs.

- Brazil's recycling industry generates returns of US\$2 billion a year while cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 10 million tonnes.

Recycling in all its forms already employs 12 million people in three countries alone: Brazil, China and the United States.

Brazil is also the world leader in sustainable ethanol production for fueling vehicles and is expanding into other renewable areas such as wind power and solar heating systems.

- The recent construction of 500,000 new homes in Brazil with solar heating systems generated 30,000 new jobs.

"We are very pleased to host this global celebration for the environment. The World Environment Day will be a great opportunity in Brazil to showcase the environmental aspects of sustainable development in the warmup to the Rio+20 conference," said Brazil's Minister of Environment, Izabella Teixeira, who this week is attending UNEP's Governing Council meeting in Nairobi, Kenya.

"The history of Brazil, the complexion of its diverse and dynamic economy with its natural and nature-based resources allied to its industries and its current and future role in international relations, offer a lens and a unique perspective through which a broad-based, transformational outcome is possible at Rio+20," said Mr Steiner.

"Brazil's commitment to social and equity issues nationally and regionally and its responsibilities towards developing and least developed economies can also guide and shape the debates," he added.

"The contemporary direction of sustainable development was born in Brazil - in many ways its future health, maturity and ability to respond to the challenges and opportunities of a markedly different world will be forged in Brazil in four months' time," said Mr Steiner.

The WED celebrations in Brazil on 5 June are part of thousands of events taking place around the globe. WED 2012 will emphasize how individual actions can have an exponential impact, with a variety of activities ranging from a marathon, to community clean-ups, car-free days, green blogging competitions, exhibits, green petitions, nationwide green campaigns and much more.

Kia Motors Corporation, the oldest and second largest automobile manufacturer in the Republic of Korea, today also donated five vehicles to UNEP as part of its response to the 2012's WED theme '*Green Economy: Does it include you?*'

The cars include Kia Rios and one 2012 Kia Optima Hybrid which were chosen for their fuel efficiency.

The official signing ceremony took place at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, and marked Kia's continued commitment to environmental sustainability.

"Through participation in environmental partnerships such as with UNEP we aim to support steadfast efforts to solve global environmental challenges," said Soon-Nam Lee, Director of Overseas Marketing, Kia Motors Corporation. "This year's 'Green Economy' theme bly resonates with our core environmental management objectives of achieving low carbon emissions, resource efficiency and placing the environment at the forefront of all our business activities."

Mr. Steiner said: "I would like to thank KIA for their support-together we will shortly be launching a competition where organizations and groups working at the grassroots of the Green Economy in all the regions of the world can stand to win one of the vehicles in order to further their important work."

UNEP plans to announce details of the competition, which celebrates WED and UNEP's 40th Anniversary, next month with full details published on www.unep.org/wed

Notes to Editors

This year UNEP plans to make WED 2012 into a bigger celebration than ever before, building on the unprecedented success of WED 2011 in India - when people in more than 112 countries registered over 4,000 activities on the WED website.

The WED 2011 website will inspire, inform and involve people through unprecedented interactivity, offering daily tips, information and statistics on the Green Economy, a platform where people around the world can register their activities, social networking campaigns and competitions to get people on every continent involved. See: www.unep.org/WED.

The Republic of India hosted World Environment Day last year for the first time since the celebrations began in 1972. The year's commemorations were the largest and most widely celebrated globally around the theme **Forests: Nature at Your Service**. Thousands of activities were organized worldwide from Hong Kong to Abidjan, with beach clean-ups, concerts, exhibits, film festivals, community events and much more.

Rio Earth Summit: In 1992 the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, popularly known as the Rio Earth Summit, was convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to address the state of the environment and sustainable development. In June 2012, there will be the follow up meeting, or Rio+20, in Brazil in June, where one of the main themes governments are expected to address is Green Economy "in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication".

For more information visit:

Details about WED campaigns and special initiatives will be announced at www.unep.org/WED in the run-up to 5 June.

Details on UNEP's 12th Special Session Governing Council can be found at: www.unep.org/GC

Details on UNEP's 40 Anniversary can be found at: <http://www.unep.org/40thAnniversary>

Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication can be found on the UNEP website: www.unep.org/greenconomy

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=2667&ArticleID=9047&l=en>

February 22, 2012

Ash Wednesday Declaration: Repent for "shrug-culture" on climate change

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Religious leaders in the United Kingdom are using this Ash Wednesday as a call to all Christians to repent for the “shrug-culture” existing in many parts of the world toward climate change.

Operation Noah, a Christian climate change lobby, released today its Ash Wednesday Declaration – a seven-point call to action based around biblical themes about creation and humanity’s responsibility to care for it.

"Traditionally, Christians commit themselves to repentance and renewed faith in Jesus Christ on Ash Wednesday," said David Atkinson, Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Southwark, in a press release. “We must live out that faith in relation to our damaging consumer economy, over-dependence on fossil fuels and the devastation we, as a species, are inflicting on God's world.

"We believe that responsible care for God's creation is foundational to the Gospel and central to the church's mission."

Read the full Declaration: <http://www.operationnoah.org/read-the-declaration>

Joining Atkinson in backing the Declaration are the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of Cape Town, South Africa and Scottish Cardinal Keith O’Brien, archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh. Leaders of the Methodist, Baptist and United Reform churches also pledged their support.

Numerous churches across England, including St. Mary-Le-Bow in London, held public prayer services to launch the Declaration, subtitled "Climate Change and the Purposes of God: a call to the Church."

Operation Noah was formed in 2001 by Christian Ecology Link. Its website state its goal is a complete decarbonization of the British economy by 2030, and to reach that end, the

organization works to educate and advocated church leaders, governmental leaders and children through various campaigns.

The Declaration states that global warming and its effects raise questions central to the Christian faith, and highlights seven areas, each stemming from a specific biblical verse (excerpts below are not bible verses, but bits from each theme in the Declaration):

- **Find joy in creation-** “The beauty and harmony of God’s creation is for all cultures a source of human well-being, spiritual nourishment and joy.”
- **Listen-** "Prophets are those who speak truth, usually uncomfortable truth, to their generation." In that respect, "We must listen to the scientists warning us of approaching dangers, exercise discernment, and be wary of ‘false prophets’ representing the vested interests of the powerful."
- **Repent-** To continue polluting habits goes against God, and "for our generation, reducing our dependence on fossil fuels has become essential to Christian discipleship."
- **Take responsibility-** Humans "have a unique responsibility for the well-being of creation," so to that end, "We must use our power wisely to promote the flourishing of future generations and the diversity of life on earth."
- **Seek justice-** Climate change justice means taking action for the poor, for future generations and for all creatures. To that end, "the challenge is to seek a different, sustainable economy, based on the values of human flourishing and the well-being of all creation, not on the assumption of unlimited economic growth, on overconsumption, exploitative interest and debt."
- **Love our neighbors-** "Loving our neighbour requires us to reduce our consumption of energy for the sake of Christ, who suffers with those who suffer. To live simply and sustainably contributes significantly to human flourishing."
- **Act with hope-** "Hope in God motivates us to take action that can lead to transformation, for by God’s power at work within us, God is able to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine. Despite the strong probability of very serious effects from global warming, for Christians despair is not an option."

Because of the connections between each of these tenants and climate change, Operation Noah views climate change as a confessional issue for our time, one that requires spiritual reflection and action.

"We believe that this is a time of urgency for the church," said Atkinson. "The threat of runaway climate change is the most significant moral question facing us today."

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/ash-wednesday-declaration-repent-shrug-culture-climate-change>

February 23, 2012

Sacred natural sites and climate change threat

By Utpal Parashar
Hindustan Times

Sacred natural sites are areas of land or water having special spiritual significance. And the Eastern Himalayas is home to many such sites like Mount Kailash (Tibet), Lumbini (Nepal), Taksang (Bhutan), Gosaikunda (Nepal), Gurudongmar Lake (Sikkim). These sites besides having spiritual and religious significance also have biodiversity conservation value due to restrictions on cutting of trees and desecration of environment around them. Surveys have found high level of biodiversity in these areas.

But like Eastern Himalayas which faces threat from climate change, these places too are in danger. A new WWF report—The High Ground—highlights the threats posed to these sites and the need to protect them.

Increased industrialisation, land use change, pollution, migration, commercialisation due to increase visits by pilgrims and tourists, dilution of sacred rituals and sale of meat, alcohol and tobacco near these sites are cited as spiritual and physical threats to these places.

More than these threats, the one which is of immediate concern is the danger posed by climate change as it is “most pervasive and difficult to tackle”. These sites are located in one of the most sensitive regions where minor change in temperatures could prove disastrous.

Changes in rainfall patterns, reduction in snowfall, increase in temperature and receding of glaciers are not only having a direct impact on these sites but also on the populations living close to them.

“One result of warmer temperatures and changes in glaciers is an increase in the rate of glacier lake outburst floods (GLOFS), one example of which has damaged the Punakha Dzong temple in Bhutan,” the report says. The temple has been hit by three GLOFs in 60 years.

In a bid to highlight the threats posed to these sites by climate change, WWF is working with governments to preserve them.

“The near pristine state of sacred sites in East Himalayas is a testament to how sacred places, beliefs and practices can aid conservation efforts,” says Tariq Aziz of WWF’s Living Himalayas Initiative.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/815560.aspx#>

February 28, 2012

Pair pioneers ecology and religion program

By Liliana Varman
Yale Daily News

After spending four days by himself in the Mojave desert without access to food, Stephen Blackmer FES '83 DIV '12 found his calling. The 49-year-old had spent his life working to conserve New England forests, but said that trip expanded his views on how to protect the environment. In 2007, two years after his return, Blackmer said he heard a voice in his head urging him to quit his job and ponder a new direction for his work.

Now a Yale Divinity School student set to graduate this spring, Blackmer has pursued study of what he calls "environmental theology" through which he has explored the connection between Christianity and the environmental movement. Blackmer already had a degree from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, but said he viewed Yale as the best place to combine religious studies with his previous work.

Yale is the only university in the country that offers joint master's degrees in religion and ecology from both the University's divinity and environment schools. Yale Divinity School professor Margaret Farley GRD '70 '73 and environment school professor Stephen Kellert GRD '71 created the program in 2003, but when Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, who are married, arrived to teach at Yale in 2006, they gave the program "a new lease on life," said former environment school Dean Gus Speth '64 LAW '69.

While Tucker estimated that seven students are currently pursuing the joint master's degrees in religion and ecology at Yale, the growing program represents just one way the couple has worked to establish the interdisciplinary field as a course of study.

BLENDING SUBJECTS

Religious worldviews and ethical attitudes vary across the globe, Tucker said, but because they all shape the relationship between humans and the Earth, they can serve as an impetus to solve environmental problems.

In 1973, a 22-year-old Tucker began teaching English literature and language at a women's university in Okayama, Japan, where she said she further deepened her appreciation for nature while experiencing the beauty of Zen gardens and the Japanese countryside. But only on a 1974 visit to Saigon on her way back to the United States did she first feel compelled to bring religion into the discussion of environmental problems.

"The devastation of Agent Orange was evident across the countryside with its subsequent effect on people," Tucker said. "It was almost too much to bear, but it was only the beginning."

Over the past 35 years, she added, the consequences of technological modernization — such as increased car usage and engineering projects in Asia — have adversely affected the environment. One of the most important issues in the field of religion and ecology is determining how to balance economic development and environmental protection, she added.

Before working to pioneer the field of religion and ecology, though, Tucker returned to school to learn more about religions of the world. Tucker earned a master's degree in the history of religions at Fordham University — where she met Grim, who was pursuing the same degree — followed by a Ph.D. in Confucianism and Asian religions at Columbia University.

After 20 years of studying and teaching world religions at universities across the country, the couple looked to unite religion and ecology on a large scale. They took a leave of absence from teaching jobs at Bucknell University to serve as senior research fellows at Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions. There the two organized and raised funds for a conference series on world religions and ecology that began in 1996. In doing so, they laid the foundations for the joint field of religion and ecology.

EXPANDED REACH

fields of religion and ecology had slowly gained momentum in the late 1980s as a result of interreligious dialogue about the environmental crisis, said John Berthrong, associate professor of comparative theology at the Boston University School of Theology.

Berthrong said he first encountered the concept in the late 1980s, but said Tucker and Grim took the initiative to begin the interdisciplinary discussion.

“Dr. Tucker and Dr. Grim put the wheels under this idea that a number of us had been thinking, and they crystallized it,” Berthrong said.

Despite enthusiastic responses, finding initial support and funding for the Harvard conferences posed some challenges, Grim said. Berthrong attributed some of the initial skepticism to the perception many had of a disconnect between science and religion.

Grim said he and his wife had to persuade scholars, religious leaders and environmentalists of the field's legitimacy because it had not formally existed before. Doing so, he said, entailed persuading scholars that old religious texts could be re-examined and reconstructed in order to apply ancient ideas to modern problems such as climate change and pollution.

The conference ultimately drew 800 people over three years, facilitating group discussions based on papers submitted by participants in fields ranging from humanistic and religious studies to the natural and social sciences.

Following these three conferences, in 1998, the couple founded the Forum on Religion and Ecology, an international interfaith project that hosts conferences for environmentalists and scholars of religion, Tucker said. By increasing dialogue, she added, they aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice. From the start of the Harvard conferences to 2004, attendees of the

Harvard conferences contributed to a series of 10 volumes published by the Harvard Center for World Religions under the direction of Tucker and Grim. Those volumes, Tucker said, explore how various religious foundations can be applied to the idea of environmental stewardship and ethics.

While Harvard was the ideal host for the conferences due to the University's focus on world religions, Tucker said, the couple returned to teach at Bucknell.

COMING TO YALE

In 2006, Yale invited Tucker and Grim to expand the interdisciplinary study of both religion and ecology, already institutionalized through a joint master's program three years earlier, said Kellert, who helped start Yale's joint master's program. Due to the University's leading programs in religion, theology, environmental studies and bioethics, Yale was the perfect place for the couple to continue their work, he added.

"Having really helped to create this field, we wanted to come to the only place that offered such a master's program," Tucker said, adding that the distinguishing factor between Yale and other universities is the equal role both graduate schools play in offering such a program.

Tucker said that the joint study of religion and ecology is still in its early stages, but interest in the program is increasing. The program is making an effort to raise money so the environment school and the divinity school can offer more scholarships for students, and last year the Porter Chair in Religion and Environmental Stewardship was awarded to Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, the Episcopal school within the Divinity School.

Rev. Stephanie Johnson DIV '10 '12, an Episcopal priest pursuing a second master's degree at Yale in sacred theology, said she had not considered the possibility of combining her interests in religion and the environment until she arrived at Yale.

"I'd always been an environmental planner in my professional life and a devout Christian in another part of my life — I never thought that they would be related in a way," she said.

Shortly after arriving at Yale, she said she heard conversations about faith and ecology. Initially, she said, she resisted such conversations because she thought she was called to be an Episcopal priest, but after attending a conference organized by Tucker and Grim, she said she realized she needed to re-envision her ministry. Now, Johnson said she is working with the New York City Bishop of the Episcopal Church to encourage members to participate in activities such as working in the church garden, in hopes that they will view the land as part of God's creation.

Johnson and Blackmer said Grim and Tucker have been supportive of their work, and have served as sources of inspiration for them.

"They're very interested in training and developing people who can carry this work on," Blackmer said.

The Forum plans to host a summer symposium on religion and environmental stewardship this June, said Tara Trapani, the Forum's administrative assistant. The Symposium, she added, will mark the first time scientists from the environment school and theologians from the divinity school will come together to discuss topics such as climate change, pollution, ecosystems and environmental justice. Tucker said she and her husband hope the symposium will become an annual event.

<http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2012/feb/28/pair-pioneers-ecology-and-religion-program/>

February 29, 2012

Green Faith

Here on Earth: Wisconsin Public Radio

How does faith affect eco-consciousness? Is religion more focused on the after-life than on stewardship of the earth? Experts on Islam and Christianity join us for an interfaith conversation about faith and environmental activism. This show will preview an Inside Islam conference on Green Faith that will be held on March 6th at the Pyle Center at UW-Madison.

Guests:

- Anna M. Gade, Associate Professor in the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia and the Religious Studies Program at UW-Madison
- Cal DeWitt, Professor, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison

Listen to the show:

http://www.wpr.org/hereonearth/archive_120229k.cfm

March 2, 2012

Awakening the healing heart

Remarks by Achim Steiner to the Global Peace Initiative of Women Conference
United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi

Dena Merriam, Founder, Global Peace Initiative of Women (USA);

Kuki Gallmann, Founder, Gallmann Memorial Foundation & Great Rift Valley Trust in Ol Ari Nyiro, Laikipia Nature Conservancy (Kenya);

H.H. Shinso Ito, Head Priest of Shinnyo-en (Japan);

Dr. Sekagya Yahaya, Traditional Leader and Healer (Uganda);

Welcome to the headquarters of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), where only last week we celebrated, together with the world's ministers responsible for the environment, our 40th anniversary.

- Four decades after the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden;
- And two decades after the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 where the peace dividend as a result of the end of the bipolar world would address the challenges built up over two centuries of industrialization, uneven and unsustainable development.

Your meeting here comes at an important time for the issues and themes that we mutually share and captured in your theme - awakening the healing heart.

In some four months' time the city of Rio de Janeiro will again host a summit - Rio+20 - that holds the promise of re-awakening, refocusing and reinvigorating the means and the pathways towards sustainable development.

Development that if fully implemented could go a long way towards healing the social, environmental and economic divides and that characterize our world in the early 21st century.

- Ones that are contributing to lost opportunities for young people everywhere to find decent jobs and livelihoods that can allow them to fulfill their potential.
- Ones that are driving species to extinction; damaging and degrading the soils, forests and freshwaters that underpin our very survival and health.
- Ones that are increasing the scarcity of natural resources and triggering emerging and challenging issues such as climate change and the acidification of the seas and oceans that if unaddressed may tip the planet into a far more unstable state.

Healing the planet and charting a transformative course requires solid science and far more creative and imaginative ways of running our economies in ways that factor in the true wealth of the natural world.

But it also requires a re-awakening of our common humanity and yes the re-awakening of the spirit and the spiritual side of humanity with all its potential for catalyzing positive and cooperative action.

Governments have a key role to play in terms of putting in place the kinds of transformational policies and programmes that can steer the lives and livelihoods of now seven billion people onto a more sustainable path.

But governments cannot do this on their own.

It is you, the faith leaders and women of the world along with all the other fibres and fabrics of society - from civic leaders to indigenous peoples - that in a very real sense give the politicians the courage and the license to legislate.

Since 2008, UNEP has in partnership with economists, academics, social thinkers and many UN organizations and agencies, been evolving the concept and developing the analysis of what we have termed the Green Economy.

In the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, it is now one of the two key themes for Rio+20.

Here in Kenya, one can see living proof of what a Green Economy is about. This country has one of the largest closed canopy forests in Africa - it is called the Mau forest complex.

Over the past 20 to 30 years it has lost some 25 per cent of its cover - recently UNEP assisted the Government of the Republic of Kenya in an analysis of just what the Mau is really worth to the people and the economy here.

The answer is US\$1.5 billion a year in terms of the generating moisture for the tea industry and water feeding major river systems that flow to the Masai Mara; Lake Nakuru and other key tourism sites where visitors from across the globe come to marvel and be moved by beauty of Kenya's wildlife and landscapes.

- Water that also makes agriculture possible and hydro-power allowing at least some Kenyans to have electricity in order to study their homework and, yes, read the Bible, the Koran or the writings of the Buddha at night.

Kenya has also passed policies - called feed-in tariffs - that are encouraging a boom in renewable energy, including advanced plans for the largest wind farm in sub-Saharan Africa and sharply increasing capacity of its geothermal in the Great Rift Valley.

If Kenya keeps up this path, then perhaps it could one day soon become a zero emission economy.

And one where women and girls can spend less time looking for water and firewood and more time caring for themselves, their families and their children, including more time on education, productive livelihoods, personal reflection and the spiritual dimension of their lives.

Our work in the Green Economy is chronicling shining examples like these across all communities, countries and Continents - the challenge before world leaders in Rio is how to scale-up and accelerate these transformations and ensure social as well as environmental and economic outcomes.

Just before Rio+20, UNEP has the privilege and the pleasure of coordinating World Environment Day which falls on 5 June each year.

The theme we have chosen is the Green Economy - Does it Include You?

Ladies and Gentlemen, we would like it to include you and your organizations and associations because your influence and connectivity to your communities could play a decisive role in rallying the globe community to the kind of transformative outcome in Rio later in June.

Indeed, faith groups and women were among the elements of civil society that played a pivotal role in 1972 in terms of awakening the world to developmental challenges facing the world that in turn established UNEP.

Your predecessors also played a pivotal role in 1992 in terms of awakening the world to action in terms of laying out the instruments and the foundations of contemporary sustainable development.

In the run up to June and Rio+20 your voices, ideas, courage and wisdom are needed again in order to empower governments and the private sector to move sustainable development from theory and patchy implementation to a decisive and mature path to fairness, equity, stability and peace.

For, Ladies and Gentlemen, without that step change we face a future of increasing scarcity, rapidly and perhaps irreversible climate change and accelerating environmental decline and degradation that could literally tear the world apart.

With that step change, however, we have the chance of being true stewards of planet Earth; harvesting new opportunities for social inclusion and allowing seven billion people, rising to over nine billion by 2050, to reach their true potential in all the dimensions of what it means to be a human being.

I wish you well for your meeting.

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=2668&ArticleID=9064&l=en>

March 2, 2012

Global Peace Initiative of Women Convenes Environmental Conference in Kenya

United Nations Environment Programme

Religious and community leaders meet to discuss solutions for sustainable development

Nairobi (Kenya) -- The Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW), a non-governmental organization of contemplative leaders based in the United States, held today an environmental conference at the headquarters of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi.

The meeting, entitled Awakening the Healing Heart, focused on how civil society, especially women and religious leaders, can mobilize awareness and action to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

The challenges facing the environment today has created a new urgency within faith communities to build a global consciousness around sustainable development. An international delegation from the GPIW conference will form part of the inter-faith component attending the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil in June 2012.

The meeting brought together over 300 women religious and community leaders, environmentalists and advocates from 28 countries and from all the major faith traditions, including among others H.H. Shinso Ito, head priest of Shinnyo-en, Japan; Reverend Dr. Celestin Musekura, founder of African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries, Rwanda/USA; Ms. Wang Yongchen, founder of Green Earth Volunteers, China and Dr. Sakeena Yacoobi, founder of the Afghan Institute of Learning.

UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner gave the keynote address.

"We at the Global Peace Initiative of Women are privileged to be in Kenya with so many inspiring faith and community leaders to assess how our perspective can contribute to environmental healing and provide new solutions for sustainable development," said Reverend Joan Brown Campbell, GPIW Chair, and former director of the U.S. Office of the World Council of Churches.

On Saturday, 3 March, delegates will travel to Ol Ari Nyiro, the Laikipia Nature Conservancy on the edge of the Rift Valley, to craft a shared agenda and commitment for mobilizing faith communities to protect the environment. Bringing religious and civil society leaders to the Rift Valley, historically known as the cradle of civilization, will serve as a far-reaching reminder of what is at stake.

The Global Peace Initiative of Women conference is organized in partnership with the Gallmann Memorial Foundation/ Gallmann Africa Conservancy, with support from Shinnyo-en, the Fetzer Institute, and the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association.

For More Information Please Contact:

Brianne Chai-Onn at Email: chaionnb@gpiw.org or Tel. +254-70-796-1117

Access to the live webcast of the conference in Laikipia at <http://www.media-server.com/m/p/8nhtau2u>

The Global Peace Initiative of Women (www.gpiw.org) A major focus of GPIW's work is to aid in building a global network of contemplative leaders who through their inner work can help transform the causes and conditions that lead to suffering at both the individual and collective level. The environmental crisis has created new urgency within faith communities to safeguard

the manifold communities of life on Earth. The gathering in Kenya aims to amplify their efforts and build the global consciousness around the collective ethical and moral responsibilities of sustainable development.

The Gallmann Africa Conservancy (www.gallmannkenya.org) promotes the co-existence of people and nature in Africa by harmonizing the protection and the creative sustainable and ecological utilization of the natural resources. Operating in Ol'ari Nyiro, in northern Kenya, the Conservancy aims to make Ol'ari Nyiro an example of this conservation principle.

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2676&ArticleID=9061&l=>

March 6, 2012

Episcopalians Confronting Climate Change

By Lisa Palmer

Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media

Leaders of American Episcopalians point to ‘mounting urgency’ to address climate change and develop more compassionate and sustainable economies to support stewardship of all of God’s creation.

In September 2011, the House of Bishops in the Episcopal Church, attending a meeting in Quito, Ecuador, sent [a pastoral letter](#) to Episcopal clergy worldwide expressing “mounting urgency” to address climate change within church membership. The letter argued the critical need for Christians to care for all of God’s creation and urged that justice be sought for the poor, who it said will suffer most from climate change.

That pastoral letter was the latest in a string of climate change and environmental sustainability communications that have consistently framed action on climate change as a matter of stewardship of creation and social justice, comprising two of the “[Five Marks of Mission](#)” in the Episcopal Church. But despite strong messaging from the top, many clergy are cautious of preaching on climate change.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the leader of the Anglican Communion, which includes the global network of Episcopal Churches, has been [publicly outspoken](#) in supporting action on climate change adaptation and mitigation. He has made individual and joint announcements, with the World Council on Churches and [with the Vatican](#), to urge policy action by governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, [stopped flying for a year](#) because he wanted to reduce his greenhouse gas footprint. And the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the U.S., Katharine Jefferts Schori, repeatedly addresses climate change.

Making connections: ‘All Life Depends on the Life of Others’

An oceanographer prior to her ordination to the priesthood, Jefferts Schori brings a unique blend of science and theology to climate communication. As a scientist, she understands linkages, including between global poverty and the need to address global warming. At a U.S. Senate environment committee meeting in 2007, [Jefferts Schori explained](#) that “no life form can be studied in isolation from its surroundings or from other organisms. All living things are deeply interconnected, and all life depends on the life of others.”

Her Senate testimony centered on how global poverty and climate change are “intimately related.” She told the committee she and her colleagues share “a profound concern that climate change will most severely affect those living in poverty and the most vulnerable in our communities here in the United States and around the world.”

“I want to be absolutely clear; inaction on our part is the most costly of all courses of action for those living in poverty,” she testified.

That message of interconnectedness has been an ongoing tenet of the Episcopal Church’s ministry, whose members total about 1.9 million in the U.S. It was the basis for a resolution in 1991 to oppose drilling and mining in Alaska’s Arctic Wildlife Refuge, an area important to the Gwich’in people, 90 percent of whom are Episcopalian. Connectedness was also the basis for [the church’s justice, peace and the integrity of creation initiative](#) and the formation of a committee on environmental stewardship, both of which laid an early foundation for the church’s work on climate. Michael Schut, Economic and Environmental Affairs Officer for the Episcopal Church in the U.S., said in a telephone interview.

“When you think of our call to ‘Love thy neighbor,’ I also think there is some motivation among Episcopalians to see other parts of creation as our neighbor, including endangered species and healthy ecosystems,” Schut said, “because they ultimately influence human health and our ability to sustain human life.”

Episcopalian’s ‘Genesis Covenant’ Calls for GHG Reductions

Episcopalians have called for international policies to combat climate change since 2000, including backing [conservation-based energy legislation](#) and financial support for developing nations to [control carbon emissions](#), among [many other efforts](#). But the [Genesis Covenant](#) may be the most significant proposal. It was adopted unanimously by Episcopal Church’s main governing body four years ago and requires that church facilities — including places of worship, offices, schools, camps and retreat centers — reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent within 10 years.

The Genesis Covenant has potential for big change across the church’s 7,000 parishes in the U.S., but it’s a voluntary program and therein lies the problem. Local leadership is necessary for it to take off, explained Schut. So far a limited number of districts and individual parishes have signed on to the agreement; these include the Diocese of Chicago, the Diocese of Olympia

(Washington), and the Arkansas Diocese. ([Watch a video](#) of Bishop Charleston's Sermon on the Genesis Covenant given at Washington D.C's National Cathedral on February 24, 2008.)

The Rev. Canon Sally Bingham has helped promote enthusiasm for climate action by helping churches lead by example. An ordained Episcopal priest and the environment minister at Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco, Bingham is also the founder and president of The Regeneration Project, an ecology and faith group that oversees the [Interfaith Power and Light](#) campaign. Chapters of Interfaith Power and Light now operate in 39 states and involve more than 14,000 congregations that work to reduce energy use from fossil fuels.

'Right Information' Leads to 'Right Thing'

"When people have the right information, they do the right thing," Bingham said in a telephone interview. She added that the Episcopal Church has always been concerned for the poor and the suffering.

"Anybody who professes a love for God and creation will respond when they know it's an insult to God and a crime against creation to destroy the climate," she said. "If you know that when you are wasting electricity, and you are depriving people in the developing world, and the poorest of the world's poor are being hurt by our behavior, you are harming those folks. If you know that, you are not going to do that. You are going to be much more responsible."

Some Areas, Some Clergy Slow to Take Action

Bingham says some areas of the U.S. are less receptive to hearing direct addresses on climate change issues than others, and she point to parts of Alabama, Mississippi, Florida and Tennessee as places clergy encounter the most opposition to climate change issues. "They say that God would never let the Earth be destroyed again," Bingham said. When asked to preach in more conservative areas, she said she often focuses on less controversial aspects of environmental stewardship, such as saving money through energy efficiency, "something everyone agrees on."

Individual clergy have been slow to address climate issues, Schut said. Yet he said some Episcopalian priests have been surprised by positive reactions from among members of their congregations. Young parishioners at St. Luke's Church in Dixon, Ill., sought ways to "green" their Gothic stone church and discretely installed [solar panels](#) on the roof to reduce use of fossil fuels and save on energy.

They then undertook a community outreach campaign, and The Rev. Michael Greene communicated with parishioners and community groups using church facilities during the week, about benefits of renewable energy, energy efficiency and recycling. The local newspaper ran a front-page story on the project, and St. Luke's received so much public attention that it resulted in increased membership.

Some Say Climate Change ‘Doesn’t Seem Religious’

The Rev. Chris Epperson, of Bruton Parish Episcopal Church in Williamsburg, Va., has taken climate change into the pulpit many times over the past decade.

“My approach has been to be careful and nuanced when preaching about global warming, and to understand that there’s real religious content there and on the need to address how we care for creation,” said Epperson. “When I get pushback, it’s usually when people tell me, ‘I come to church to be religious and this doesn’t seem religious.’”

Epperson said there’s a tendency among some church members to think about faith as “private” and not consider how it relates more broadly to the world. “Some people tell me they go to church from 9 to 12 on Sundays for spirituality and religion, and then they want to live the rest of their lives however they want,” said Epperson. “I think in terms of less tidy categories. We are called to see, and I think of it as a Venn diagram. There’s much more overlap — with climate change, our call to care for creation, and seeking justice — than people realize.”

Overcoming Criticisms ... On Politics in Sermons

A big challenge in the Episcopal Church involves getting the word out and having more of its clergy talking about climate change as an issue.

“One woman called me and said, ‘I don’t want to hear about politics when I come to church.’ If you have folks like that in your parish, or if you have the head of an oil company, or big donors who are Republicans, as clergy you are sometimes afraid,” said Bingham. She often is asked to be a visiting minister to help carry the burden: “The message gets delivered and the clergy member doesn’t have to take the brunt of it,” she said.

In recent years, the Episcopal Church has faced strong criticism from conservative members who have opposed having gays and lesbians openly serve as bishops and clergy. While climate change has raised some hackles, it has not caused divisions among bishops and clergy.

“When you look at the abolition of slavery or the civil rights movement, if people had been afraid to talk about that from the pulpit, we wouldn’t be where we are today,” Bingham said.

“And getting off fossil fuels is the same kind of an issue. It is harming people. It is killing people. It is only going to get worse as time goes on. It is a matter of life or death. We as clergy have a responsibility to tell the truth and a responsibility to talk about it. If you ask Episcopal clergy if they think it’s a problem, they’ll tell you yes. But will they get up and give a sermon about it? Sometimes, but certainly not always. They are afraid to.”

A New ‘App’ ... and an Upcoming Ecumenical Forum and Webcast

The Episcopal Church recently stepped up its communications efforts to further engage members on climate change. In February it launched [a new iPad magazine app](#) called “[Wayfarer](#)” to tell stories that concern Episcopalians around the globe. The first issue highlights the plight of

residents of Kivalina, Alaska, and chronicles the story of indigenous Alaskans faced with having to move their entire village to higher ground because of rising sea levels.

On April 21, the Episcopal Church plans to [further explore poverty and the environment](#) during a two-hour ecumenical forum that is to be available as a live webcast. “We will explore the differential effects of environmental degradation and changing climate patterns on the poor — in this country and around the world,” Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said in a press release.

Preaching about climate change poses clear challenges for Episcopalians, just as it does for other faith communities addressed in this ongoing *Yale Forum* series.

The science is complex. The specter of upsetting parishioners is real. But faith leaders, who deeply believe that the connection to creation is clear, seem determined to persist.

Also see:

[Nationwide Climate ‘Preach-In’ To Target Broad Faith-Group Congregations](#)
[The Catholic Church and Climate Change](#)
[Judaism and Climate Change](#)
[Baptists and Climate Change](#)

Lisa Palmer is a Maryland-based freelance writer and a regular contributor to The Yale Forum. (E-mail: lisa@yaleclimatemediainforum.org)

<http://www.yaleclimatemediainforum.org/2012/03/episcopalians-confronting-climate-change/>

March 19, 2012

Sacred groves: Theologians contemplate God in special places

Reverence for the divine can be found far afield and close to home.

By Brandon Loomis
The Salt Lake Tribune

Jason Brown was a Brigham Young University anthropology student working on a Guatemalan field study when he sensed that his spirituality and the natural world were tightly bound.

The villagers he was living among had a vastly different view of a forest than most Americans. Thinking the trees around them were neither a dollar-valued commodity nor a nature preserve to be admired but kept separate, they cherished them for the firewood, shelter, animals and comfort they provided.

Their ways led Brown to a new path with dual theology and forestry master’s degrees from Yale University and helped inform the environmental conscience that he discusses in religion and ethics and values classes he leads at Utah Valley University and Salt Lake Community College.

It's a philosophy that embraces the divine inspiration found in any part of nature — from a Wasatch Range spruce forest to a backyard garden.

“You say, ‘What’s nature?’ And they say, ‘Well, my cornfield. My house,’ ” Brown said. “There wasn’t this [separate] category called nature.”

Environmental ethics and a reverence for landscapes are common bonds among many faiths in Utah. The conspicuous beauty of the state’s mountains, forests and deserts makes the theme almost unavoidable, said Pastor Jeffrey Loudon of St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Taylorsville. He noted that many congregations throughout the Salt Lake Valley are active in fighting climate change or protecting landscapes, with a newsworthy example last year being First Unitarian Church’s support of fellow congregant Tim DeChristopher as he was convicted for obstructing an oil and gas lease sale in protest of Bush administration drilling policies. Like Brown, Loudon finds the sacred wherever he seeks it — and not just in politically protected places. He believes even urban landscapes such as Salt Lake City’s 700 East (“there are a lot of animals downtown”) can be sacred.

“The world is a gift,” Loudon said, “so therefore it’s sacred.” Perhaps it’s a product of our species’ evolution in nature. “People feel most at home when they feel connected to the environment.”

Loudon is also a National Outdoor Leadership School instructor, for which he will lead a hiking expedition into Wyoming’s Wind River Mountains this summer. It’s another way of sharing his love of the world, and it’s what he does instead of feeling frustrated by others’ indifference to the land.

“Can’t go there,” he said when asked whether Utahns sufficiently respect their environment. “Frustration doesn’t motivate anybody. All I can do is go places, show people and motivate them.”

Brown said an industrial or utilitarian outlook corrodes the nature-spirit connection, and he’s troubled by this attitude in Utah. The Guatemalan farmers told him of the old stories — stories that many no longer believe as modern culture has overtaken their land — of trees having spirits.

These stories struck a nerve with Brown, a young Mormon who wondered why so many of his own faith seemed oblivious to church founder Joseph Smith’s view of nature: that animals and plants have spirits.

He wondered why Western society had so commodified the land — some of it for products, other parts for parks and wildernesses — when Smith’s “first vision” of God occurred in a most natural place: a wooded farm his family had not only tapped for timber and maple syrup, but also revered as a shelter for worshipful contemplation.

While finishing at Yale last summer, Brown visited Smith’s “sacred grove” in Palmyra, N.Y., and further developed his take on sacred groves everywhere. He interviewed visitors about their

experiences there among the hardwoods. Some were history buffs. Some made annual pilgrimages. Some assigned a particular sacredness to those specific trees.

For his part, Brown finds the sacred everywhere because he views sacredness as a process or experience. Smith sought clarity in nature, he said, and in so doing taught followers to bring their own questions to nature.

“Spiritual nutrition is accessible everywhere,” he said. “All groves are sacred.”

That’s why he believes more people, including more Mormons, should be mindful of nature’s intrinsic value. Using forests and other places in sustainable ways is part of incorporating the land into the human consciousness, he said, but too often Americans value resources only for their monetary value.

Ideally he supports greater local control of public lands, noting that previous generations of federal foresters from Washington brought a utilitarian mind-set to their timber-management task. But he also hopes church leaders will increasingly focus attention on stewardship issues. It’s a hope he said has gained some traction as top Mormon leaders have begun building greener, more energy-efficient meetinghouses.

George Handley, a humanities professor at BYU, has written about the spirituality of place and nature in his book *Home Waters*, about his life and wanderings along the Provo River. He, too, finds the sacred in all of nature, but most especially close to home.

“We make places spiritual by the experiences we have in them,” he said. “Any place has the potential to be a spiritual place if we bring a kind of reverence to it and respect or maybe even awe to it.”

Often these experiences start with family or friends and shared events outdoors, he said. But aloneness in nature also heightens perception. Even dangers demonstrating vulnerability — close calls such as losing one’s way in the desert — have value in that they make one feel alive and aware. Sometimes that may even be the subconscious goal of an outing.

“Modern life is so automated,” Handley said, “and it really doesn’t cultivate that awareness of our senses very well.”

Handley called the concept of sacred natural places “a beautiful idea” and, like Brown, he pointed out that Smith found his in the neighboring trees, not “some exotic locale.”

“The fact that that [grove] is sacred should be an emblem of why any place where we live could have that sort of sacred quality for us,” he said. “We have to approach where we live with that kind of reverence.”

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<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/lifestyle/53726923-80/brown-church-close-god.html.csp?page=1>

March 21, 2012

Religious leaders unite to bless sustainability

By Sharon Udasin
Jerusalem Post

Muslim, Jewish and Christian clerics gathered on Monday to promote cooperation among spiritual leaders regarding reinforcing the importance of environmental protection among their individual communities.

“Religious leaders and institutions have the potential to mobilize billions of followers in the global struggle to curb climate change and achieve sustainable development,” said Rabbi Yonathan Neril, founder and director of the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development.

The Interfaith Climate and Energy Conference, held in Jerusalem, was co-organized by The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, a German political think tank. In addition to Neril, some prominent participants in the panel discussions included Eastern Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III; Archbishop of Acre, Haifa, Nazareth and the Galilee Dr. Elias Chacour; Sheik Muhammed Amara, imam of Zalafa; and Rabbi Ronen Lubitch, rabbi of Nir Etzion and lecturer at Sha’anun Religious Teachers College and at Hebrew University.

Video casts from other world leaders complemented the live addresses, including the Dalai Lama; Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church; Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger; Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; Archbishop Desmond Tutu; and Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The conference occurred 90 days prior to the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development.

According to Neril, the religious community is crucial with regards to furthering environmental protection as “the degradation of the natural world” is equivalent to a spiritual crisis and causes a sense of imbalance for the globe’s billions of people.

“It is not a problem of the birds and the bees, the trees and the toads,” he said.

“Rather, it is a crisis of the human being and how we live as spiritual beings in a material world.”

In order to maintain a beautiful world that is riddled with vulnerabilities, human beings are responsible for ensuring that the world is a better place, added Chacour.

“Being in charge and control of this earth, it is incumbent upon us to maintain the balance of life on it, to guarantee an honest living and a dignified preservation of all elements, and everything living on the face of this earth, including its animals and plants, and non-living objects,” Amara agreed.

In Eastern Orthodox tradition, Theophilos explained, there is likewise a “moral responsibility” to ensure that all humans are able to enjoy the home they share on earth, and Christianity in general

has a profound understanding of environment and creation.

When God took flesh as Jesus Christ according to Christianity, God demonstrated that “creaturely life” is holy and that a pilgrimage toward a union with him begins in this life, on this Earth, Theophilus said. The baptism that occurred in the waters of the Jordan River only testify to this idea of the importance of creation and nature, he added.

“The entire liturgical tradition of the Church rings with the imagery of creation,” Theophilus said. “The care of the environment begins with our own purification and stillness.”

Lubitch, speaking on behalf of Jewish ideals, supported this notion, adding that “viewing the world as a creation of God obligates us as humans to preserve creation. By doing so one realizes God’s image.”

As so many people draw significant inspiration from their respective faiths, religious leaders in this sense can bring about positive changes in the world, said Neril.

“World religions have a unique role in addressing climate change through education and advocacy of their billions of followers,” he said. “Let there be no mistake.”

<http://www.jpost.com/Sci-Tech/Article.aspx?id=262729>

March 28, 2012

The U.N. Happiness Project

By Timothy W. Ryback
New York Times

Next Monday, the United Nations will implement [Resolution 65/309](#), adopted unanimously by the General Assembly in July 2011, placing “happiness” on the global agenda.

“Conscious that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal” and “recognizing that the gross domestic product [...] does not adequately reflect the happiness and well-being of people,” Resolution 65/309 empowers the Kingdom of Bhutan to convene a high-level meeting on happiness as part of next week’s 66th session of the U.N. General Assembly in New York.

An impressive array of luminaries will be speaking for this remote Himalayan kingdom. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will open the meeting via a prerecorded video missive. The Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz will speak on “happiness indicators,” as will the economist Jeffrey Sachs. The Bhutanese prime minister will represent King Jigme Khesar Namgyel, the reigning Dragon King of the Bhutanese House of Wangchuck. (The kingdom became a constitutional monarchy in 2007.)

For the 32-year-old Dragon King — Bhutan means “land of dragons” in the local Dzongkha language — U.N. Resolution 65/309 represents a global public relations triumph and the

realization of a hereditary ambition, initiated by his grandfather 40 years ago, to establish Gross National Happiness (G.N.H.) as an alternate model to Gross National Product (G.N.P.) as a measure of national progress.

“A family should have a good house, have sufficient land if one is a farmer, and have a modest level of labor-saving devices to save precious time used up by excessive physical work,” explains Karma Ura, a leading public intellectual and artist who serves both as adviser to the king at home and as a G.N.H. ambassador abroad.

He has designed the country’s bank notes, denominated in the local currency known as ngultrum or nu, which is tied to the Indian rupee. He has promoted Gross National Happiness at the European Commission in Brussels and will do so again on Monday at the United Nations in New York.

For his services, Karma Ura received a knighthood from the king, which includes the ancient honorific title, dasho, and a sword that Ura bears as proudly as his G.N.H. patriotism. The “true forms of wealth,” he says, are being blessed with a “ravishing environment,” “vibrant health,” “strong communal relationships” and “meaning in life and freedom to free time.”

As a nation, Bhutan makes good on the Dasho Karma Ura formula. Landlocked in the Himalayan highlands between the dual economic juggernauts India and China, the kingdom is among the poorest and least developed countries in the world.

With a population under 800,000, the average income is about \$110 per month. Most Bhutanese do not earn enough money to pay taxes, which are only levied on annual incomes in excess of 100,000 ngultrum, or about \$2,000. Despite these limitations, Business Week has ranked Bhutan the “happiest” nation in Asia and the eighth happiest in the world.

“The Bhutanese have combined Buddhist spirituality and barefoot economics into a unique model that a lot of other nations can learn from,” observes Jean Timsit, a Paris-based lawyer and artist who provided the funding to publish a handbook on “operationalization of Gross National Happiness,” based on a conference held in Bhutan in 2004. The 750-page tome helped define G.N.H. and leverage it onto the global agenda.

To date, there have also been G.N.H. conferences in Thailand, Canada, the Netherlands and Brazil. According to Timsit, these activities provided the impetus for President Nicolas Sarkozy of France to commission Stiglitz, along with the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and the French economist Jean-Paul Fitoussi, to conduct a study of the “of economic performance and social progress” that included diverse G.N.H. indicators, ranging from walking to reading to the frequency of love making.

“The kind of civilization we build depends on the way we do our accounts quite simply because it changes the value we put on things,” Sarkozy notes in his preface to the report. “And I am not just speaking about market value.”

On Monday, the Bhutanese model for G.N.H. will be showcased on the United Nations agenda in accordance with Resolution 65/309. “The 2nd April High Level Meeting is intended as a landmark step towards adoption of a new global sustainability-based economic paradigm for human happiness and well-being of all life forms to replace the current dysfunctional system that is based on the unsustainable premise of limitless growth on a finite planet,” the Bhutan government Web site asserts.

With the current international crises over Syria and Iran, not to mention ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to name but a few, the Bhutanese agenda may not attract as much attention as it may deserve.

“I believe that while Gross National Happiness is inherently Bhutanese, its ideas may have a positive relevance to any nation, peoples or communities — wherever they may be,” King Jigme Khesar Namgyel observed in the preface to the G.N.H. handbook back in 2004, while he was still crown prince.

While Americans may well stake their own nationalist claim to having pioneered the notion of “happiness” as a “self-evident truth” and “inalienable right,” dating back to Thomas Jefferson’s 1776 Declaration of Independence, the Dragon King puts a distinctly Bhutanese point on the matter.

“There cannot be enduring peace, prosperity, equality and brotherhood in this world if our aims are so separate and divergent,” he says, “if we do not accept that in the end we are people, all alike, sharing the earth among ourselves and also with other sentient beings, all of whom have an equal role and stake in the state of this planet and its players.” The Dragon King has spoken. Perhaps it is time for the world to listen.

Timothy W. Ryback is deputy secretary general of the Académie Diplomatique Internationale in Paris.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/opinion/the-un-happiness-project.html>

March 29, 2012

For Katharine Hayhoe, Climate Change Not a Leap of Faith

By Michael D. Lemonick
Climate Central

[Katharine Hayhoe](#) came out of the closet in 2009. In the decade and a half since she’d gotten her Ph.D. in atmospheric sciences, her professional colleagues had known Hayhoe as an increasingly prominent expert on climate change — the author or co-author of scientific papers, textbook chapters and major reports on the science and the impacts of global warming and, since 2005, a faculty member [at Texas Tech](#) University, in Lubbock.

But in the fall of 2009, Hayhoe and her husband, [Andrew Farley](#), published a book titled *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions*, and a fact she'd always kept out of her professional life was suddenly very public. Hayhoe and Farley are evangelical Christians, and Farley, an associate professor of applied linguistics at Texas Tech, is also the pastor of a local church.

"In the U.S., evangelical Christians tend to be politically conservative, and even anti-science," said the Canadian-born Hayhoe. "So in scientific circles, saying you're an evangelical Christian is like saying 'I check my brain at the door.' I seriously wondered what this would do to my scientific reputation — was I tossing everything I'd done in the toilet?"

She needn't have worried. The book won praise not only from religious leaders, but also from hard-nosed scientists and environmentalists, including a past president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the president of the National Wildlife Federation. Since it came out, moreover, Hayhoe has been busier than ever professionally: in 2011, she served on a National Academy of Science committee on stabilization targets for greenhouse gases, and spearheaded an effort to have Texas Tech co-host one of six Regional Climate Centers sponsored by the Department of the Interior.

Increasingly, though, Hayhoe sees her mission as one of outreach. At one level, that means talking to professionals who need information on climate to do their jobs. At Texas Tech, for example, she offers a course on climate science and policy for grad students — in any discipline.

"We have civil engineers," she said, "water resource people, architects, natural resource managers, agricultural scientists, geoscientists, wildlife biologists . . . and we had so many requests from faculty to audit that I'm giving a one-week intensive course for them as well." Hayhoe has also just finished a book for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on how to use climate science and climate models to inform decisions about how to manage ecosystems.

But she's also talking to ordinary people who are simply skeptical about the whole business. "When we first came to West Texas," Hayhoe said, "I knew that most people in the area didn't accept that climate change is real. I felt a little bit like a missionary going to Africa. I thought I might end up in a stew pot."

Within a couple of months after her and Farley's arrival, though, Hayhoe began getting speaking invitations at women's groups, churches, grade schools. "People had good, legitimate questions about why they should believe climate change is caused by humans," she said, "and telling them, 'you're an idiot' is not going to change their minds. But many people in conservative communities feel that this is what they're being told."

She also got plenty of questions by way of her husband, who was invited to pastor the nondenominational, evangelical Ecclesia church soon after they came to Texas. "People started to realize that if the pastor's wife took climate change seriously, maybe it wasn't just a plot by liberal tree huggers who want Al Gore to rule the world." The congregation was too polite to ask Hayhoe about the issue directly, but they did ask her husband. "Andrew got millions of questions," she said. "He would tell them, 'I'll find out.' He's a very conservative person, went

to a Southern Baptist school, and he would tell me, ‘this is a good question, you have to have a good answer.’ ”

But good answers about the science, Hayhoe said, are not always enough, because much of the opposition is emotional, not fact based. So she tries to make a connection based on what she has in common with her listeners. “I can’t just say, ‘I’m a scientist,’” she said. “I am a human, a mother, an evangelical Christian who knows that Jesus said to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. The impacts of climate change are going to fall disproportionately on the poorest. Who doesn’t believe we should take care of the poor and needy? When I start from that place, I’ve seen dramatic shifts. People say ‘what can I do about it?’ ”

But that’s not always the case. Last year, recalled Hayhoe, she went to speak to a group of petroleum geologists. “These are white male engineers who study fossil fuels, which may be four categories of people most hostile to hearing about climate change. I felt like I was going into the lion’s den.”

Indeed, at least one member of the audience accused her of making it all up in order to score money from the government. But afterward, she got an email from someone who’d been there saying. “I still disagree, but you were courteous, and you don’t deserve what was being said.” It was, Hayhoe said, “the best email ever. If the entire U.S. were in that situation where we’re respectfully disagreeing, but talking, we’d be in very different position than we are today.”

It doesn’t look as though that will happen anytime soon, however. Back in December, Rush Limbaugh got wind that Hayhoe had contributed a chapter to a book Newt Gingrich was putting together on the environment. Limbaugh called out Gingrich for working with a “climate babe” — and Gingrich, already under fire from conservatives from once having taken climate change seriously, dropped the chapter like a hot potato. “Nice to hear that Gingrich is tossing my [#climate](#) chapter in the trash. 100+ unpaid hrs I cd’ve spent playing w my baby,” she tweeted shortly after she found out.

Since the Limbaugh incident, Hayhoe has gotten more than her share of hate mail from people who have no interest in respectful disagreement, but it hasn’t slowed her. Next month, she’s going to speak to a cotton growers’ association — if anything, she said, they’re even more conservative than petroleum geologists. “The head of the association goes to our church,” Hayhoe said. “He told me, ‘if you want to come talk to us, just don’t mention global climate change or Al Gore.’ ”

So she won’t, and she’ll treat the growers with respect, and if anyone can get even some of them to take the threat seriously, Hayhoe’s the one to do it. “I’m optimistic in one sense,” she said. “I’ve seen that we can move people from debating science to debating solutions.” But, she adds, “I’m not sure that we can do it in time to avoid serious impacts. I’m really struggling now with a question I can’t yet answer: what could we be doing more effectively to move people from x to y?”

Given Hayhoe’s energy and commitment, however— and maybe most of all, the fact that she believes she’s doing God’s work — it would be foolish to doubt she’ll come up with the answer.

<http://www.climatecentral.org/news/for-katharine-hayhoe-climate-change-not-a-leap-of-faith?utm-source=feedburner&utm-medium=feed&utm-campaign=Feed%3A+ClimateCentral-News+%28Climate+Central+-+News%29&utm-content=FeedBurner>

April 2, 2012

Seeking Happiness on a Finite and Human-Shaped Planet

By Andrew C. Revkin
Dot Earth Blog

I'm at the United Nations today for the Bhutan-led "[High Level Meeting on Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm](#)." The details are [nicely summarized in a recent Op-Ed article](#) by Timothy W. Ryback, the deputy secretary general of the Académie Diplomatique Internationale in Paris. As Ryback explains, the meeting was approved in a [U.N. resolution last year](#) recognizing that "the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal" and "the gross domestic product [G.D.P.] does not adequately reflect the happiness and well-being of people...."

I'll be adding live updates here through the day (see [bottom of post](#)). You can get a sense of the conversation by reviewing [the online discussion over a draft statement](#) the group plans to adopt.

Bhutan is a tiny, poor, once-isolated Himalayan nation well into the process of moving from monarchy to democracy and opening to the world. Recognizing problems attending a growth-driven economic sprint in other developing countries, in the early 1970's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck decided to make his nation's priority not its G.D.P. but its G.N.H., or gross national happiness. The [goal ever since](#) has been a mix of economic and social progress shaped to sustain cultural and environmental assets. (There's a [fun explanatory video here](#).) I first [wrote on this concept in 2005](#), when several dozen Bhutanese leaders, scholars and other citizens, attending a conference in Nova Scotia, described efforts to move from happiness as a concept to a set of policies.

Today's meeting (you can track it via the [Twitter hashtag #gnh](#)) reflects a global build-up of this notion under other names, as an array of nations and agencies develop systems for measuring well-being that go well beyond what can be measured in dollars. (The Gallup pollsters and the health-care company Healthways have developed a polling project that aims to be [a real-time U.S. Well-being Index](#). I think that a short-term time scale like that — daily polling of 1,000 people — kind of misses the point, but it's a useful experiment.)

On a different scale is the newly published [World Happiness Report](#), prepared for this conference by economists John Helliwell of the University of British Columbia, Richard Layard at the London School of Economics and Jeffrey D. Sachs of Columbia University (the [full document as a pdf file](#)). You can read a short excerpt below.

Other examples include [The Better Life Index](#) of the Organization on Economic Cooperation and Development, France's [Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress](#).

There are heaps of issues here, of course, the first being definitional. Long before the “pursuit of happiness” was enshrined in the [Declaration of Independence](#), and ever since, the term has been debated. What is the good life? As [I’ve written before](#), you can choose the [Vegas definition](#) or [that of Plato](#).

As I wrote after the 2005 meeting in Nova Scotia, [John Ralston Saul](#), a Canadian political philosopher, defined happiness as a balance of individual and community interests. “The Enlightenment theory of happiness was an expression of public good or the public welfare, of the contentment of the people...”

The work of Dan Kahan of Yale and the other researchers studying “[cultural cognition](#)” has revealed deep, natural divisions among us between what Kahan calls communitarians and individualists (and others call liberals and libertarians). This doesn’t bode well for the notion that nations, or the community of nations, will have an easy time settling on new measures of progress.

But it certainly doesn’t hurt to try, given the extraordinary gulfs on the planet now between haves and have nots, the signs that business as usual will be hard to fit on a finite, increasingly human-shaped planet and [the fast-expanding capacity to share and shape ideas](#) in ways that smooth the human journey.

I’ve written a host of posts that explore relevant themes, including my pieces, “[Do the Top Billion Need New Goals?](#)” and “[How Much is Enough?](#)” An excerpt from that post is worth pasting here:

This kind of examination isn’t just related to personal happiness or, say, environmental damage. John P. Holdren, now President Obama’s science adviser, wrote in “[Science and Technology for Sustainable Well-Being](#)” that when you measure human harm in years of life lost (e.g., a child cut down by disease loses decades; a grandmother dying of a stroke at 80 loses a few years), the major afflictions of poverty and affluence do us in at roughly equal rates.

Other relevant pieces can be found in the lengthening string of Dot Earth posts under the tag “[wellbeing](#).”

Here’s an excerpt from the World Happiness Report. Dig in and weigh in:

The realities of poverty, anxiety, environmental degradation, and unhappiness in the midst of great plenty should not be regarded as mere curiosities. They require our urgent attention, and especially so at this juncture in human history. For we have entered a new phase of the world, termed the Anthropocene by the world’s Earth system scientists.

The Anthropocene is a newly invented term that combines two Greek roots: “*anthropo*,” for human; and “*cene*,” for new, as in a new geological epoch. The Anthropocene is the new epoch in which humanity, through its technological prowess and population of 7 billion, has become the major driver of changes of the Earth’s physical systems, including the climate, the carbon cycle, the water cycle, the nitrogen cycle, and biodiversity. [[More on the Anthropocene](#).]

The Anthropocene will necessarily reshape our societies. If we continue mindlessly along the current economic trajectory, we risk undermining the Earth's life support systems – food supplies, clean water, and stable climate – necessary for human health and even survival in some places. In years or decades, conditions of life may become dire in several fragile regions of the world. We are already experiencing that deterioration of life support systems in the drylands of the Horn of Africa and parts of Central Asia.

On the other hand, if we act wisely, we can protect the Earth while raising quality of life broadly around the world. We can do this by adopting lifestyles and technologies that improve happiness (or life satisfaction) while reducing human damage to the environment. “Sustainable Development” is the term given to the combination of human well-being, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. We can say that the quest for happiness is intimately linked to the quest for sustainable development.

<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/seeking-happiness-on-a-finite-and-human-shaped-planet/>

April/May 2012

Jesuit Forum OPEN SPACE

A publication of the Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice
Volume IV, No. 2

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.”
(Quoted from the 1971 Roman Synod Document: *Justice in the World*)

No, you can't have faith without justice, so why has the 40th anniversary of this significant church statement, signed by almost every Catholic bishop around the globe, not been celebrated and lifted up at this time in our history when we desperately need to inspire the Catholic community and all people of goodwill to seek ways to address the root causes of poverty, oppression and ecological devastation.

For full publication, visit:

http://www.jesuitforum.ca/sites/default/files/OpenSpace9_0.pdf

April 3, 2012

World Happiness Report: Earth Institute Releases First Survey Of Where Countries Rank On Joy

By Daniel Tencer
The Huffington Post Canada

Canada is the fifth-happiest country in the world, according to a social and economic study from a Columbia University think tank.

The first-ever [World Happiness Report](#), from the Earth Institute, was released Monday in time for the UN's [Conference on Happiness](#), and it shows that the world's happiest countries are all in northern Europe -- Denmark, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands took up the top four spots, in that order.

Canada came in fifth, well ahead of the United States at eleventh place.

[Check the slideshow below to see the 12 happiest countries in the world.](#)

While the happiest countries tend to be wealthy, and the poorest tend to be least happy (Togo, Benin, Central African Republic and Sierra Leone bottomed out the list), the report is quick to note that happiness is not just about money.

"Political freedom, strong social networks and an absence of corruption are together more important than income in explaining well-being differences between the top and bottom countries," the report states. "At the individual level, good mental and physical health, someone to count on, job security and stable families are crucial."

The report "reflects a new worldwide demand for more attention to happiness and absence of misery as criteria for government policy," the authors state.

That does seem to be the case. In recent years, economists and social thinkers have been pushing for new ways to measure countries' economic and social success, arguing that measures such as GDP aren't nearly enough to reflect the real circumstances of a country.

One idea that is gaining some steam is [Gross National Happiness](#), a new index that seeks to measure quality of life and happiness in a broader context than GDP.

The Asian nation of Bhutan recently became the first country to adopt the Gross National Happiness index, and its prime minister, Jigmi Y. Thinley, told the UN on Monday that the world needs to move away from GDP.

["The GDP-led development model that compels boundless growth on a planet with limited resources no longer makes economic sense."](#) It is the cause of our irresponsible, immoral and self-destructive actions," Thinley said, as quoted at Time. "The purpose of development must be to create enabling conditions through public policy for the pursuit of the ultimate goal of happiness by all citizens."

Among some of the happiness report's highlights:

Happier countries tend to be richer countries. But more important for happiness than income are social factors like the strength of social support, the absence of corruption and the degree of personal freedom.

Over time as living standards have risen, happiness has increased in some countries, but not in others (like for example, the United States). On average, the world has become a little happier in the last 30 years (by 0.14 times the standard deviation of happiness around the world).

Unemployment causes as much unhappiness as bereavement or separation. At work, job security and good relationships do more for job satisfaction than high pay and convenient hours.

Behaving well makes people happier.

Mental health is the biggest single factor affecting happiness in any country. Yet only a quarter of mentally ill people get treatment for their condition in advanced countries and fewer in poorer countries.

Stable family life and enduring marriages are important for the happiness of parents and children.

In advanced countries, women are happier than men, while the position in poorer countries is mixed.

Happiness is lowest in middle age.

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/04/03/world-happiness-report-ea_n_1400299.html

April 7, 2012

The Other Arab Spring

By Thomas L. Friedman
New York Times

Isn't it interesting that the Arab awakening began in Tunisia with a fruit vendor who was harassed by police for not having a permit to sell food — just at the moment when world food prices hit record highs? And that it began in Syria with farmers in the southern village of Dara'a, who were demanding the right to buy and sell land near the border, without having to get permission from corrupt security officials? And that it was spurred on in Yemen — the first country in the world expected to run out of water — by a list of grievances against an incompetent government, among the biggest of which was that top officials were digging water wells in their own backyards at a time when the government was supposed to be preventing such water wildcatting? As Abdelsalam Razzaz, the minister of water in Yemen's new government, told Reuters last week: "The officials themselves have traditionally been the most aggressive well diggers. Nearly every minister had a well dug in his house."

All these tensions over land, water and food are telling us something: The Arab awakening was driven not only by political and economic stresses, but, less visibly, by environmental, population and climate stresses as well. If we focus only on the former and not the latter, we will never be able to help stabilize these societies.

Take Syria. “Syria’s current social unrest is, in the most direct sense, a reaction to a brutal and out-of-touch regime,” write Francesco Femia and Caitlin Werrell, in a report for their Center for Climate and Security in Washington. “However, that’s not the whole story. The past few years have seen a number of significant social, economic, environmental and climatic changes in Syria that have eroded the social contract between citizen and government. ... If the international community and future policy makers in Syria are to address and resolve the drivers of unrest in the country, these changes will have to be better explored.”

From 2006-11, they note, up to 60 percent of Syria’s land experienced one of the worst droughts and most severe set of crop failures in its history. “According to a special case study from last year’s Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, of the most vulnerable Syrians dependent on agriculture, particularly in the northeast governorate of Hassakeh (but also in the south), ‘nearly 75 percent ... suffered total crop failure.’ Herders in the northeast lost around 85 percent of their livestock, affecting 1.3 million people.” The United Nations reported that more than 800,000 Syrians had their livelihoods wiped out by these droughts, and many were forced to move to the cities to find work — adding to the burdens of already incompetent government.

“If climate projections stay on their current path, the drought situation in North Africa and the Middle East is going to get progressively worse, and you will end up witnessing cycle after cycle of instability that may be the impetus for future authoritarian responses,” argues Femia. “There are a few ways that the U.S. can be on the right side of history in the Arab world. One is to enthusiastically and robustly support democratic movements.” The other is to invest in climate-adaptive infrastructure and improvements in water management — to make these countries more resilient in an age of disruptive climate change.

An analysis by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, published last October in the *Journal of Climate*, and cited on Joe Romm’s blog, climateprogress.org, found that droughts in wintertime in the Middle East — when the region traditionally gets most of its rainfall to replenish aquifers — are increasing, and human-caused climate change is partly responsible.

“The magnitude and frequency of the drying that has occurred is too great to be explained by natural variability alone,” noted Martin Hoerling, of NOAA’s Earth System Research Laboratory, the lead author of the paper. “This is not encouraging news for a region that already experiences water stress, because it implies natural variability alone is unlikely to return the region’s climate to normal.”

Especially when you consider the other stresses. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, the executive director of the Institute for Policy Research and Development in London, writing in *The Beirut Daily Star* in February, pointed out that 12 of the world’s 15 most water-scarce countries — Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Israel and Palestine — are in the Middle East, and after three decades of explosive population growth these countries are “set to dramatically worsen their predicament. Although birth rates are falling, one-third of the overall population is below 15 years old, and large numbers of young women are reaching reproductive age, or soon will be.” A British

Defense Ministry study, he added, “has projected that by 2030 the population of the Middle East will increase by 132 percent — generating an unprecedented ‘youth bulge.’ ”

And a lot more mouths to feed with less water than ever. As Lester Brown, the president of the Earth Policy Institute and author of “World on the Edge,” notes, 20 years ago, using oil-drilling technology, the Saudis tapped into an aquifer far below the desert to produce irrigated wheat, making themselves self-sufficient. But now almost all that water is gone, and Saudi wheat production is, too. So the Saudis are investing in farm land in Ethiopia and Sudan, but that means they will draw more Nile water for irrigation away from Egypt, whose agriculture-rich Nile Delta is already vulnerable to any sea level rise and saltwater intrusion.

If you ask “what are the real threats to our security today,” said Brown, “at the top of the list would be climate change, population growth, water shortages, rising food prices and the number of failing states in the world. As that list grows, how many failed states before we have a failing global civilization, and everything begins to unravel?”

Hopefully, we won’t go there. But, then, we should all remember that quote attributed to Leon Trotsky: “You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.” Well, you may not be interested in climate change, but climate change is interested in you.

Folks, this is not a hoax. We and the Arabs need to figure out — and fast — more ways to partner to mitigate the environmental threats where we can and to build greater resiliency against those where we can’t. Twenty years from now, this could be all that we’re talking about.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/08/opinion/sunday/friedman-the-other-arab-spring.html>

April 20, 2012

Towards an Ethos of Inclusion - A contribution to the post-2015 development dialogue

With Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics
United Nations Development Programme

<http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/21986213>

April 23, 2012

Road to Rio: The moral link to the global economic crisis

By Olav Kjørven
United Nations Development Programme

I was honored to host a [discussion with Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen in contribution to the post-2015 development dialogue](#) on Friday in New York. Our discussion, focused on the ‘ethos of inclusion’, took place as the global economy may be going through its worst crisis since World War II.

What we have is a global, multifaceted crisis that brings to the fore existing deficiencies in policy making. It highlights the weaknesses of measuring progress only in terms of growth, as the [2011 Human Development Report](#) stresses, and divorcing economic rationale from the social and environmental considerations of development.

If these deficiencies are not addressed comprehensively and forcefully over an extended period of time, they threaten to reverse the impressive gains in human development the world has seen over the last few decades.

But how did we get here and what can be done?

Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, argues that a key underlying failure in recent decades has been the almost complete decoupling of economics and policy-making from moral and conscientious reflection.

The framing of economics and economic policy as instruments to achieve broader human and social ends has been the subject of intense study by Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and other classical economists, and has been carried forward in social choice theory by Kenneth Arrow and Professor Sen himself. However, this aspect of economic theory largely fell out of focus as growth became widely seen as the sole end worthy of “real economists” and Ministries of Finance.

It is time to bring this thinking back to the fore. In this moment of upheaval, it is time to reflect on the norms, values and principles in which economic decisions should be grounded. It is time to reflect on what it means to advance people-centred economics, if we are to move towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.

This is particularly relevant ahead of the [Rio+20 conference in June](#) and, in the medium and longer terms, as we approach the [2015 Millennium Development Goals](#)’ deadline and the discussions on what a post-2015 development agenda could look like begin in earnest.

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourperspective/ourperspectivearticles/2012/04/23/future-of-development-advancing-people-centred-economics-olav-kj-rven.html>

April 23, 2012

Four Prominent Botanical Institutions Announce Plans to Create First Online World Flora

Missouri Botanical Garden; The New York Botanical Garden;
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; and Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Leading Effort to Develop World Flora by 2020

Missouri Botanical Garden

(ST. LOUIS): The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew), the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) and the Missouri Botanical

Garden (MBG), have announced plans to develop the World Flora—the first modern, online catalog of the world’s plants—to be made available by the year 2020. This massive undertaking will include the compilation of information on up to 400,000 plant species worldwide. It will also achieve a primary target of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, an ambitious effort first adopted by the United Nations’ Convention on Biological Diversity in 2002, to halt the continuing loss of plant biodiversity around the globe. Representatives of the four botanical gardens recently met to organize a framework to guide their efforts and respond to this need for a baseline survey on the plants of the world that has been called for by the international community. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) detailing plans to create the World Flora was recently signed into effect by the four institutions.

Professor Stephen Hopper, Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew said, “Using the wealth of resources available at our institutions, we will help to provide the baseline data needed to develop plant-based solutions for a rapidly changing world. Botanical institutions worldwide have much expertise to contribute to this effort to capture the information necessary to better conserve and sustainably use the planet’s plant diversity.”

“Botanic gardens have led the way in spearheading international conservation strategies and programs, and are a natural partnership for mobilizing much needed information on plant biodiversity,” said Professor Stephen Blackmore, Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. “This is a large task, but with many contributors we can deliver what is needed.”

“The world’s great botanical gardens are proud to lead this effort,” said Gregory Long, Chief Executive Officer and The William C. Steere Sr. President of The New York Botanical Garden. “Thanks to advances in our botanical knowledge and in digital technology, an online World Flora is within our grasp. It is imperative that we create this resource, which will help us assess the value of all plant species to humankind and be effective stewards to ensure their survival.”

“There are few institutions in the world that have the capacity to foster this project, and no one of us could do this alone,” added Dr. Peter Wyse Jackson, President, Missouri Botanical Garden. “We all want to see this come to fruition, and the entire international community will benefit from it. With the botanical resources and knowledge we each possess, it was implicit that our institutions would step forward to collaborate on this project.”

Plants are one of Earth’s greatest resources. They are sources of food, medicines and materials with vast economic and cultural importance. They stabilize ecosystems and form the habitats that sustain the planet’s animal life. They are also threatened by climate change, environmental factors and human interaction. There are an estimated 400,000 species of vascular plants on Earth, with some 10 percent more yet to be discovered. These plants, both known and unknown may hold answers to some of the world’s health, social and economic problems. A full inventory of plant life is vital if their full potential is to be realized before many of these species, and the possibilities they offer, become extinct.

The critical situation for plants, where at least 100,000 plant species are threatened by extinction worldwide, has been recognized by the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In

2002, a Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) was developed and adopted by the Convention.

In 2004, a Global Partnership for Plant Conservation (GPPC) was formed, involving leading environmental, conservation and botanical organizations who came together to support the achievement of the GSPC. The four botanical gardens involved in this new project are all members of the GPPC.

“An online Flora of all known plants” is the first of the GSPC’s targets for the period 2011-2020¹. Earlier work by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Missouri Botanical Garden addressed one of the GSPC’s earlier targets for 2010 with the launch of The Plant List, an online portal containing the accepted names and synonyms of all known plant species. The forthcoming Flora will use The Plant List as a building block for something much more detailed, containing not just names but also descriptions, images and distribution information about every plant.

The team tackling the World Flora will build a collaborative partnership for this work worldwide and create a structure and program able to incorporate data from institutions and individuals all over the world. In some cases, existing electronic data sets will be combined and augmented with the results of botanical research published over more than a century around the world. Much historic information will require a thorough review and update, along with a conversion to an electronic medium. As new plants are subsequently collected, named and described, they too will be added to the World Flora.

“We look forward to working with institutions worldwide to produce a sustainable resource to aid conservation globally, regionally and nationally,” said Hopper.

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NOTE: Digital images available by request or via [Flickr](#). Download media materials at www.mobot.org/media.

¹ Convention on Biological Diversity, Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.
<http://www.cbd.int/gspc/targets.shtml>

About the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is a world-famous scientific organization, internationally respected for its outstanding living collection of plants and world-class herbarium as well as its scientific expertise in plant diversity, conservation and sustainable development in the U.K. and around the world. Kew Gardens is also a major international visitor attraction. Its landscaped 132 hectares and Kew's country estate, Wakehurst Place, attract nearly two million visitors every year. Kew was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2003 and celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2009. Wakehurst Place is home to Kew’s Millennium Seed Bank, the largest wild plant seed bank in the world. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and its partners have collected and conserved seed from 10 percent of the world's wild flowering plant species (c. 30, 000 species) and aim to conserve 25 percent by 2020. Learn more: www.kew.org

About The New York Botanical Garden

The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants, an educational institution, and a scientific research organization. Founded in 1891, the Botanical Garden is one of the world's great centers for studying plants at all levels, from the whole organism down to its DNA. Garden scientists conduct fundamental research on plants and fungi globally, as well as on the many relationships between plants and people. A National Historic Landmark, the Garden's 250-acre site is one of the greatest botanical gardens in the world and the largest in any city in the United States, distinguished by the beauty of its diverse landscape and extensive collections and gardens, as well as by the scope and excellence of its programs in horticulture, education and science. Learn more: www.nybg.org

About the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is a leading international research organisation delivering knowledge, education and plant conservation action in more than 80 countries around the world. In Scotland its four Gardens at Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan attract nearly a million visitors each year. It operates as a Non Departmental Public Body established under the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985, principally funded by the Scottish Government. It is also a registered charity, managed by a Board of Trustees appointed by Ministers. Its mission is "*exploring and explaining the world of plants for a better future.*" Learn more: www.rbge.org.uk

About the Missouri Botanical Garden

Today, 153 years after opening, the Missouri Botanical Garden is a National Historic Landmark and a center for science, conservation, education and horticultural display. With scientists working in 35 countries on six continents around the globe, the Missouri Botanical Garden has one of the three largest plant science programs in the world and a mission "to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment in order to preserve and enrich life." Learn more: www.missouribotanicalgarden.org

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/media/news-releases/article/314/four-prominent-botanical-institutions-announce-plans-to-create-first-online-wor.aspx>

April 30, 2012

Don't consider native spirituality in mine review, Ottawa urged

By Peter O'Neil
Edmonton Journal

OTTAWA - A new federal environmental review panel "does not have any right to attribute significance to the spirituality of a place per se," Taseko Mines Ltd. president Russell Hallbauer wrote in a letter obtained under the Access to Information Act and provided to the Vancouver Sun by B.C. independent MLA Bob Simpson.

Vancouver-based Taseko, which failed in its 2010 bid to get federal approval after a “scathing” federal review, also asked Ottawa to not permit aboriginal prayer ceremonies at pending hearings on the revised proposal.

Children’s plays should also be banned, Hallbauer said in his November letter.

The panel allowed “a group of kindergarten children to present a play, in which the children wore fish cut-outs on their heads, moved around the floor, and then all fell over simultaneously, symbolizing the death of the fish,” Hallbauer wrote.

Allowing opening prayers wasn’t “appropriate” and a “sensational” anti-project film and the children’s play also shouldn’t have been part of a process that is supposed to be “objective and fact-based.”

The company also complained that one of the three panel members, metallurgist and former environmental mining supervisor Nalaine Morin, was a member of a First Nations organization in the area that was opposed to the project.

One native leader said Taseko’s letter is an affront to aboriginal spirituality.

“We are tied to the land and that’s a spiritual area,” Tsilhqot’in National Government (TNG) tribal chair Chief Joe Alphonse said, referring to the proposed open-pit mine about 125 kilometres southwest of Williams Lake.

“To not even have that as part of the review, you may as well not have a review at all. Let’s go turn the Vatican into a casino hall.

“This is exactly what we’re talking about when a company is allowed to make those kinds of suggestions. It’s wrong.”

Another local First Nations leader, Xeni Gwet’in Chief Marilyn Baptiste, likened Taseko’s proposal to the former government-sanctioned residential schools that “outlawed our spirituality, our drumming and our language.”

A federal panel appointed under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act ruled in 2010 against allowing the proposed Prosperity Mine to proceed. Then-environment minister Jim Prentice, now a senior executive at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, called the panel report “scathing,” and the minority Tory government supported the recommendation.

The federal decision came several months after a B.C. government review led to approval of the project on the grounds that the job and wealth creation more than balanced environmental damage.

The federal panel report was filled with comments on the cultural and spiritual importance to local First Nations of Taseko’s property and especially Fish Lake, which Taseko planned to drain and turn into a tailings dump.

“The Panel has determined that the loss of the Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) and Nabas areas for current use activities, ceremonies, teaching, and cultural and spiritual practices would be irreversible, of high magnitude and have a long-term effect on the Tsilhqot’in,” the report stated.

The federal government, which is bringing in sweeping legislative changes to make it easier for companies to get approval for natural resource projects, announced in November it would let the company file a new application based on a plan that doesn’t include destroying Fish Lake.

A draft document on the government’s website, setting out guidelines for Taseko’s environmental impact statement and prepared by Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, suggests the government is listening to Taseko’s argument.

Editing notes on the margins of the document, posted in January, cross out a reference to “spiritual” in a lengthy list of the mine’s potential environmental effects.

“Term spiritual is not used in the act (the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act) and should not be included here,” the editor wrote.

Brian Battison, Taseko’s vice-president of corporate affairs, also stressed that spirituality isn’t part of federal legislation and shouldn’t be considered. He said the company is objecting to children’s plays, films and prayers because such events bring too much emotion into the hearings.

“The whole process moves so far beyond the true facts that it makes it very, very difficult for everybody, I think, including the panel, to not try to consciously or unconsciously reflect all of that in their findings,” Battison said.

“And what happens is the science and the facts get lost, and if they don’t get lost they get overwhelmed by these circumstances.”

Battison also said the company would consider a federal court challenge if the government appointed a panellist who obviously had a bias in favour of aboriginal opponents.

Simpson, the MLA who obtained the document, said the company is displaying hypocrisy given that its August proposal for the New Prosperity mine made repeated references to Fish Lake’s spiritual importance to First Nations.

That proposal calls for the tailings facility to be located two kilometres upstream from Fish Lake.

Simpson said it’s “condescending” to suggest that a panel of professionals couldn’t properly weigh the relative weight of scientific evidence against emotional displays.

“And it’s another affront to any possible relationship they could have with the TNG, which quite frankly they will need. There is no way you proceed with this project without a strong relationship with the company and the First Nations.”

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<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/technology/consider%20native%20spirituality%20mine%20review%20Ottawa%20urged/6543178/story.html>

March/April 2012

America the Possible: A Manifesto, Part I

From decline to rebirth

By James Gustave Speth
Orion magazine

Part two of this article can be found at:

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6810>

LIKE YOU AND OTHER AMERICANS, I love my country, its wonderful people, its boundless energy, its creativity in so many fields, its natural beauty, its many gifts to the world, and the freedom it has given us to express ourselves. So we should all be angry, profoundly angry, when we consider what has happened to our country and what that neglect could mean for our children and grandchildren.

How can we gauge what has happened to America in the past few decades and where we stand today? One way is to look at how America now compares with other countries in key areas. The group of twenty advanced democracies—the major countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, the Nordic countries, Canada, and others—can be thought of as our peer nations. Here's what we see when we look at these countries. To our great shame, America now has

- the highest poverty rate, both generally and for children;
- the greatest inequality of incomes;
- the lowest social mobility;
- the lowest score on the UN's index of "material well-being of children";
- the worst score on the UN's Gender Inequality Index;
- the highest expenditure on health care as a percentage of GDP, yet all this money accompanied by the highest infant mortality rate, the highest prevalence of mental health problems, the highest obesity rate, the highest percentage of people going without health care due to cost, the highest consumption of antidepressants per capita, and the shortest life expectancy at birth;
- the next-to-lowest score for student performance in math and middling performance in science and reading;

- the highest homicide rate;
- the largest prison population in absolute terms and per capita;
- the highest carbon dioxide emissions and the highest water consumption per capita;
- the lowest score on Yale's Environmental Performance Index (except for Belgium) and the largest ecological footprint per capita (except for Denmark);
- the lowest spending on international development and humanitarian assistance as a percentage of national income (except for Japan and Italy);
- the highest military spending both in total and as a percentage of GDP; and
- the largest international arms sales.

Our politicians are constantly invoking America's superiority and exceptionalism. True, the data is piling up to confirm that we're Number One, but in exactly the way we don't want to be—at the bottom.

These deplorable consequences are not just the result of economic and technological forces over which we have no control. They are the results of conscious political decisions made over several decades by both Democrats and Republicans who have had priorities other than strengthening the well-being of American society and our environment. Many countries, obviously, took a different path—one that was open to us as well.

I wish that were all the bad news. Unfortunately, international comparisons only give us a glimpse of what we now face. They miss many of the most important challenges, including in the critical areas of social conditions, national security, and politics. I will spare you the litany of environmental bad news; most of you have already heard it.

When it comes to social conditions, it's important to recognize that nearly 50 million Americans now live in poverty—one in six. If you're in poverty in America, you're living on less than \$400 per week for a family of four. Poverty is the bleeding edge of a more pervasive American shortcoming—massive economic insecurity. About half of American families now live paycheck to paycheck, are financially fragile, and earn less than needed to cover basic living expenses, let alone save for the future.

Back in 1928, right before the Great Depression, the richest 1 percent of Americans received 24 percent of the country's total income. Starting with the New Deal, public policy favored greater equality and a strong middle class, so that by 1976, the share of the richest 1 percent of households had dropped to 9 percent. But then the great re-redistribution began in the 1980s, so that by 2007, right before the Great Recession, the richest 1 percent had regained its 1928 position—with 24 percent of income.

As for national security, the U.S. now spends almost as much on the military as the rest of the world combined. If one totals military and other U.S. security spending, the total easily climbs to over \$1 trillion annually, about two-thirds of all discretionary federal spending. In what has been called a key feature of the American Empire, America now garrisons the world. Although the Pentagon officially reports that we maintain a mere 660 military bases in 38 countries, if one adds the unreported bases in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, there are likely as many as 1,000 U.S. military sites around the world. By 2010, we had covert operations deployed in an

estimated 40 percent of the world's 192 nations. On the home front, in 2010, the Washington Post reported that the top-secret world the government created in response to 9/11 now contains some 1,300 government entities and 1,900 private companies all working on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security, and intelligence in some 10,000 locations across the United States.

When you've got an armful of hammers, every problem looks like a nail, and the U.S. has tended to seek military solutions to problems that might be addressed otherwise. The costs have been phenomenally high. When all told, our wars since 9/11 will cost us over \$4 trillion and more than 8,000 American lives, with another 99,000 U.S. troops already wounded in action or evacuated for serious illness.

Another sorrow is the huge, draining psychological burden that U.S. actions have on its citizens. We see our own military, the CIA, and U.S. contractors engaged in torture and prisoner abuse, large killings of innocent civilians, murders and the taking of body parts as souvenirs, renditions, drone assassinations, military detention without trial, collaboration with unsavory regimes, and more.

Meanwhile, outside our borders, a world of wounds has festered without much help, and often with harm, from the United States. We are neglecting so many problems—from world poverty, underdevelopment, and climate change to emerging shortages of food and water and energy, biological impoverishment, and transnational organized crime.

The following are among the many treaties ratified by all nations, except for a few rogue states—and the United States: the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Land Mine Convention, the International Criminal Court convention, the Biodiversity Convention, the Law of the Sea, the Kyoto Protocol of the Climate Convention, and the Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. The U.S. is the main reason we do not now have a World Environment Organization.

In these respects and in many others, the U.S. posture in the world reflects a radical imbalance: a hugely disproportionate focus on the military and on economic issues and a tragic neglect of some of the most serious challenges we and the world now confront.

These many challenges require farsighted, strong, and effective government leadership and action. Inevitably, then, the path to responding to these challenges leads to the political arena, where a vital, muscular democracy steered by an informed and engaged citizenry is needed. That's the democracy we need, but, unfortunately, it is not the democracy we have. Right now, Washington isn't even trying to seriously address most of these challenges. Neglect, stalemate, and denial rule the day. It is estimated that American politics is more polarized today than at any time since Reconstruction. Polarization, of course, is father to gridlock. Gridlock and stalemate are the last thing our country needs now.

The American political system is in deep trouble for another reason—it is moving from democracy to plutocracy and corporatocracy, supported by the ascendancy of market fundamentalism and a strident antiregulation, antigovernment, antitax ideology. The hard truth is

that our political system today is simply incapable of meeting the great challenges described here. What we have is third-rate governance at a time when the challenges we face require first-rate governance.

America thus confronts a daunting array of challenges in the maintenance of our people's well-being, in the conduct of our international affairs, in the management of our planet's natural assets, and in the workings of our politics. Taken together, these challenges place in grave peril much that we hold dear.

The America we must seek for our children and grandchildren is not the America we have today. If we are going to change things for the better, we must first understand the forces that led us to this sea of troubles. When big problems emerge across the entire spectrum of national life, it cannot be due to small reasons. We have encompassing problems because of fundamental flaws in our economic and political system. By understanding these flaws, we can end them and move forward in a very different direction.

I THINK AMERICA GOT OFF COURSE for two primary reasons. In recent decades we failed to build consistently on the foundations laid by the New Deal, by Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and his Second Bill of Rights, and Eleanor Roosevelt's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Instead, we unleashed a virulent, fast-growing strain of corporate-consumerist capitalism. "Ours is the Ruthless Economy," say Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus in their influential textbook, *Macroeconomics*. And indeed it is. In its ruthlessness at home and abroad, it creates a world of wounds. As it strengthens and grows, those wounds deepen and multiply.

Such an economy begs for restraint and guidance in the public interest—control that can only be provided by government. Yet, at this point, the captains of our economic life and those who have benefited disproportionately from it have largely taken over our political life. Corporations, long identified as our principal economic actors, are now also our principal *political* actors. The result is a combined economic and political system—the operating system upon which our society runs—of great power and voraciousness, pursuing its own economic interests without serious concern for the values of fairness, justice, or sustainability that democratic government might have provided.

Our political economy has evolved and gathered force in parallel with the course of the Cold War and the growth of the American Security State. The Cold War and the rise of the American Empire have powerfully affected the nature of the political-economic system—strengthening the already existing prioritization of economic growth, giving rise to the military-industrial complex, and draining time, attention, and money away from domestic needs and emerging international challenges. This diversion of attention and resources continues with our response to international terrorism.

So what are this operating system's key features, which have been given such free rein by these developments? First, ours is an economy that prioritizes economic growth above all else. We think of growth as an unalloyed good, but this growth fetish is a big source of our problems. We've had plenty of growth in recent decades—growth while wages stagnated, jobs fled our borders, life satisfaction flat-lined, social capital eroded, poverty and inequality mounted, and the

environment declined. Today, U.S. GDP has regained its prerecession level, but 15 percent of American workers still can't find full-time jobs.

Another key feature of today's dysfunctional operating system is how powerfully the profit motive affects corporate behavior. Today's corporations have been called "externalizing machines," so committed are they to keeping the real costs of their activities off their books. Profit can be increased by keeping wages low and real social, environmental, and economic costs externalized—borne by society at large and not by the firm. One can get some measure of these external costs from a recent analysis of three thousand of the world's biggest companies. It concluded that paying for their external environmental costs would erase at least a third of their profits. Profits can also be increased through subsidies, tax breaks, regulatory loopholes, and other gifts from government. Together, these external costs and subsidies lead to dishonest prices, which in turn lead consumers to spur on businesses that do serious damage to people and planet.

Given such emphasis on inexorable growth and profit, the constant spread of the market into new areas can be very costly environmentally and socially. As Karl Polanyi described in his 1944 book, *The Great Transformation*, "To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment . . . would result in the demolition of society. . . . Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed." With its emphasis on privatization, commercialization, and commodification, American capitalism has carried this demolition forward with a vengeance.

But the system that drives the capitalism we have today includes other elements. The corporation—the most important institution and agent of modern capitalism—has become both enormous and hugely powerful. Of the hundred largest economies in the world, fifty-three are corporations. Of the three hundred largest corporations in the world, a third are U.S. companies. American business wields great political and economic power and has routinely used that power to restrain ameliorative governmental action. Our corporations have driven the rise of transnational capital as the basis for economic globalization, along with all the challenges that equation introduces.

Then, there is what our society has become. Dominant American values today are strongly materialistic, anthropocentric, and contempocentric. Today's consumerism and materialism place high priority on meeting human needs through the ever-increasing purchasing of goods and services. We say the best things in life are free, but not many of us act that way. Instead we've embraced an endless cycle of work and spend. The anthropocentric view that nature belongs to us, rather than we to nature, facilitates the exploitation of the natural world. And the habit of focusing on the present and discounting the future leads us away from a thoughtful appraisal of the long-term consequences of the world we are making.

Next, there is what our government and politics have become. Growth serves the interests of government by boosting politicians' approval ratings, keeping difficult social justice and other issues on the back burner, and generating larger revenues without raising tax rates. Government in America doesn't own much of the economy, so it must feed its growth habit by providing

what corporations need to keep growing. Meanwhile, Washington today is hobbled by partisanship, corrupted by money, and typically at the service of economic interests. It is focused on the short horizons of election cycles and guided by a pathetic level of public discourse on important issues. Finally, our government seeks to enhance and project national power, both hard and soft, in part through economic strength and growth and in part through sustaining a vast military deployment.

And there is what our system of money and finance has become. We think of money as the cash in our pockets or the bank, but, in truth, virtually all the money in circulation today is created by the banking system when loans are made. If everyone paid off all their debts, there would be hardly any money. Money is a system of power, and Wall Street wields that power. Today, among other things, the big banks are financing the destruction of the planet's climate. In 2010, Citi raised more than \$34 billion for the coal and oil industries. Within Citi's portfolio is \$1 billion raised for the proposed pipeline intended to carry tar sands oil from Alberta to Gulf Coast refineries. Since January 2010, ten big banks have supported mountaintop removal coal mining to the tune of more than \$2.5 billion.

These features aptly characterize key dimensions of today's operating system—the political economy of today's American capitalism. It's important to see these features as a system, linked and mutually reinforcing. Taken together, they have given rise to an economic reality that is both colossal and largely out of control. An unquestioning society-wide commitment to economic growth at any cost; powerful corporate and banking interests whose overriding objective is to grow by generating profit, including profit from avoiding social and environmental costs; a government beholden to corporate interests and thus not strongly inclined to curb corporate abuses; and a rampant consumerism spurred endlessly on by sophisticated advertising—all these combine to deliver an ever-growing economy insensitive to the needs of people, place, and planet.

The prioritization of economic growth is among the roots of our problems. Today's reigning policy orientation holds that the path to greater well-being is to grow and expand the economy. Productivity, profits, the stock market, and consumption must all go up. This growth imperative trumps all else. Growth is measured by tallying GDP at the national level, and sales and profits at the company level. The pursuit of GDP and profit can be said to be the overwhelming priorities of national economic and political life.

Economic growth may be the world's secular religion, but for much of the world it is a god that is failing—underperforming for most of the world's people and, for those in affluent societies, now creating more problems than it is solving. The never-ending drive to grow the overall U.S. economy undermines families and communities; it is leading us to environmental calamity; it fuels a ruthless international search for energy and other resources; it fails at generating the needed jobs; and it rests on a manufactured consumerism that is not meeting our deepest human needs.

Americans are substituting growth and consumption for dealing with the real issues—for doing the things that would make us, and the country, better off. Psychologists have pointed out, for example, that while economic output per person in the United States has risen sharply in recent

decades, there has been no increase in life satisfaction, and levels of distrust and depression have increased substantially. We have entered the realm of what ecological economist Herman Daly calls “uneconomic growth.” Environmentally, we see a world in which growth has brought us to a situation where more of the same will quite literally ruin the planet. Politically, the growth imperative is a big part of how we the people are controlled: the necessity for growth gives the real power to those who have the finance and technology to deliver it.

IT IS UP TO US AS CITIZENS to inject values of justice, fairness, and sustainability into this system, and government is the primary vehicle we have for accomplishing this. Typically, we attempt to do so by working within the system to promote needed reforms. We work the media and other channels to raise public awareness of our issue, and try to shift public understanding and discourse in our favor. We lobby Congress, the current administration, and government agencies with well-crafted and sensible proposals. When necessary, we go to court. With modest resources, we devote what we can to the electoral process and to candidates for public office. And we hope somehow that lightning will strike and events will move in our favor.

But it is now abundantly clear that these reformist approaches are not succeeding. The titanic forces unleashed by the American brand of capitalism are too powerful. The ceaseless drive for profits, growth, and power and other system imperatives keep the problem spigot fully open. Reform rarely deals with the root causes—the underlying drivers. The forces that gave rise to these problems in the first place continue to war against progress. And our enfeebled political life, more and more in the hands of powerful corporations and individuals of great wealth, is no match for these forces.

Pursuing reform within the system can help, but what is now desperately needed is transformative change in the system itself. To deal successfully with all the challenges America now faces, we must therefore complement reform with at least equal efforts aimed at transformative change to create a new operating system that routinely delivers good results for people and planet.

At the core of this new operating system must be a sustaining economy based on new economic thinking and driven forward by a new politics. The purpose and goal of a sustaining economy is to provide broadly shared prosperity that meets human needs while preserving the earth’s ecological integrity and resilience—in short, a flourishing people and a flourishing nature. That is the paradigm shift we must now seek.

I believe this paradigm shift in the nature and operation of America’s political economy can be best approached through a series of interacting, mutually reinforcing transformations—transformations that attack and undermine the key motivational structures of the current system, transformations that replace these old structures with new arrangements needed for a sustaining economy and a successful democracy.

The following transformations hold the key to moving to a new political economy. Consider each as a transition from today to tomorrow.

- *Economic growth*: from growth fetish to post-growth society, from mere GDP growth to growth in human welfare and democratically determined priorities.
- *The market*: from near laissez-faire to powerful market governance in the public interest.
- *The corporation*: from shareholder primacy to stakeholder primacy, from one ownership and motivation model to new business models and the democratization of capital.
- *Money and finance*: from Wall Street to Main Street, from money created through bank debt to money created by government.
- *Social conditions*: from economic insecurity to security, from vast inequities to fundamental fairness.
- *Indicators*: from GDP (“grossly distorted picture”) to accurate measures of social and environmental health and quality of life.
- *Consumerism*: from consumerism and affluenza to sufficiency and mindful consumption, from more to enough.
- *Communities*: from runaway enterprise and throwaway communities to vital local economies, from social rootlessness to rootedness and solidarity.
- *Dominant cultural values*: from having to being, from getting to giving, from richer to better, from separate to connected, from apart from nature to part of nature, from transcendent to interdependent, from today to tomorrow.
- *Politics*: from weak democracy to strong, from creeping corporatocracy and plutocracy to true popular sovereignty.
- *Foreign policy and the military*: from American exceptionalism to America as a normal nation, from hard power to soft, from military prowess to real security.

We know that systemic, transformative change along these dimensions will require a great struggle, and it will not come quickly. The new values, priorities, policies, and institutions that would constitute a new political economy capable of regularly delivering good results are not at hand and won’t be for many years. The truth is we are still in the design stage of building a new operating system. That system won’t be yesterday’s socialism, by the way, but it won’t be today’s American capitalism either.

It follows that effectively addressing the many serious challenges America faces will take a lot more time than we would like. Meanwhile, America’s decline will persist—“decline” here not referring to losing world power relative to China and other countries, but to decline in human and natural conditions. That is a very depressing conclusion, but we must face it. More importantly, we must use it as a framework for understanding what we must now do. Indeed, there can be a very bright light at the end of this gloomy tunnel. There is the great gift of plausible hope that we can find our way forward.

In this period of decline, the imperatives we face as citizens are threefold: to slow and then halt the descent, minimizing human suffering and planetary damage along the way and preventing a collapse, the emergence of a fortress world, or any of the other dark scenarios plotted for us in science fiction and increasingly in serious analysis; to minimize the time at the bottom and start the climb upward toward a new operating system; and to complete, inhabit, and flourish in the diversity of alternative social arrangements, each far superior to ones we will have left behind.

But if we are failing at modest, incremental reform, how can we hope to achieve deeper, transformative change? The decline now occurring will progressively delegitimize the current order. Who wants an operating system that is capable of generating and perpetuating such suffering and destruction? One good thing about the decline of today's political economy is that it opens the door to something much better. People will eventually rise up, raise a loud shout, and demand major changes. This is already happening with some people in some places. It will grow to become a national and global movement for transformation, demanding a better world.

As the old system enters its death throes, we are already seeing the proliferation of innovative models of "local living" economies, sustainable communities, and transition towns, as well as innovative business models, including social enterprises and for-benefit and worker-owned businesses that prioritize community and environment over profit and growth. Initiatives that may seem small or local can be starter wedges that lead to larger changes. These initiatives provide inspirational models for how things might work in a new political economy devoted to sustaining human and natural communities. Such initiatives are growing rapidly in America.

While the struggle to build a new system goes forward, we must do everything we can to make the old system perform. For example, if we do not act now on climate change, both nationally and internationally, the consequences will become so severe that the dark visions of those predicting calamity will become all too real. The situation we face in regard to climate disruption is already very grave. Should we fail to act now on the climate front, the world will likely become so nasty and brutish that the possibility of rebirth, of achieving something new and beautiful, will simply vanish, and we will be left with nothing but the burden of climate chaos and societies' endless responses to it. Coping with the wreckage of a planetary civilization run amok would be a full-time job. On this issue and others, then, reform and transform are not alternatives but complementary and mutually reinforcing strategies.

Important here is a "theory of change." The theory adopts the view that people act out of both fear and love—to avoid disaster and to realize a dream or positive vision. The theory affirms the centrality of hope and hope's victory over despair. It locates the plausibility of hope in knowledge—knowing that many people will eventually rise up and fight for the things that they love; knowing that history's constant is change, including deep, systemic change; and knowing that we understand enough to begin the journey, to strike out in the right directions, even if the journey's end is a place we have never been. The theory embraces the seminal role of crises in waking us from the slumber of routine and in shining the spotlight on the failings of the current order of things. It puts great stock in transformative leadership that can point beyond the crisis to something better. The theory adopts the view that systemic change must be both bottom-up and top-down—driven by communities, businesses, and citizens deciding on their own to build the future locally as well as to develop the political muscle to adopt system-changing policies at the national and international levels. And it sees a powerful citizens' movement as a necessary spur to action at all levels.

So imagine: As conditions in our country continue to decline across a wide front, or at best fester as they are, ever-larger numbers of Americans lose faith in the current system and its ability to deliver on the values it proclaims. The system steadily loses support, leading to a crisis of legitimacy. Meanwhile, traditional crises, both in the economy and in the environment, grow

more numerous and fearsome. In response, progressives of all stripes coalesce, find their voice and their strength, and pioneer the development of a powerful set of new ideas and policy proposals confirming that the path to a better world does indeed exist. Demonstrations and protests multiply, and a powerful movement for prodemocracy reform and transformative change is born. At the local level, people and groups plant the seeds of change through a host of innovative initiatives that provide inspirational models of how things might work in a new political economy devoted to sustaining human and natural communities. Sensing the direction in which things are moving, our wiser and more responsible leaders, political and otherwise, rise to the occasion, support the growing movement for change, and frame a compelling story or narrative that makes sense of it all and provides a positive vision of a better America. It is a moment of democratic possibility.

In the end it all comes down to the American people and the strong possibility that we still have it in us to use our freedom and our democracy in powerful ways to create something fine, a reborn America, for our children and grandchildren. We can realize a new American Dream if enough of us join together in the fight for it. This new dream envisions an America where the pursuit of happiness is sought not in more getting and spending, but in the growth of human solidarity, real democracy, and devotion to the public good; where the average American is empowered to achieve his or her human potential; where the benefits of economic activity are widely and equitably shared; where the environment is sustained for current and future generations; and where the virtues of simple living, community self-reliance, good fellowship, and respect for nature predominate. These American traditions may not prevail today, but they are not dead. They await us, and indeed they are today being awakened across this great land. New ways of living and working, sharing and caring are emerging across America. They beckon us with a new American Dream, one rebuilt from the best of the old, drawing on the best of who we were and are and can be.

Part two of this article can be found at:

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6810>

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6681>

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America the Possible: A Manifesto, Part II

A new politics for a new dream

By James Gustave Speth
Orion magazine

Part one of this article can be found at:

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6681>

WE NEED A COMPELLING VISION for a new future, a vision of a better country—America the Possible—that is still within our power to reach. The deep, transformative

changes sketched in the first half of this manifesto provide a path to America the Possible. But that path is only brought to life when we can combine this vision with the conviction that we will pull together to build the necessary political muscle for real change. This article addresses both the envisioning of an attractive future for America and the politics needed to realize it. A future worth having awaits us, if we are willing to struggle and sacrifice for it. It won't come easy, but little that is worth having ever does.

By 2050, America the Possible will have marshaled the economic and political resources to successfully address the long list of challenges, including basic social justice, real global security, environmental sustainability, true popular sovereignty, and economic democracy. As a result, family incomes in America will be far more equal, similar to the situation in the Nordic countries and Japan today. Large-scale poverty and income insecurity will be things of the past. Good jobs will be guaranteed to all those who want to work. Our health-care and educational systems will be among the best in the world, as will our standing in child welfare and equality of women. Racial and ethnic disparities will be largely eliminated. Social bonds will be strong. The overlapping webs of encounter and participation that were once hallmarks of America, "a nation of joiners," will have been rebuilt, community life will be vibrant, and community development efforts plentiful. Trust in each other, and even in government, will be high.

Today's big social problems—guns and homicides, drugs and incarceration, white-collar crime and Wall Street hijinks—will have come down to acceptable levels. Big national challenges like the national debt, illegal immigration, the future of social security, oil imports and the shift to sustainable energy, and environmental and consumer protection will have been successfully addressed. U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will have been reduced to a tiny fraction compared to today.

Internationally, the United States will assume the role of a normal nation. Military spending will be reduced to a level close to Europe's today; military interventions will be rare and arms sales small. The resources thus freed up will be deployed to join with other nations in addressing climate change and other global environmental threats, nuclear proliferation, world poverty and underdevelopment, and other global challenges. The U.S. will be a leader in strengthening the institutions of global governance and international regulation, and we will be a member in good standing of the long list of treaties and other international agreements in which we do not now participate.

Politically, implementation of prodemocracy reforms will have saved our politics from corporate control and the power of money, and these reforms will have brought us to an unprecedented level of true popular sovereignty. Moreover, government in America will again be respected for its competence and efficiency. And, yes, taxes will be higher, especially for those with resources.

Overall, the economy will be governed to ensure broadly shared prosperity and to preserve the integrity and biological richness of the natural world. It will simply be assumed that the priority of economic activity is to sustain human and natural communities. Investment will concentrate in areas with high social and environmental returns even where not justified by financial returns, and it will be guided by democratically determined priorities at the national

and local levels. Corporations will be under effective public control, and new patterns of business ownership and management—involving workers, communities, and other stakeholders—will be the norm. Consumerism will be replaced by the search for meaning and fulfillment in nonmaterial ways, and progress will be measured by new indicators of well-being other than GDP.

This recitation seems idealistic today, but the truth is we know how to do these things. Our libraries are full of plausible, affordable policy options, budget proposals, and institutional innovations that could realize these and other important objectives. And today's world is full of useful models we can adapt to our circumstances.

NEW VALUES

Many thoughtful Americans have concluded that addressing our many challenges will require the rise of a new consciousness, with different values becoming dominant in American culture. For some, it is a spiritual awakening—a transformation of the human heart. For others it is a more intellectual process of coming to see the world anew and deeply embracing the emerging ethic of the environment and the old ethic of what it means to love thy neighbor as thyself. But for all, the possibility of a sustainable and just future will require major cultural change and a reorientation regarding what society values and prizes most highly.

In America the Possible, our dominant culture will have shifted, from today to tomorrow, in the following ways:

- from seeing humanity as something apart from nature, transcending and dominating it, to seeing ourselves as part of nature, offspring of its evolutionary process, close kin to wild things, and wholly dependent on its vitality and the finite services it provides;
- from seeing nature in strictly utilitarian terms—humanity's resource to exploit as it sees fit for economic and other purposes—to seeing the natural world as having intrinsic value independent of people and having rights that create the duty of ecological stewardship;
- from discounting the future, focusing severely on the near term, to taking the long view and recognizing duties to future generations;
- from today's hyperindividualism and narcissism, and the resulting social isolation, to a powerful sense of community and social solidarity reaching from the local to the cosmopolitan;
- from the glorification of violence, the acceptance of war, and the spreading of hate and invidious divisions to the total abhorrence of these things;
- from materialism and consumerism to the prioritization of personal and family relationships, learning, experiencing nature, spirituality, service, and living within limits;
- from tolerating gross economic, social, and political inequality to demanding a high measure of equality in all these spheres.

We actually know important things about how values and culture can be changed. One sure path to cultural change is, unfortunately, the cataclysmic event—the crisis—that profoundly challenges prevailing values and delegitimizes the status quo. The Great Depression is the classic example. I think we can be confident that we haven't seen the end of major crises.

Two other key factors in cultural change are leadership and social narrative. Leaders have enormous potential to change minds, and in the process they can change the course of history. And there is some evidence that Americans are ready for another story. Large majorities of Americans, when polled, express disenchantment with today's lifestyles and offer support for values similar to those urged here.

Another way in which values are changed is through social movements. Social movements are about consciousness raising, and, if successful, they can help usher in a new consciousness—perhaps we are seeing its birth today. When it comes to issues of social justice, peace, and environment, the potential of faith communities is vast as well. Spiritual awakening to new values and new consciousness can also derive from literature, philosophy, and science. Consider, for example, the long tradition of “reverence for life” stretching back over twenty-two hundred years to Emperor Ashoka of India and carried forward by Albert Schweitzer, Aldo Leopold, Thomas Berry, E. O. Wilson, Terry Tempest Williams, and others.

Education, of course, can also contribute enormously to cultural change. Here one should include education in the largest sense, embracing not only formal education but also day-to-day and experiential education as well as the fast-developing field of social marketing. Social marketing has had notable successes in moving people away from bad behaviors such as smoking and drunk driving, and its approaches could be applied to larger cultural change as well.

A major and very hopeful path lies in seeding the landscape with innovative, instructive models. In the United States today, there is a proliferation of innovative models of community revitalization and business enterprise. Local currencies, slow money, state Genuine Progress Indicators, locavorism—these are bringing the future into the present in very concrete ways. These actual models will grow in importance as communities search for visions of how the future should look, and they can change minds—seeing is believing. Cultural transformation won't be easy, but it's not impossible either.

AVERTING DISASTER

High on any list of our duties to future generations must be the imperative to keep open for them as many options and choices as possible. That is our generation's gift of freedom. Here, the first order of business is to preserve the possibility of a bright future by preventing any of today's looming disasters from spinning out of control or otherwise becoming so overwhelming that they monopolize resources of time, energy, and money, thus foreclosing other options. My list of biggest threats includes the following:

- severe disruption of global climate
- widespread exhaustion, erosion, and toxification of the planet's natural resources and life-support systems
- militarism and permanent war
- nuclear disaster

- major economic or financial collapse, possibly linked to failing energy supply and soaring prices
- runaway terrorism and resulting loss of civil liberties
- pandemics and antibiotic resistance
- social and cultural decay, including the rise of criminality
- hollowing out of democracy and the dominance of corporatocracy and plutocracy
- something weird from the lab (nanotech? robotics? genetic engineering? a new weapon system? indefinite life extension?)

Much ink has been spilled warning us about these threats, and we must take them very seriously. In America the Possible, these warnings have been taken seriously and the threats avoided. We can already see the problems leading to all of the threats listed, but we are not yet fated to experience their worst.

THE VIRTUES OF NECESSITY

Even with disaster averted, there are still powerful constraints and limits on future options. And there are the lessons from positive psychology about what contributes to happy, fulfilling lives. In fact, three sets of developments are coming together and are pushing us to nothing less than a new way of living: the imperative to protect the climate and the earth's living systems; the need to adjust to the rise of scarcities in energy and other resources; and the desire to shift national priorities to things that truly improve social well-being and happiness.

If we manage these factors well, the result could be a blessing in disguise, leading us to a new and better place—and a higher quality of life both individually and socially. Life in America the Possible will tend strongly in these directions:

RELOCALIZATION. Economic and social life will be rooted in the community and the region. More production will be local and regional, with shorter, less complex supply chains, especially for food. Business enterprises will be more rooted and committed to the long-term well-being of employees and their communities, and they will be supported by local currencies and local financial institutions. People will live closer to work, walk more, and travel less. Energy production will be distributed and decentralized, and predominantly renewable. Socially, community bonds will be strong; relationships with neighbors will be unpretentious and important; civic associations and community service groups plentiful; levels of trust and support for teachers and caregivers high. Personal security, tolerance of difference, and empathy will be high, and violence, fear, and hate low. Politically, local governance will stress participatory, direct, and deliberative democracy. Citizens will be seized with the responsibility to sustainably manage and extend the commons—the valuable assets that belong to everyone—through community land trusts at the local level, for example, and an atmospheric trust at the national level.

NEW BUSINESS MODELS. Locally-owned businesses, including worker-owned, customer-owned, and community-owned firms will be prominent, as will hybrid business models such as profit-nonprofit and public-private hybrids. Cooperation will replace or moderate

competition. Business incubators will help entrepreneurs with arranging finance, technical assistance, and other support. Enterprises of all types will stress environmental and social responsibility.

PLENITUDE. Consumerism, where people find meaning and acceptance through what they consume, will be supplanted by the search for abundance in things that truly matter and that bring happiness and joy—family, friends, the natural world, meaningful work. Status and recognition will go to those who earn trust and provide needed services. Individuals and communities will enjoy a strong rebirth of reskilling, crafts, and self-provisioning. Overconsumption will be replaced by new investment in civic culture, natural amenities, ecological restoration, education, and community development.

MORE TIME; SLOWER LIVES. Formal work hours will be cut back, freeing up time for family, friends, hobbies, continuing education, skills development, caregiving, volunteering, sports, outdoor recreation, exploring nature, and participating in the arts. Life will be slower, less frenetic; frugality and thrift prized and wastefulness shunned; ostentatious displays of conspicuous consumption avoided; mindfulness and living simply prized.

NEW GOODS AND SERVICES. Products will be more durable and versatile and easy to repair, with components that can be reused or recycled. Production systems will be designed to mimic biological ones, with waste eliminated or turned into useful inputs elsewhere. The provision of services will replace the purchase of many goods; sharing, collaborative consumption, lending, and leasing will be commonplace.

RESONANCE WITH NATURE. Environmental protection regulations will be tough and demanding, and energy used with maximum efficiency. Zero discharge of traditional pollutants, toxics, and greenhouse gases will be the norm. Directly or indirectly, prices will reflect the true environmental costs. Schools will stress environmental education and pursue “no child left inside” programs. Natural areas and zones of high ecological significance will be protected. Green chemistry will replace the use of toxics and hazardous substances. Organic farming will eliminate pesticide and herbicide use. Environmental restoration and cleanup programs will be major focuses of community concern. There will be a palpable sense that economic and social activity is nested in the natural world and that we are close kin to wild things.

MORE EQUALITY. Because large inequalities are at the root of so many social and environmental problems, measures to ensure greater equality—not only of opportunity but also of outcomes—will be in place. Because life is simpler, more frugal, more caring, and less grasping, and people will be less status conscious and possessive, there will be more to go around and a high degree of economic equality. Special programs will ensure that seniors have income protections and opportunities to pursue their passions in second and third careers.

CHILDREN CENTERED, NOT GROWTH CENTERED. Overall economic growth will not be seen as a priority, and GDP will be seen as a misleading measure of well-being and progress. Instead, indicators of community wealth creation—including measures of social and

natural capital—will be closely watched, and special attention will be given to children and young people—their education and their right to loving care, shelter, good nutrition, health care, a toxic-free environment, and freedom from violence.

HUMAN SCALE AND RESILIENT. The economy and the enterprises within it will not be too big to understand, appreciate, and manage successfully. A key motivation will be to maintain resilience—the capacity to absorb disturbance and outside shocks without disastrous consequences. We can think of today’s American economy as a giant, unitary system—highly complex and thoroughly integrated and interdependent, so that the failure of one component such as banking causes a cascade of failures throughout the system. The economy in America the Possible is, by contrast, diverse and decentralized, a collection of more self-reliant but interacting units that provide redundancy and resilience.

GLOCALISM. Despite the many ways life will be more local, and the resulting temptation toward parochialism and provincialism, Americans will feel a sense of belonging and citizenship at larger levels of social and political organization, and will support global-level governance in the numerous areas where it is needed, such as environmental issues.

DEMOCRACY REBORN

It is simply unimaginable that American politics as we know it today will deliver the transformative changes needed. Political reform and building a new and powerful progressive movement in America must be priority number one. Above all else, we must build a new democratic reality—a government truly of, by, and for the people.

A foundation of democracy is the principle that all citizens should have a right to participate as equals in the actual process of governing. All should have a right to vote, to have access to relevant information, to speak up, associate with others, and participate. Votes should count equally, the majority should prevail, subject to respect for basic rights, and the issues taken up should be the important ones society faces. These are ideals by which America’s current situation as well as our political reform agenda should be judged. Viewed this way, we are coming up far short on democracy and political equality. What we are seeing instead is the steady emergence of plutocracy and corporatocracy.

That the list of most-needed reforms to our political system is so long is testimony to how flawed the current system actually is.

- We need to both expand and protect the process of voting. Voter registration should be the default position: upon reaching the age of eighteen, citizens would be automatically registered, as is common in advanced democracies. Once registered, voting can be made easier in a number of ways: early voting should be extended; election day should be made a national holiday; ballots should be made simpler and voting less confusing; and campaigns to discourage and suppress voting through intimidating and deceptive practices should be prohibited and penalized. A national elections commission should be charged with providing for election administration and monitoring by impartial and well-trained election officials; for certification and testing of voting machines; for voter-verified paper trails to serve as the

official ballots for recounts and audits; and generally for the integrity and accuracy of the voting process.

- We need a constitutional amendment to provide for direct popular election of the president. As long as that remains a bridge too far, state legislatures should agree to assign all of a state's electoral votes to the candidate winning the national popular vote for president, but only if and when enough states make the commitment to total at least 270 electoral votes (the number needed to win in the Electoral College). Thus far nine states—including California, Hawai'i, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, Washington, and Massachusetts—with half the electoral votes needed to win, have made such pledges. Another way to bring more democracy to presidential elections would be to increase House membership by 50 percent, a good idea in its own right.
- Reform of our current system of primary elections is also in order. There are many possibilities here, but a key goal is to broaden participation in primaries beyond each party's core. One way to do that is to have structured open primaries—where registered independents can vote in either party's primary.
- The partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts should be stopped. District lines should be drawn by independent, nonpartisan commissions.
- We need to break the two-party duopoly. To do that, we need a process for voting that will encourage third parties without making them spoilers, will ensure that every vote counts in the end result and is not wasted, and will ensure that winners have the support of the majority of voters. This would be accomplished by instant-runoff voting (IRV), the process by which voters rank the candidates in order of preference. Low-scoring candidates—often third-party ones—are eliminated in the vote counting, and their voters' second choices are added to those that remain until one candidate has a majority. Even more attractive, fusion voting allows a minority party to list as its candidate on the ballot the candidate of another party. Fusion thus allows third parties to bargain with the two major parties for the best representation they can get.
- The Senate needs a host of reforms, including abolishing the current practice of filibusters. Given the way filibusters are now managed, senators representing a mere 11 percent of the U.S. population can exercise effective control over legislation, at least in theory. And there is another, but difficult, way to bring more democracy to the Senate: with congressional approval, large states could decide to subdivide into two or more smaller ones.
- The most important prodemocracy reform is to undermine the power of money in our elections and in lobbying. The emphasis of campaign finance reform should be on encouraging small donor contributions and public funding of elections—the democratization of campaign finance itself. The Fair Elections Now Act, introduced in Congress in April 2011, embodies this approach for congressional elections and has many supporters in the House and Senate. Several states have already pursued the approach with success. Candidates who participated in “clean” or “fair” state election programs similar to Fair Elections Now hold about 85 percent of the legislative seats in Maine and around 75 percent in Connecticut.

- Major efforts should be pursued to address the many problems created by the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, which opened the floodgates to unrestricted campaign spending by corporations and unions. Amending the Constitution should be a priority, in the process depriving corporations of constitutional personhood. Or Congress could regulate the impact of the Supreme Court's decision, as Democrats tried unsuccessfully to do in 2010 with the Disclose Act proposal. At least it would have required disclosure of the source of campaign spending. There are two other attractive ideas for regulation. One would require that corporate boards, or even the shareholders themselves, approve all campaign spending initiatives. A second regulation would greatly strengthen the requirement that these corporate contributions be truly independent—that is, not coordinated in any way with the candidate being supported. And, of course, the court could simply reverse itself, for example, if a new justice were appointed to replace one of the five in the majority.

- Candidate access to the media should be enhanced, and the power of money reduced, by ensuring that all carriers and service providers offer full access to political speech at rates offered to the most favored commercial customers and by requiring that broadcasters provide candidates with a minimum amount of free airtime as a condition of receiving their federal licenses.

- Much needs to be done to tighten regulation of lobbying. There should be a ban on registered lobbyists engaging in campaign fundraising—no contributions to campaigns from lobbyists, no lobbyist bundling of multiple contributions, and no other form of lobbyist fundraising for federal candidates. Connecticut enacted such a ban on “pay to play” in 2005. “Strategic consulting” for congressional offices should be classified as lobbying. Congressional staff should be further professionalized, enlarged, and better paid in order to reduce the current dependence on lobbyists' information and analysis. The offices serving Congress, such as the Congressional Research Service and the Government Accountability Office, should be strengthened for these same reasons. Appropriate restrictions should be placed on the lobbying activities of large government contractors, and stricter revolving door provisions should be adopted. As an extension of federal laws regulating lobbying and requiring disclosure of lobbying expenditures, organizations should be required to disclose expenditures pursuant to major-issue campaigns aimed at affecting federal legislation, just as narrowly defined “lobbying” expenses are now disclosed. Also, all sponsors and direct or indirect funders of public-issue ads should be required to be identified in those ads along with an announcement like those in today's campaign ads approving and taking responsibility for the contents.

Beyond these changes in the rules of American politics, other changes are needed to strengthen both journalism and government transparency, to restore disinterest to the courts, to rebuild large membership institutions like labor unions that can magnify the strength of the otherwise isolated voter, and to rebuild competency in our oft-maligned and now depleted civil services.

We won't get far in addressing the challenges we now face unless we are a competent nation with a competent government. And this competence in turn requires, above all, education and

public integrity. Education is essential not just for building the skills needed in today's high-tech economy, but also for building a capacious understanding of the world in which we live. Public integrity includes not just integrity at the personal level, but also the capacity to elevate the public good over private gain.

A UNIFIED MOVEMENT

When one considers all the ways in which our politics begs for change and reform, it is easy to see why so little of what is needed is actually accomplished. A prodemocracy agenda like the one described here must move to top priority. Such an agenda should be a priority for all progressive communities, and should draw support from Americans across the political spectrum.

Let us never forget that faith in democracy and fighting for it are acts of affirmation. In democracy, we affirm that we trust our fellow citizens—that we count on each other. Whether we win or lose the coming struggle for democracy in America, we claim that high ground.

But to drive real change in politics and in public policy, we need to build a powerful, unified progressive movement. Few of the measures our country needs are likely to get very far without a vigorous social and political movement that we don't now have. In today's America, progressive ideas are unlikely to be turned into action unless they are promoted by powerful citizen demand.

Successful movements for serious change are launched in protest against key features of the established order. They are nurtured on outrage at the severe injustices being perpetrated, the core values being threatened, or the undesirable future that is unfolding. And they demand real change. Here one is reminded of Frederick Douglass's famous 1857 statement about the challenge to slavery: "If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." If progressives hope to succeed, then the movement must capture the spirit of Frederick Douglass.

What must now be built with urgency is a unified progressive community. The silos separating the various progressive communities must be breached. To succeed, there must be a fusion of progressive causes, the forging of a common agenda, and the building of a mighty force on the ground, at the grass roots. Progressives of all stripes must come together to build a true community of outlook, interest, and engagement, as well as the organizational infrastructure to strengthen the progressive movement on an ongoing basis.

Our best hope for real change is a movement created by a fusion of people concerned about environment, social justice, true democracy, and peace into one powerful progressive force. We have to recognize that we are all communities of a shared fate. In particular, progressives

must focus on electoral politics far, far more than they have in the past. The 2008 Obama campaign shows what can be done. For the progressive movement to secure a powerful place in American politics, it will require major efforts at grassroots organizing, strengthening groups working at the state and community levels, reaching out to broaden membership and participation, and developing motivational messages and moral appeals. It will also require building partylike organizations, creating political action committees (PACs), and fielding candidates.

Regarding the language we use and the messages we seek to convey, I can see clearly now that we environmentalists have been too wonkish and too focused on technical fixes. We have not developed well the capacity to speak in a language that goes straight to the American heart, resonates with both core moral values and common aspirations, and projects a positive and compelling vision. Throughout my forty-odd years in the environmental community, public discourse on environment has been dominated by lawyers, scientists, and economists—people like me. Now we need to hear a lot more from the preachers, the poets, the psychologists, and the philosophers. And our message must be one that is founded on hope and honest possibility.

Former House Speaker Tip O'Neill famously said, "All politics is local," and a progressive movement must stress building locally, from the bottom up. We all live local lives, and if more and more people are to become engaged politically, engaging them locally is imperative. When we add that most of the promising things happening in America today are happening at the community level, the case is compelling for linking progressive initiatives at the local level to building a national progressive movement—community action melded to a national strategy.

Movements gather strength when people realize that they are being victimized and that there are many others in the same boat, and it helps when they are able to identify and point to those responsible—the villains of the story. Many on the right work hard and with consummate cynicism to raise the specter of "class warfare" when, for example, efforts are launched to tax the rich a bit more. With admirable candor, businessman Warren Buffett, an advocate for fairer taxes and one of the wealthiest men in America, has said, "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." In 1936, Harold Lasswell wrote *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How*. He declared that "the study of politics is the study of influence and the influential . . . the influential are those who get the most of what there is to get. . . . Those who get the most are elite; the rest are mass." Today, the elite have gotten about all there is to get, and the great mass of people have gotten the shaft.

An invigorated American progressive movement must also embrace the accumulated knowledge that generations of thoughtful scholars have made possible. With the right seemingly disavowing good science at every turn, it is doubly important that progressives draw heavily on the contributions of our impressive scientific community. Nothing against faith, but the scientific content of public policy issues is increasing steadily, and progressives won't be leading in the right directions without such an embrace. And while progressives should both appeal to moral values and kick up a ruckus, it remains important to ground

appeals and campaigns on solid analysis, accurate history, and facts. They go together well. As Stephen Colbert has quipped, “The facts have a well-known liberal bias.”

In the end, the most meaningful changes will almost certainly require a large-scale rebirth of marches, protests, demonstrations, direct action, and nonviolent civil disobedience. Protests are important to dramatize issues, show the depth of concern, attract public and media attention, build sympathetic support, raise public consciousness, and put issues on the agenda. No one who followed events in Egypt or the Wisconsin State House, or who remembers the civil rights and anti-war protests of the 1960s and 1970s, can doubt their importance. Author and social critic Chris Hedges urges that “civil disobedience, which will entail hardship and suffering, which will be long and difficult, which at its core means self-sacrifice, is the only mechanism left.” Those words ring true to those who have worked for decades to elicit a meaningful response to the existential threat of climate change and who find, after all the effort, only ashes.

There are ongoing historical trends that require the development of the progressive movement sought here. The widespread persistence of relative poverty at home and absolute poverty abroad; the growth of economic inequality now matching that of 1928; the rapid exhaustion of the planet’s renewable and nonrenewable resources; the impossibility of continuous exponential growth on a finite planet; the destruction of the climate regime that has existed throughout human civilization; the drift to militarism and endless war—these warn us that business as usual is not an option.

America the Possible awaits us, if we are prepared to struggle—to put it all on the line. If the future is to be one we wish for our grandchildren, we had better get started building this progressive movement without delay. Given the deplorable conditions on so many fronts, the day will surely come when large numbers of Americans will conclude, with Howard Beale’s character in *Network*, “I’m as mad as hell and I’m not going to take this anymore!” The progressive movement must not only be ready for that day, it must also hasten its arrival.

Part one of this article can be found at:

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6681>

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6810>

May 1, 2012

In Message, Secretary-General Says Buddha’s Belief that Changing Man’s Nature

Changes World Offers Insight to Improve Conditions for Planet, Inhabitants

United Nations

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message for the Day of Vesak, 5 May:

We commemorate this year's Day of Vesak as the international community enters the final preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro — a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set the world on a more equitable and sustainable path of development.

Buddhism has much to offer that process. The Buddha's assertion that, "The way to change the world is to change the nature of man," offers a critical insight into how to improve conditions for our planet and its inhabitants.

The spirit to care not just for ourselves but for others, based on an awareness of our interlinked fates, lies at the heart of Buddhism — and, indeed, all of the world's great religions.

These teachings challenge families, communities and nations to act in concert for the advancement of our common well-being. That is the best way to secure individual and collective progress in an interdependent world.

We must also change longstanding assumptions and open our minds to new ideas and possible solutions if we are to address major global threats, from the proliferation of deadly weapons to intolerance and inequality.

I invite Buddhists and people of all traditions to use the occasion of the Day of Vesak to reflect on how we can change our actions to pave the way for a more sustainable future.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2012/sgsm14266.doc.htm>

May 2, 2012

Bishops and Extractive Industries: A Human Face of Mining

By Katherine Marshall
Huffington Post

In far flung corners of the world, religious leaders are protesting against mining companies and projects. What are their complaints? In Guatemala, they argue that gold mining poisons the water table, in Chad that painfully negotiated revenues that promised to ease the pain of poverty are nowhere in sight, in Ecuador that oil drilling devastates the landscape, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Nigeria that mining feeds devastating conflicts, in Ghana that mining in forest reserves threatens animal and plant species, in India that it strips indigenous people of their land rights, and in Peru that it pollutes lakes and rivers. The litany goes on and on but the underlying story told is one of broken promises, of powerful companies for whom profit is their God, and of a wounded planet whose land resources are despoiled with little to show, harming the people who live nearby.

It's not that the church leaders are fighting a futile battle to stop all mining. As a statement of Catholic Bishops from Latin America who met last July in Chaclacayo, Peru began, "the church

recognizes the importance of the extractive industries, the service they can provide to mankind and the economies of the world, and the progress they contribute to society as a whole." But, there is a long list of "buts." The bishops' bottom line is that they see an irrational exploitation that leaves a trail of destruction, even death, throughout Latin America.

At the Washington National Cathedral an unlikely gathering of bishops, preachers, and advocates met on April 24 to explore how they might join forces both to draw attention to the harm that bad mining practices wreak on people and land, and to point to practical, positive ways to move forward. The prime movers behind the effort are the [Bank Information Center](#) its indomitable leader, Chad Dobson and Father Seamus Finn, whose work with the [Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility](#) has focused for years on nudging and cajoling companies towards responsibility in their corporate practice. Two large faith inspired organizations, Catholic Relief Services and Tearfund, have long campaigned for responsible mining and support the new coalition.

This group is by no means a solitary voice in the wilderness. The downsides of mining are a constant theme among advocates both for social justice and for protection of the earth. Ten years ago the World Bank responded to critics with a complex review of Extractive Industries that pointed to plenty of ways to do better. Every large mining project these days comes in for thorough review and heated debate. The [Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative \(EITI\)](#) enlists governments and companies, voluntarily, to agree to follow established standards and guidelines and to "publish what they pay" so that the huge financial flows involved are more open and transparent.

But the religious voices hold the promise of bringing new urgency and new dimensions to the debate. Their focus starts with the living, day to day impact of mining for people and above all the poorest people, who have the least capacity to fight for their rights. They frame their witness with a constant call to responsibility, to God and to our fellow man, to a true covenant to be honored. It's above all about giving a human face to the impact of our demand for energy and the goods that come from the mines, whether cell phones and computers or cars and refrigerators.

The stories at the Cathedral meeting began in West Virginia, where strip mines have scarred the landscape, moved to Mary Magdalene, then the Garden of Eden, and on to Bangladesh and to Peru. It involved powerful appeals to conscience, angry protests against greed and selfishness, and a vision of hope that humankind can and must do better. The evangelical call to "creation care" echoes the Catholic call to care for the "least among us" and a Muslim call to care for equity and the common good.

The potential coalition of leaders from different world regions and different religious traditions could do wonders for the extractive industry cause. They offer a special promise, because they can draw so powerfully on living stories from so many different places as well as on deeply felt principles and traditions. It will not be easy, however, to link either the stories or the different teachings from different religious traditions, melding them into a common story and campaign. Even so, it may prove easier to find common ground in the common good and in exhortations to honor the golden and silver rules, and even to accept a more austere lifestyle, than to link these noble ideas to the sober if sensible principles that the experts advocate. These include systematic

social and environmental assessments, transparency of action and finance, acceptance of stakeholders in decision-making, favoring food production over mining, complying with international standards, ensuring that mining companies pass basic tests of ethics and competence, and fair sharing of royalties and taxes. Bringing these threads together so that they weave a strong cloth, that's the challenge and the promise ahead.

Follow Katherine Marshall on Twitter: www.twitter.com/patlakath

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-marshall/bishops-and-extractive-industries_b_1461358.html

May 9, 2012

BC's Emerging Green Faith Movement

By Adam Pez
TheTyee.ca

Churchgoers opposed to tankers, pipelines say activism expresses compassion for God's creation.

Christ Church Cathedral stands overshadowed by modern glass and steel skyscrapers in Vancouver's downtown core. The century-old Anglican church is a bit of Vancouver heritage, a reminder of the province's British colonial roots. When British royalty visit, they worship there.

On a Monday, the church offers shelter from the rain and a meal for city homeless. On a Sunday, it still provides mass. But on a Saturday late in April, the hall of worship provided space for an event of a different sort. Delegates from the Lower Mainland's 60 Anglican parishes met with over a dozen representatives from other denominations to take a good look at projects to transport more oil sands crude, and the hazard those pose to the environment and B.C. First Nations.

"No religious tradition says 'blessed are the greedy.' It's out of that tradition that people can speak to the pipeline tanker issue," said Robert Worcester, who sits as co-chair of the eco-justice committee of the Anglican diocese of New Westminster, which stretches from Hope to Tsawwassen.

He said participants learned about the impacts of the Enbridge Northern Gateway and Kinder Morgan pipelines, and increased tanker traffic in the Port of Vancouver.

From 'prophetic' to eco-focused

The Compassion for Creation event, organized by Anglicans for Eco-justice, is one more milestone towards more faith group participation in environmental debates. And the heavy Anglican presence at the forum reflects the increased pull environmental issues have among

many mainline Christians, who are putting more pressure on their leaders to oppose energy projects that will increase greenhouse gas emissions and perpetuate our reliance on fossil fuels.

Those at the forum, said Worcester, agreed Anglican bishops needed to take a stronger stance on the Northern Gateway Pipeline.

This is not the first time Anglicans have waded into B.C. energy debates. In response to pressure from the B.C. and Yukon diocese, six Anglican bishops released a Good Friday statement this April [expressing concern](#) over the "fairness" of the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline hearings. The group said federal Conservative comments, and government attempts to streamline environmental assessment reviews, risked jeopardizing democracy by denying those affected -- especially First Nations -- a fair chance to air their views.

That statement is the strongest the church has been willing to make on the pipeline, and it reflects caution among top Anglican clergy, who don't want to alienate Anglican churches who might be supportive of the pipeline, said Worcester.

In a recent [story](#) on The Tyee, Donald Grayston, a retired Simon Fraser University religious studies instructor, said the Anglican clergy was once deeply involved in social causes. The 1960s and '70s formed the heydays of the Anglican social mission in Canada, when "prophetic ministry" found purchase amongst the top ranks of B.C. clergy, he said. Ministers were encouraged to prophesy hellfire and damnation as a way of moving society to address injustices.

Anglican activists in B.C. and elsewhere worked parallel with other civil-rights era campaigns, where church organizations -- led by the likes of Rev. Martin Luther King -- formed the nucleus of many groups seeking to rectify racial and economic inequity.

However after the 1970s, church attendance rates fell and prophetic ministry appeared to be turning off too many people. In recent years, the upper echelons of the Anglican Church have been reluctant to [take sides](#) on issues of systemic inequity like those raised during the Occupy Wall Street protests. Many churches have preferred to focus on social issues like gay marriage, which has [created friction](#) between progressive and conservative Anglicans worldwide.

'Late to the table'

Now, though, new alliances within the church may be forming over saving the environment.

"Christians have come late to the table" as active participants in the environmental movement, said Mallory McDuff, a lifelong Episcopalian and an environmental education instructor at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina. She is author of *Natural Saints* and was lead contributor to the recently published *Sacred Acts*, two books that give voice to people of faith on the front lines of environmentalism.

She said the weight of scientific evidence over climate change, and concern over environmental despoliation in general, is leading many faith groups to fuse existing traditions of social activism

with environmental concern. In other words, Anglicans are increasingly being swept up in a broader green faith movement.

Stewardship over God's creations and loving neighbour as self are two principles which lead Christians to respect nature, said Reverend Margaret Marquardt, who helped organize the forum at Christ Church Cathedral. "Neighbour is not just humans being neighbour; neighbour is other creatures and neighbour is the land," she said.

Beyond 'dominion over the earth'

Neighbour also includes developing world countries who don't have the resources to cope with the many impacts of climate change, said McDuff.

"Christian groups worldwide are on the front lines of disaster response.... And they're like, look, we're going to be in the position of full-time disaster relief if you can't get people on board to address climate change through both mitigation and adaptation," she said.

"We're really seeing a re-framing of a classic argument that Christians think we have dominion over the earth.... Unfortunately, the reality is a lot of people, including environmentalists, are just hearing this vocal minority like (former Republican presidential candidate) Rick Santorum and some of the super conservative Christian groups."

McDuff said Christians are involved in climate change activism in North America. Initiatives like [Creation Care](#) and [What would Jesus drive?](#) have tried to curb emissions and waste south of the border. The Keystone pipeline protests involved religious groups both in Washington, D.C., and on the ground in Nebraska, said McDuff. Closer to home, April of last year, Earth Ministry - a Washington state coalition of Christian activists -- played a key role in lobbying to have the state's last coal power plant retired. (The bill, E2SSB 5759, passed, and both of the plant's coal-fired boilers are to be shut down by 2025.)

"We're finding that there are a lot of congregations, based on the principle of justice, that are able to unite around climate change" despite disagreeing about issues like abortion and gay marriage, said McDuff.

As a consequence of that agreement, Christian activists can harness and deploy church space, congregation volunteers and donations, and other church assets from multiple different denominations in the service of environmental causes. And their contributions could become increasingly significant in Canada, where the Conservative government has already [expressed suspicion](#) towards where secular environmental groups get their money.

A moral stance on consumerism

Worcester said Christian groups can also make another contribution by changing how society, more broadly, views nature.

He said many participants at the April forum were of the view that prevailing consumerist values were broken, and that Christians could play a key role in reshaping them. Voluntary simplicity, he said, is something common to many Christian traditions, and it's the "most radical position" one can take in a consumer society.

"It's appropriate for people with a religious background to say money is not the most important thing here.... It's respect for (First Nations') culture and the natural world; these are more important issues than how much money a few Texans can make," he said.

"In the states there's the confusion between right-wing political ideologies and right-wing conservative religious values.... We don't buy into that."

Adam Pez is completing a practicum at The Tyee with a focus on religious faith and social change.

<http://thetyee.ca/News/2012/05/09/Green-Faith-Movement/>

May 11, 2012

In Rio, Secretary-General Says in Message, 'We Must Mobilize Partnerships Needed to Shift World onto a More Sustainable Trajectory of Growth and Development'

United Nations

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for World Environment Day, 5 June:

As the world gears up for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), World Environment Day is an opportunity to highlight the need for a paradigm shift towards a more sustainable world. This year's theme, "*Green Economy: Does it include you?*", underscores the need for everyone to play their part in keeping humankind's ecological footprint within planetary boundaries.

The world's population stands at 7 billion and may rise to more than 9 billion by 2050. This means greater pressure on already crowded cities — where more than half of all people now live — and on natural resources, as demand for food, water and energy rises. It also means more people in search of decent jobs. Globally, 1.3 billion people are currently unemployed or under-employed. An estimated half billion more will join the job market over the next decade.

Sustainability entails providing opportunity for all by balancing the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. We have to rebut the myth that there is conflict between economic and environmental health. With smart policies and the right investments,

countries can protect their environment, grow their economies, generate decent jobs and accelerate social progress.

Rio+20 is our opportunity to deepen global commitment to sustainable development. In Rio, we should agree that measuring growth and wealth by gross domestic product alone is inadequate. We should agree that the world needs a set of sustainable development goals that will build on the Millennium Development Goals. And we should make progress on some of the building blocks of sustainability — energy, water, food, cities, oceans, jobs and the empowerment of women.

Sustainability is gaining prominence on the public policy agenda in both developed and developing nations. The United Nations itself is working towards climate neutrality and sustainable management of our offices and activities. In Rio, we must mobilize the partnerships we need to shift the world onto a more sustainable trajectory of growth and development. On this World Environment Day, in advance of this historic conference, I urge Governments, businesses and all members of society to make the holistic choices that will ensure a sustainable future — the future we want.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2012/sgsm14280.doc.htm>

May 12, 2012

Chut Wutty's memory spurs anti-logging campaign

By Guy De Launey
BBC News Magazine

Phnom Penh -- The death of an environmental activist, shot dead by police, has galvanised his campaign against deforestation and illegal logging in a scenic part of Cambodia.

Ratanakiri is a beautiful province in the north of this country - with volcanic lakes, waterfalls and huge areas of unspoiled forest.

Most of the people who live there belong to indigenous hill tribes who worship spirits in nature.

But peace has brought smooth-surfaced roads and outsiders to rural parts of the country that were once remote.

The hill tribes complain that the newcomers try to trick them out of their traditional lands - and hack down the trees which make up what they call the "spirit forests".

A young man from the Tampeun people told me he knew where loggers were at work - and volunteered to show me. So we jumped into a battered pickup - and slithered along a narrow trail through the forest.

Suddenly we burst out into a clearing. And immediately it seemed that we had made a horrible mistake.

Among piles of cut timber, there was a group of young men who did not look thrilled to see us. Several were dressed in military fatigues - and at least a couple were toting AK-47 rifles. The only way out was behind us.

I jumped out of the car, smiled and shouted hello.

A slightly older man turned and beamed broadly. It turned out that not only did he speak English, but he was an avid listener to the BBC. Instead of being held at gunpoint, we were invited to lunch.

I remembered this incident, a few years on, when I heard about the violent death of Chut Wutty.

I knew him a little - he used to be a soldier before getting a job with the British environment monitor Global Witness, which meant he saw at first-hand the devastation of Cambodia's forests.

When his employers were kicked out of Cambodia for alleging connections between the government and illegal loggers, Wutty set up his own organisation.

He helped indigenous people to form forestry patrols to seek out and chase away illegal loggers. If they found piles of cut timber, they would burn it - making sure those who destroyed the trees would not not profit.

Wutty was good at PR as well as direct action. He brought hundreds of tribe members to Phnom Penh, where they painted their faces blue and dressed up as characters from Avatar.

Just like the aliens in the film, their forest world was being destroyed by greedy outsiders.

All these antics meant that Wutty was not short of enemies.

Some of them were extremely well-connected - holders of land concessions that activists said were being used as cover for illegal logging. But he had powerful friends as well - thanks to his military connections.

So it is ironic that he died at the hands of a military police officer.

And from a personal point of view it is haunting - because he was doing much the same as my young Tampeun guide in Ratanakiri.

Wutty was showing two journalists around an area which he believed was being illegally logged.

They ran into military police who demanded their cameras.

A heated argument developed, then the journalists heard gunshots and fled into the forest. When they emerged, Wutty was dead in the driver's seat of his Landcruiser and a military police officer lay prone on the ground.

As the journalists were surrounded by other men in uniforms, they overheard one say "just kill them". Thankfully that did not happen - they are both safe, if traumatised.

I do not believe Wutty was deliberately targeted. But his death is the most chilling example of what seems to be an increasing willingness to use armed force against protesters.

Just in the past three months, guards at a rubber plantation shot and wounded land protesters. The governor of Bavet city is facing charges for shooting at demonstrating garment factory workers.

And, in a reversal of the archetype, police threw stones at residents during an eviction in Phnom Penh.

The UN's visiting special envoy for human rights in Cambodia told me these were worrying developments.

Surya Subedi went to pay his respects to Chut Wutty's family and he said that bullets were just one part of the threat to protest and freedom of expression in Cambodia.

"People seem to be exercising self-censorship - they're afraid of being prosecuted for defamation and incitement," he told me.

"I've shared my recommendations with the government - but the implementation is frustratingly slow and I'm disappointed with the progress made."

The government may be aware this is a slippery slope. It has suspended all future land concessions, though not those already in place.

Chut Wutty would probably have taken that as progress, but not victory. The indigenous people he worked with have promised they will continue the movement he started.

And that perhaps is the most fitting tribute to that intense, unorthodox and courageous man, who knew the dangers of his job and was prepared to accept them.

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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18032883>

May 13, 2012

Our environmental challenge

By Bishop Edward J. Burns
Juneau Empire

Here in Juneau we live surrounded by mountains and glaciers. The majesty and beauty of the Mendenhall Glacier never ceases to impress me and I have been fortunate to view some of the other glaciers in Southeast Alaska. Just recently I had the opportunity to speak to a longtime Juneau resident who expressed her amazement at how the Mendenhall Glacier has receded over recent years.

The glaciers and the changes taking place reminded me that just a year ago the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Science published its report on the causes and consequences of the retreat of mountain glaciers and the impact of climate change on the natural environment and human society.

A working group of internationally renowned glaciologists, climate scientists, meteorologists, hydrologists, physicists, chemists and other scientists came together at the Vatican for two days in April 2011 to present scientific papers on the worldwide phenomenon of melting mountain glaciers and to make recommendations regarding the risks and threats of climate change.

The report noted that the widespread loss of glaciers, ice and snow on the mountains is taking place on a global scale at a rapid rate which provides some of the clearest evidence available for a change in the climate system. The major causes appear to be rising temperatures because of greenhouse gases combined with large-scale emissions of dark soot particles and dust that cover glaciers and icefields which then absorb rather than reflect sunlight.

The Vatican working group made the following recommendations:

- Immediately reduce carbon dioxide emissions worldwide by employing renewal energy resources, addressing deforestation and increasing reforestation and employing technologies that “draw down excessive carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
- Cut heat-absorbing pollutants like soot, methane and hydroflourocarbons by 50 percent.
- Adopt international policies to help countries to assess and adapt to the environmental and social impacts that climate change will bring.

If what the overwhelming majority of responsible scientists predict about climate change is correct, the possible consequences are grave within the near and long term. In the near future, rising sea levels threaten vulnerable island communities in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

Long term, the accelerating breakup and melting of glaciers and icesheets in Antarctica and Greenland and the loss of the summer icepack in the Arctic Ocean means rising sea levels that by the end of the century will threaten coastal cities. The acidification of the oceans due to excessive carbon dioxide threatens to disrupt the aquatic food chain and the destruction of acid sensitive species such as reef corals and the plants and animals that depend on them.

As Pope Benedict XVI said in his 2010 message for the World Day of Peace, “There is a very close connection between respect for the human being and the safeguarding of creation. Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others.”

Making the changes necessary to turn around climate change before it is too late is not simply a scientific or political question but a moral and spiritual one. We are not the masters but the stewards of God’s creation and have a responsibility before God and to future generations to do what we can to reduce and eventually reverse the impact on the environment caused by the burning of fossil fuels that power our cars, trucks, airplanes and much of our economy.

In August of 2013 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is sending a delegation of bishops and experts from the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change will be coming to Alaska to learn for themselves some of the ways in which climate change has affected the Alaskan environment and the people of Alaska, especially in the rural areas.

Their visit, hosted by the Archbishop of Anchorage, Roger L. Schwietz, Fairbanks’ Bishop Donald Kettler and me, will begin with a symposium in Anchorage made up of church leaders, Alaskan scientists and academics, and Alaska Native elders. The USCCB delegation will then go

to visit villages in western Alaska, where they will meet with the people most directly affected by the environmental changes brought about by global warming. On their return to Anchorage, the bishops will conclude the symposium with their own personal reflections on what they have witnessed.

As important as this visit is, we can begin to take action now. With the full support of the nation's Catholic bishops, all across our country, Catholics are taking the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor. The St. Francis Pledge is a promise and a commitment by Catholic individuals, families, parishes, organizations and institutions to live our faith by protecting God's creation and advocating on behalf of people in poverty who face the harshest impacts of global climate change. For more information about the St. Francis Pledge please go to: www.catholicclimatecovenant.org.

- Burns is the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Juneau and Southeast Alaska.

<http://juneauempire.com/opinion/2012-05-13/our-environmental-challenge#.T6-P1r-yNmg>

May 14, 2012

Sacred Lake Titicaca Is Being Drowned by Pollution

By Sara Shahriari

Indian Country Today Media Network

Brown, rolling plains that seem to stretch on to eternity are suddenly broken by the brilliant blue of Lake Titicaca. The lake, which sits on the border between Peru and Bolivia, has supported indigenous farming and fishing communities for thousands of years. But what was once a sacred place to the Inca is now in danger from pollution, as population growth in the Titicaca watershed overwhelms the area's infrastructure.

The most famous creation stories in this part of the world come from the Inca, the last indigenous culture to control the region before the Spanish arrived in the 1500s. Those stories say the god Viracocha rose from the waters of Lake Titicaca. Some say Viracocha created mankind, while others say he made the first Inca, Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo. The lake is still considered a sacred place, and honored with a pilgrimage that draws thousands of people each year to a church on the lakeshore in Copacabana, Bolivia.

The New Urban Landscape

Over the past decade Aymara Indian farmers from all over Bolivia's high plains were drawn to the city of El Alto in search of education and employment. But as the population of that city has recently grown to more than one million people, it scrambles to provide basic services with a budget that is always stretched thin. Many Bolivian cities do not treat much of their used water, but what makes El Alto important is that its wastewater ends up in Lake Titicaca, just 40 miles away.

About 80 percent of the people in El Alto have access to potable water, but at best just 50 percent of its homes and businesses connect via sewers to the city's only wastewater treatment plant. The rest of the water goes directly into rivers, which now display a sickly rainbow of colors—red with blood from slaughterhouses, green with chemicals from tanneries, and a deep orange from mineral processing waste. Their banks are lined with trash—from tires to bottles to dead dogs—and the rivers are also toilets for many people who don't have bathrooms in their homes.

"The water keeps getting dirtier," says 17-year-old Susi Mamani from El Alto as she walks along a bank of the Seco River. She says that for many households the river is the closest and easiest way to dispose of trash, especially when garbage trucks fail to collect it week after week. "I hope we can clean the water and learn not to throw our trash in the rivers," she says. "I want to see them cleaner, with more plants."

Dirty water and piles of trash can have deadly results. Children playing along the riverbanks and families picking through the piles of garbage are exposed to chemicals and feces; many people here carry harmful intestinal parasites and thousands of children die each year from diarrhea related to inadequate sanitation.

Budgets Stretched Thin

"There is no complete and structured treatment of wastewater," says Marco Ribera Arismendi of the Environmental Defense League in La Paz, which monitors pollution in El Alto and the lake. "The things governments have done so far are like giving an aspirin to someone who has been shot."

A second wastewater treatment plant for the city, which will rely largely on international funds for completion, is planned. But that addition may not be enough to deal with industrial pollutants. "Most of the medium and small businesses are dispersed through the city, and plastic, paint, detergents and metals from factories go into the rivers and then the lake," says Ribera Arismendi. What El Alto really needs, he adds, is an industrial park that would group all the factories in one area and a water-treatment plant that can remove metals and chemicals.

El Alto's budget depends on Bolivia's central government and gains very little from local taxes. Edgar Patana Ticona, El Alto's mayor, says that wastewater treatment often takes a backseat to necessities such as potable water, schools and health centers. When the city does try to enforce environmental laws, he says it is often met with insurmountable resistance from people trying to maintain their livelihoods. "If we monitor a specific business then the people who work there, the owner and all the neighbors begin to protest," he says. "And not so that we enforce the rules—but so the business can continue operating."

Trouble Downstream

The Pallina River is one of several in the network that connects El Alto to Lake Titicaca. Rigoberto Rios Miranda, an Aymara farmer, has lived on its banks for more than 60 years. "When I was a child the Pallina River was clean, the water was crystalline. About 15 or 20 years

back they contaminated it. There were fish here—then one day waters came—I don't know from where, but all the fish were dead,” he says.

Rios Miranda, like many farmers, is digging wells on his property after deciding that it was not safe to have livestock drink from the river. The Pallina soon meets the Katari River, the last step on the journey to the lake. Policarpio Lopez is an Aymara dairy farmer whose land sits close to the Katari on a broad floodplain on the edge of Lake Titicaca. Every year when the rains come the Katari runs strong toward the lake, and the waters that inundate his land bring a tide of trash.

“In this pasture we can find every kind of garbage. Plastic bottles, cosmetics, radios, televisions, dolls, basketballs, volleyballs,

sandals and clothes,” he says, looking out over his land. Every year brings more, and his only defense is to collect it.

Fishermen are also affected. Lake Titicaca's shallow shore water is a breeding ground for several species of fish that locals depend on for their livelihood. Donato Corani is from Suriqui, an island in Titicaca a few miles from where the Katari River enters the lake. “Pollution has changed the fish in many ways,” he says. According to Corani, young fish that formerly grew to maturity in warm shore waters have migrated deeper into the lake, resulting in diminished population and size. Corani says pollution, combined with serious overfishing, has pushed many former fishermen to migrate to cities in search of work.

A Multifaceted Problem

Though El Alto is creating a problem in Lake Titicaca, it is not the only source of water pollution there. Smaller towns also lack wastewater treatment plants, while some Peruvian gold-mining operations use a smelting process that releases mercury into rivers that lead to the lake. Even the cattle that graze along the shore affect the water, as their manure loads it with excess nutrients. Those help a plant called duckweed to proliferate, that in turn blocks sunlight and sucks up oxygen other aquatic species need to survive.

Tourism is another challenge for Lake Titicaca. National and international visitors bring in money that improves the standard of living in the impoverished region, but also means towns with poor sewage treatment facilities take in large influxes of visitors. Grover Rivera Ballesteros, an engineer and instructor at Bolivia's Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, says constructing treatment plants for those communities is more complicated than it might seem.

“Water treatment plants must be in accordance with local conditions, because people from the town are going to operate them, and the people from the community have to pay for the maintenance,” he says. “If I build a plant that isn't in accordance with those needs, then it may function well but later go to pieces.”

The Search for Solutions

Lake Titicaca is bigger than the state of Delaware. That size makes it resilient, and most of lake's water is still clean. Yet the presence of distant clean waters is cold comfort to people in riverside or shoreline communities who see their livelihoods affected.

There are many small projects underway to help people living in the Lake Titicaca watershed. One organization, Fundación Sumaj Huasi, helps people without sewer service build ecological toilets. Another project helps dairy farmers maintain healthy herds of cows and build compost centers where, instead of washing into the lake, manure is collected and later sold as fertilizer.

Despite the successes of these and other projects, there is a powerful feeling downstream that unless El Alto makes a big move to treat its wastewater nothing will change. People say that laws are passed and promises made, but nothing happens. For instance, in 2004 the government of then-president Carlos Mesa passed a law declaring four rivers, including the Pallina, environmental disaster zones. When action didn't follow the law, people who live near the Pallina blocked a key highway leading toward Bolivia's capital and demanded a cleaner river. Although the protest called attention to the issue of pollution, the Pallina remains a foamy, opaque green.

Rivera Ballesteros, the engineer, says better cooperation between organizations working on water pollution and trash collection would be a step in the right direction. "There are institutions doing this kind of work, but it would be good to have more coordination, to work together, form teams and join forces," he says.

Rocio Butron, who works for the municipality of Pucarani, Bolivia agrees that more cooperation is essential. She says local governments often lack the trained staff to take on large environmental projects, and, as in El Alto, key issues such as health care and education take precedence over sanitation in the municipal budget. "There should be a bigger push from the central government and the departmental government to tackle these issue and get the municipalities involved to contribute," she says.

Butron hopes that leaders and projects from all the affected areas stretching from El Alto down to Lake Titicaca will meet and hammer out an overarching plan. After all, she says, downstream communities are powerless to push back the tide of contamination alone.

Reporting for this story was funded by a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2012/05/14/sacred-lake-titicaca-is-being-drowned-by-pollution-111423>

May 16, 2012

Anglicans take action at UN's Rio+20

By Ali Symons

Anglican Church of Canada

Above the skyline of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a 39-metre Jesus statue spreads its arms over the slums and mansions of this sprawling city. The iconic statue, built in 1931 to represent peace, has now become a symbol for the work of thousands of Christians—Anglicans included—who are actively supporting the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which meets in Rio June 13 to 22.

Known as Rio+20, the conference marks the 20th anniversary of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, known as the "Earth Summit." The event will gather leaders from governments, the private sector and NGOs to discuss a green economy and an institutional framework for sustainable development. Themes will include energy, food security and disaster readiness.

The goal is to produce an action plan, entitled "The Future We Want," with specific sustainable development goals for the UN's 193 member states.

[A new resource pack](#), produced by the Anglican Alliance—a global Communion network focusing on development, relief, and advocacy—has been compiled to help Anglicans learn about and pray for Rio+20. The pack includes information on the conference and topic sheets with facts, action points and prayers on environmental justice, water, climate change and ecojustice.

The resource materials, designed for use on Rio Sunday (June 3), the People's Summit first global day of action (June 5), and during the conference, were developed with help from the Anglican Communion UN Office, Lambeth Palace, the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, whose secretary is the Rev. Ken Gray of Victoria, B.C.

Anglicans have a long history of environmental activism. They have worked internationally through the World Council of Churches since the 1980s and Rio+20 is the latest focal point for this work.

Local Brazilian Anglicans are leading the way. Their Primate, the Most Rev. Mauricio Andrade, has invited the Anglican Communion to follow Rio+20 and take practical steps towards preserving the environment.

"With hope, audacity and renewed faith, I call on the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil and the Anglican Communion around the world to assume their prophetic duty to 'take care of Creation,'" he said in a recent letter. "We need to support the initiatives of organized civil society and make a strong appeal to the governments to take their responsibility for the life on our planet."

A People's Summit will run parallel to the UN meetings. Its goal is to build a common voice for justice among civil society groups, including churches. Anglicans are part of an ecumenical coalition that is organizing a space for religious perspectives. Anglicans also be involved in debates, workshops, roundtables and local advocacy. On June 22 at 5:00 pm, the Anglican cathedral in Rio de Janeiro will host a special service.

For more information and resources, follow these links to:

- [access the Rio+20 resource pack](#)
- [learn about the World Council of Churches' work to support Rio+20](#)
- [visit the People's Summit website](#)

http://news.anglican.ca/news/stories/2491?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+acc-news+%28Anglican+Church+of+Canada+News+Stories%29

May 28 2012

‘The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it’ – Minister urges action at Rio+20

Christian Aid

Secretary of State Caroline Spelman has said churches have a vital role to play at next month's Rio+20 summit, which aims to tackle global poverty and create an environmentally sustainable future.

Speaking at a ‘Faith in Rio’ event hosted by four Christian development agencies, Christian Aid, Progressio, Tearfund and CAFOD, the Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs outlined the challenge facing the conference, which marks 20 years since the first Earth Summit in 1992.

‘We expect the global population to rise significantly. In just 13 years there will be an extra billion mouths to feed. I think that really brings home the challenge we face,’ she said.

‘By 2030 the world will need at least 50 per cent more food, 45 per cent more energy and 30 per cent more water and this will need to be produced without further damaging the environment.

‘We need Rio to hasten change across all sectors and all continents and we do not have the luxury of time.’

She added: ‘The churches have enormous reach. Reach into your own communities to engage them, reach into the wider global community.

‘Personally as a Christian I believe the earth is the Lord's and everything in it and we have a responsibility to steward the earth's natural resources, not just for our own generation but for future generations and Rio is an important opportunity to demonstrate just that.’

Also on the discussion panel at the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster was the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Peter Price, who said Jesus saw poverty as the greatest challenge for humanity.

‘If you were to ask Jesus what is the ‘good news’, he would give you a very simple answer: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised and the poor will have good news brought to them,’ he said.

‘So often what we do in relation to poverty in our world is to say we have concern for it. That’s not what Jesus had. Jesus saw poverty as the single biggest issue that humanity has to deal with.’

He also called on the Church not to be scared to speak out radically against injustice and oppression. ‘It frightens people when the church speaks about justice. It frightens people when the Church speaks about making peace in the world. It frightens people when you say we must stop this perpetual commitment to murder and killing that goes on in the world without due regard.’

Among the issues being examined in Rio is the creation of new Sustainable Development Goals designed to shape the future of development post-2015, when the current Millennium Development Goals come to an end. The new goals could cover poor people’s access to clean energy, food security, how farmers can use sustainable agriculture and the role of the private sector in development.

- Ends -

If you would like further information please contact Joe Ware on 0207 523 2418 or jware@christian-aid.org. 24 hour press duty phone – 07850 242950

Photo available: Caroline Spelman and the Bishop of Bath and Wells at the Faith in Rio event, chaired by BBC Environment correspondent Richard Black (far right).

Notes to editors:

1. Christian Aid works in some of the world's poorest communities in 47 countries. We act where there is great need, regardless of faith or nationality, helping people to build the lives they deserve.
2. Christian Aid has a vision of an end to global poverty, and we believe that vision can become a reality. Our report Poverty Over explains what we believe needs to be done – and can be done – to end poverty. Details at christianaid.org.uk/Images/poverty-over-report.pdf

3. Christian Aid is a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of 125 churches and church-related organisations that work together in humanitarian assistance, advocacy and development. Further details at actalliance.org

4. Follow Christian Aid's newswire on Twitter: twitter.com/caid_newswire

5. For more information about our work visit christianaid.org.uk

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/may-2012/earth-lords-everything-in-it-minister-urges-action-rio20-2805.aspx>

May 30, 2012

Countdown Begins to World Environment Day 2012

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi/Rio de Janeiro - From the floor of the National Senate, to the streets of Rio de Janeiro, the countdown to World Environment Day (WED) on 5 June 2012 is well underway in Brazil.

This year's host country is preparing to lead what promises to be the largest WED celebrations in the event's four-decade history.

Under the WED 2012 theme *Green Economy: Does it Include You?*, people across the world are set to carry out thousands of environmental activities on and around 5 June 2012.

Just over a week after WED, Brazil will host world governments for the Rio+20 summit, where the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication will be one of two central themes.

In the run-up to Rio+20, WED 2012 will promote the active role of communities around the world in the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and socially inclusive green economy.

From Algiers to Auckland, close to 8000 activities have already been registered on www.unep.org/wed by WED participants across the world for 5 June.

There is still plenty of time to get involved in WED 2012. Members of the public are encouraged to visit www.unep.org/wed and register their green activities for 5 June.

UNEP will also launch the Global Environment Outlook 5 (GEO 5) on 6 June. Three years in the making and involving close to 300 experts, GEO is the UN's most comprehensive environmental assessment. In the run-up to Rio+20, GEO 5 will analyze the state of the global environment and track global progress towards international sustainability targets.

Highlights of the WED 2012 programme in Brazil include:

1 June 2012

- Opening of Green Nation Fest

Museum of Natural History, Rio de Janeiro

A celebration of environment, education and entertainment, the Green Nation Festival is partnering with UNEP to celebrate WED through cinema, new media and other cultural activities. The 10-day festival aims to mobilize community action in Brazil to promote sustainable development and lifestyles. Official website (in Portuguese) is available at: <http://www.greennationfest.com.br>

2 June 2012

- Launch of Green Passport

9:00-10:00, Corcovado Monument, Rio de Janeiro

Rio+20 will see hundreds of delegates flying to Brazil from across the world, filling the city's hotels and traveling around the region; actions which could lead to a potentially high carbon footprint for the summit. UNEP has partnered with the Government of Brazil to produce a new smart phone application, which provides information on 400 environmentally friendly sites and tourism services around Rio de Janeiro. UNEP has also produced sustainability guidelines for hotels in the city. With Brazil set to host the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016, the Green Passport marks a new development in efforts to promote sustainable tourism throughout the country.

4 June 2012

- WED Challenge Forest Takes Root with Gisele Bündchen

09:30-11:00, Green Nation Fest, Museum of Natural History, Rio de Janeiro

UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Gisele Bündchen will plant the first of 50,000 new trees that will take root to mark WED. Gisele's forest marks the culmination of last year's WED Challenge, where the supermodel and campaigner competed with fellow UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Don Cheadle to mobilize global participation for WED. To mark the Brazilian model's victory in the WED Challenge, a new forest will be planted in her home country. Gisele will also work as a news reporter with Brazilian TV station Globo for the day, covering WED activities. Gisele will join Brazilian Environment Minister Izabella Teixeira, Mayor of Rio de Janeiro Eduardo Paes and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner for a press conference immediately following the tree-planting.

- UNEP Champions of the Earth Awards

Press Conference: 4.30-5.45pm, Blue Room, Copacabana Palace Hotel, Rio de Janeiro

Award Ceremony: 8pm-12am, Crystal, Palm and Gallery Rooms, Copacabana Palace Hotel, Rio de Janeiro

The UN's flagship environment awards will be held in conjunction with WED for the first time this year. The Champions of the Earth prize recognizes leaders in the fields of policy, science, entrepreneurship, and grassroots leadership. This year, UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Gisele Bündchen will present the 2012 Champions of the Earth laureates with their awards.

5 June 2012

- WED Celebrations at Presidential Palace

15:00-18:00, Palácio do Planalto, Brasília

President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff will unveil a package of national environmental measures to mark WED. A Special Session of the Brazilian Senate on World Environment Day 2012 will follow the announcement.

6 June 2012

- Global Launch of UNEP Global Environment Outlook (GEO) 5:

Press Conference and High-Level Panel Discussion

10:30-12:45, Palácio Itamaraty, Centro, Rio de Janeiro

GEO is the UN's most comprehensive environmental assessment report. GEO 5, which will be officially launched in Rio de Janeiro, provides an in-depth assessment of the state of the world environment and includes contributions from close to 300 global experts. GEO 5 will also unveil global progress towards international sustainability targets. Parallel launches will take place in several locations worldwide. More information on GEO 5 is available at: www.unep.org/geo

Worldwide Celebrations

Beyond Brazil, WED celebrations are being planned by individuals, organizations and communities in scores of locations.

An interactive map of global WED activities can be viewed at:
<http://www.unep.org/wed/aroundtheworld/activitymap/>

Among these are:

Belgium

3-8 June - Bee Biodiversity Garden

Where: European Parliament, Brussels

What: Thousands of bee-friendly plants exhibited in the plaza outside the European Parliament, with stalls and information booths

Switzerland

2 June - Celebration to mark 10th anniversary of Switzerland's admission to the United Nations, 40th anniversary of UNEP and 20 years of the Rio conference

Where: Parc La Grange, Geneva

What: Exhibits by UNEP, other environmental organizations, Paint Party on Green Economy, competition for the most sustainable picnic, music and games

Kenya

5 June - UNEP/Mathare Green Heroes: Green Economy Waste Management Initiative

Location: Mathare, Nairobi

Waste Management Education and football fun day organized by Maji Mazuri, a youth-run community development organization operating in Mathare, one of the largest slums in the Kenyan capital

Iraq

5 June - UN-HABITAT WED Art Festival

Location: Hillah Youth Centre, Hillah, Iraq

Festival will include competitions for drawing and essay writing focused on environmental themes

Thailand

5 June - Green Economy Seminar

Where: Bangkok

What: Hosted by **UNEP and the Center for People and Forests**, the seminar will take place **under the theme** 'Green Economy and Thai flooding'.

USA

5 June - Panel Discussion on Sustainable Cities and WED Reception

Location: U.S. Green Building Council Offices, Washington DC

Hosted by UNEP, U.S. Green Building Council and World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the panel will take place under the theme, 'Sustainable Cities and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)'

Panama

5 June - Documentary Screening: 'What I Grasp and What I See'

Film narrated by the communities in two river basins in Panama. Screening hosted by UNEP, UNDP, National Environment Authority and Panama Canal Authority and to be followed by discussion with director and participants.

Notes to Editors

About WED

World Environment Day (WED) is the biggest and most widely celebrated global day for positive environmental action and is held on 5 June every year.

WED celebrations began in 1972 and have grown to become the one of the main vehicles through which the UN stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and encourages political attention and action.

Visit the official WED website at: www.unep.org/wed

WED Challenge 2012

For WED 2012, people across the world will be challenged to register an environmental activity at www.unep.org/wed that they will carry out around 5 June 2012, and help break the record for the greatest number of activities registered in WED's four decade history.

This year, there's an added incentive to get active for the environment.

Five fuel-efficient cars donated by Kia Motors will be awarded to the best WED projects from each of the following categories:

- **People:** Biggest number of participants mobilized for a WED Activity.
- **Theme:** Best supports WED 2012 theme: *Green Economy: Does it include you?*
- **Creativity:** Most innovative, unique & fun WED activity
- **Buzz:** WED activity that best harnesses the power of social media

- **Impact:** WED activity that results in effective and substantive change

To qualify, all activities must be registered online by 30 June 2012. The winners will be announced on 30 July 2012. More information is available at: www.unep.org/wed/challenge

For more information on media arrangements for WED, please contact:

UNEP Newsdesk (Nairobi) on +254 20 7623088 or E-mail: unepnewsdesk@unep.org

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=2683&ArticleID=9143&l=en&t=long>

June 6, 2012

World Remains on Unsustainable Track Despite Hundreds of Internationally Agreed Goals and Objectives

Ambitious Set of Sustainability Targets Can be Met, But Only with Renewed Commitment and Rapid Scaling-Up of Successful Policies

United Nations Environment Programme

Rio - The world continues to speed down an unsustainable path despite over 500 internationally agreed goals and objectives to support the sustainable management of the environment and improve human wellbeing, according to a new and wide-ranging assessment coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The fifth edition of the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-5), launched on the eve of the Rio+20 Summit, assessed 90 of the most-important environmental goals and objectives and found that significant progress had only been made in four.

These are eliminating the production and use of substances that deplete the ozone layer, removal of lead from fuel, increasing access to improved water supplies and boosting research to reduce pollution of the marine environment - for a full list of goals and status of implementation, visit: www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/Progress_towards_goals.pdf.

Some progress was shown in 40 goals, including the expansion of protected areas such as National Parks and efforts to reduce deforestation.

Little or no progress was detected for 24 - including climate change, fish stocks, and desertification and drought.

Further deterioration was posted for eight goals including the state of the world's coral reefs while no assessment was made of 14 other goals due to a lack of data.

The report cautions that if humanity does not urgently change its ways, several critical thresholds may be exceeded, beyond which abrupt and generally irreversible changes to the life-support functions of the planet could occur.

"If current trends continue, if current patterns of production and consumption of natural resources prevail and cannot be reversed and 'decoupled', then governments will preside over unprecedented levels of damage and degradation," said UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

But it's not all bad news. The report says meeting an ambitious set of sustainability targets by the middle of the century is possible if current policies and strategies are changed and strengthened, and gives many examples of successful policy initiatives, including public investment, green accounting, sustainable trade, the establishment of new markets, technological innovation and capacity building.

GEO-5 also points out that where international treaties and agreements have tackled goals with specific, measurable targets-such as the bans on ozone-depleting substances and lead in petrol-they have demonstrated considerable success. For this reason, GEO-5 calls for more specific targets, with quantifiable results, across a broader range of environmental challenges.

"GEO-5 reminds world leaders and nations meeting at Rio+20 why a decisive and defining transition towards a low-carbon, resource-efficient, job-generating Green Economy is urgently needed," said Mr. Steiner. "The scientific evidence, built over decades, is overwhelming and leaves little room for doubt."

"The moment has come to put away the paralysis of indecision, acknowledge the facts and face up to the common humanity that unites all peoples," he added. "Rio+20 is a moment to turn sustainable development from aspiration and patchy implementation into a genuine path to progress and prosperity for this and the next generations to come."

The report also calls for a greater focus on policies that target the drivers of environmental change - such as population growth and urbanization, unsustainable consumption patterns, fossil fuel-based energy consumption and transport, and globalization.

In particular, globalization has made it possible for trends in drivers to generate intense pressures in concentrated parts of the world very quickly, as in the case of increased demand for biofuels leading to land clearance and conversion.

Although reducing the drivers of environmental change directly may appear politically difficult, it is possible to accomplish significant indirect benefits by targeting more expedient objectives, such as international goals on human well-being, the report says.

Data Gaps and Measuring Progress

Keeping track of the state of the global environment relies heavily on data and statistics collected by national governments.

Data gaps in a number of key issues (chemicals/waste and freshwater pollution being two glaring examples) make it very difficult to measure progress towards goals in these areas.

In the area of chemicals and waste, for example, keeping up with the ever-growing number of chemicals used in commerce and the lack of sufficient information on contaminated sites challenges many governments and hampers response efforts.

At the same time, it is impossible to assess global trends in freshwater pollution because of inadequate data.

GEO-5 notes that linking environmental data with national statistics can place the environment at the heart of national priorities and policy making.

State of the Environment

Scientific evidence shows that Earth systems are being pushed towards their biophysical limits, with evidence that these limits are close and have in some cases been exceeded.

Atmosphere

Of the nine internationally agreed atmospheric goals reviewed, significant progress has been made in eliminating substances that deplete the ozone layer and the phase-out of lead in gasoline, but there has been little or no progress on serious issues such as indoor air pollution and climate change.

Ozone

The world has nearly eliminated the production and use of ozone depleting substances, under the Montreal Protocol.

- It is estimated that implementation of the Protocol will result, in the United States alone, in 22 million fewer cases of cataracts in people born between 1985 and 2100, and 6.3 million fewer skin cancer deaths by mid-century.
- While further expansion of the Antarctic 'ozone hole' has been halted, full recovery is not expected until mid-century or later.
- One group of ozone replacement chemicals - hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) - still needs to be phased out due to many having a high global warming potential.

Lead in Gasoline

Nearly all countries have phased out lead in gasoline. Reduced health risks due to the phase-out have estimated economic benefits of US \$2.45 trillion a year, or roughly 4 per cent of global GDP.

Climate Change

Under current models, greenhouse gas emissions could double over the next 50 years, leading to rise in global temperature of 3°C or more by the end of the century.

Four independent analyses show that 2000-2009 was the warmest decade on record and in 2010, the rate of emissions from fossil fuel burning and cement production was the highest ever recorded.

The annual economic damage from climate change is estimated at 1-2 per cent of world GDP by 2100, if temperatures increase by 2.5°C.

Air Pollution

Air pollution is among the main causes of premature deaths and health problems, especially in children.

- Indoor air pollution from particulate matter is responsible for nearly 2 million premature deaths annually - including 900,000 deaths in children under the age of five.
- Out-door particulate matter may be responsible for around 3.7 million deaths annually.
- Ground-level ozone is responsible for 700,000 respiratory deaths, over 75 per cent of which occur in Asia.
- Global economic losses due to reduced agricultural yields caused by air pollution are estimated at US \$14-26 billion annually.

Biodiversity

The world failed to reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

- Around 20 per cent of vertebrate species are under threat.
- The extinction risk is increasing faster for corals than for any other group of living organisms, with the condition of coral reefs declining by 38 per cent since 1980. Rapid contraction is projected by 2050.
- With more than 30 per cent of the Earth's land surface used for agricultural production, some natural habitats have been shrinking by more than 20 per cent since the 1980s.

However, there has been some progress in terms of policy responses, such as increasing the coverage of protected areas and sharing access and benefits of genetic resources.

Access and Benefit Sharing

The Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources - due to enter into force in 2015 - is unprecedented in its recognition of the rights of indigenous and local communities to regulate access to traditional knowledge in accordance with their customary laws and procedures.

For example, in the field of pharmaceuticals, ten countries own 90 per cent of patents related to marine biodiversity.

Complete data is not yet available on the number of agreements, the number and distribution of beneficiaries and the nature, extent and sustainability of benefits from genetic resources.

Protected Areas

Protected areas cover nearly 13 per cent of the world's land surface, but only 1.6 per cent of the marine area - compared to the 17 per cent and 10 per cent respectively, identified by the Aichi targets set for 2020 and agreed two years ago.

Data gaps on location, extent, legal status and effectiveness, as well as security concerns undermine conservation efforts. Priorities for action include allocation of adequate resources, clear management arrangements and indicators to assess the effectiveness of protected areas.

Fish Stocks

The last two decades witnessed unprecedented deterioration in fish stocks.

- Though catches more than quadrupled from the early 1950s to the mid-1990s, they have stabilized or diminished since then - despite increased fishing.
- In 2000, catches could have been 7-36 per cent higher were it not for stock depletion. This translated into economic losses to the value of US \$6.4 - 36 billion.
- Commercial fisheries and overfishing are the main threat to stocks. Fish products certified by the Marine Stewardship Council constituted only 7 per cent of global fisheries in 2007.

Marine protected areas have proven in many cases to be effective conservation tools, with recent surveys showing higher fish populations inside reserves than in surrounding areas and in the same areas before reserves were established.

Water

Of the 30 environmental goals examined in relation to water, only one goal - that of increasing access to clean drinking water - shows significant progress.

But less progress has been made in rural areas, especially in Africa and the Pacific.

Water Quality and Quantity

Despite some improvements, water quality remains the largest cause of human health problems worldwide.

At the same time, climate change and further population growth are likely to result in even greater water shortages in many regions.

- Water quality in at least parts of most major river systems still fails to meet World Health Organization (WHO) standards.
- More than 600 million people are expected to lack access to safe drinking water by 2015, while more than 2.5 billion people will lack access to basic sanitation.
- As water scarcity increases, some regions will be forced to rely more on energy-intensive desalination technologies.
- By 2030, an estimated US \$9-11 billion will be spent annually on additional infrastructure to provide sufficient quantities of water, especially in developing countries.
- Curbing water pollution could result in health benefits of more than US \$100 million in large OECD economies alone.
- Nitrate concentrations are projected to increase due to water pollution from fertilizers and inadequate sanitation, resulting in serious threats to human health and aquatic life.

Although freshwater pollution seems to be on the increase, proper monitoring has declined in many regions.

Ground Water Depletion

Further deterioration of groundwater supplies has been recorded since 2000, while global water withdrawals have tripled over the past 50 years.

Agriculture accounts for 92 per cent of the global water footprint and many global agricultural centres are particularly dependent on groundwater, including northwest India, northeast Pakistan, northeast China and western United States.

Integrated Water Management

Integrated water management and monitoring tools need to be developed and strengthened if the world is to better manage current and future water challenges.

At present, about 158 of the 263 international freshwater basins still lack cooperative management frameworks.

Other obstacles to better water management include: Insufficient data, the absence of comprehensive monitoring systems and water security indicators to track trends over time.

Marine Pollution

Little or no progress has been achieved in preventing, reducing or controlling pollution of the marine environment.

- The number of coastal dead zones has increased dramatically in recent years. Out of the 169 coastal dead zones worldwide, only 13 are recovering and 415 coastal areas suffer from eutrophication.
- Around 80 per cent of marine pollution is caused by land-based activities.

- Of 12 seas surveyed between 2005 and 2007, the South-East Pacific, North Pacific, East Asian Sea and Caribbean contained the most marine litter.
- Ratification of the MARPOL convention by 150 countries is resulting in reduced pollution from ships despite gaps in implementation.
- Governance of marine areas beyond boundaries is weak and fragmented.

Extreme Events

GEO-5 emphasizes the need to step up efforts to prevent and mitigate the impact of extreme events, including climate change-induced disasters. River channelization, floodplain loss, urbanization and changing land-use are important environmental factors increasing the impacts of floods and drought.

- The number of flood and drought disasters rose by 230 per cent and 38 per cent respectively between the 1980s and 2000s, while the number of people exposed to floods rose by 114 per cent.
- The cost of coastal adaptation to climate change is estimated to reach between US \$26 billion and US \$89 billion by the 2040s, depending on the magnitude of sea-level rise.

Land

Some progress has been made to ensure better access to food, although combating desertification and droughts has seen little or no progress. Competing demands for food, feed, fuel, fibre and raw materials are intensifying pressures on land, helping to drive deforestation.

There has been some progress on deforestation at the global level: annual forest loss decreased from 16 million hectares in the 1990s to approximately 13 million hectares between 2000 and 2010. Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean together accounted for the loss of over seven million hectares annually between 2005 and 2010.

Improved governance and capacity building are crucial to fulfilling the potential for more sustainable land management and systems.

Chemicals and Waste

There has been some progress in dealing with heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants and radioactive waste.

However, more than 90 per cent of water and fish samples from aquatic environments are contaminated by pesticides. Pollution with persistent organic pollutants (POPs) is also widespread, in particular affecting remote areas such as the Arctic and Antarctic.

Emerging issues requiring attention include accelerating the sound management of electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) and the challenges of endocrine-disrupting chemicals, plastics in the environment, open burning, and the manufacture and use of nanomaterials.

Regional Outlook

Detailed summaries that present a full picture of GEO-5's content per region are available separately, but below is an overview of key issues and examples of successful policies that, if scaled-up and accelerated, could assist in a transition to a Green Economy.

Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean share the common problems of population growth and increasing consumption, worsened by rapid urbanization in Africa and Asia and the Pacific, placing growing stress on dwindling natural resources. Climate change is an overarching problem.

However, examples of success - from a renewed understanding of the value of forests to ecosystems in Kenya, to the introduction of payments for ecosystem services in Vietnam to policies that have reduced deforestation rates in the Amazon - show progress is possible.

Europe and North America continue to operate at unsustainable levels of consumption, and North America in particular has seen limited growth in the renewable energy industry.

Yet policies to cut greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, such as congestion taxes, show change is achievable, as do policies in North America, such as improving the flexibility of grids to allow renewable sources more access and the implementation of carbon taxes in Quebec and British Columbia.

West Asia is facing worsening water scarcity, land degradation and sea level rise, but can point to water resources management in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and rangeland rehabilitation in Syria as policies that can be replicated.

Recommendations

GEO-5 outlines ways in which the race for development needs not be at the expense of the environment or the populations which rely upon it. Indeed, many of the projects that the publication analyses prove that development can be boosted through better understanding the value of natural resources.

Above all, a redefinition of wealth that goes beyond Gross Domestic Product to a more sustainable metric could boost the quality of life and well-being of all communities, especially those in developing nations.

The report makes the following specific recommendations:

- More reliable data are needed to make informed decisions about environmental resources and to measure progress towards meeting internationally agreed goals
- There is a need for clear long-term environment and development targets and for stronger accountability in international agreements
- Capacity development to support environmental information, especially in developing countries, needs to be stepped up significantly

- Changes need to be both short- and long-term, and to combine technology, investment and governance measures along with lifestyle modifications grounded in a mindset shift towards sustainability- and equity-based values
- Transformation requires a gradual but steadily accelerating transition process. Some successful policy innovation is already happening but need to be mainstreamed
- International cooperation is essential, since environmental problems do not follow national boundaries. Global responses can play a key role in setting goals, generating financial resources and facilitating the sharing of best practices
- Even though national and regional responses have shown success, a polycentric governance approach is needed to attain effective, efficient and equitable outcomes.
- Improving human well-being is dependent on the capacity of individuals, institutions, countries and the global community to respond to environmental change
- Rio+20 provides an opportunity to assess achievements and shortcomings, and stimulate transformative global responses.

Notes to Editors

- **Global Environment Outlook (GEO-5)** is the most authoritative assessment of the state, trends and outlook of the global environment. The report was produced over three years in a process that involved more than six hundred experts worldwide, who collated and analyzed data from every continent to build up a detailed picture of the world's wellbeing.

The full report is downloadable here:

http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/GEO5_report_full_en.pdf

- **GEO-5 Regional Summaries for journalists (in languages):**

Summary for Africa ([En](#), [Fr](#), [Pr](#))

Summary for Asia Pacific ([En](#), [Ch](#))

Summary for North America ([En](#), [Sp](#))

Summary for Latin America and the Caribbean ([En](#), [Pr](#), [Sp](#))

Summary for West Asia ([En](#), [Ar](#), [Fr](#))

Summary for Europe ([En](#), [Fr](#), [Sp](#), [Pr](#), [Ru](#))

- The companion report, **Measuring Progress: Environmental Goals and Gaps** - Reviews and illustrates the world's progress towards meeting international environmental goals for a set of critical issues and highlights gaps in our ability to measure progress, including the absence of clear numerical targets and important data gaps on many issues: http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/Measuring_progress.pdf

- **Keeping Track of our Changing Environment: From Rio to Rio+20** - is a compilation of facts and figures that track the environmental changes that have swept the planet over the last twenty years: http://www.unep.org/GEO/pdfs/Keeping_Track.pdf

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<http://www.unep.org/NewsCentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2688&ArticleID=9158>

June 6, 2012

Karmapa addresses Khoryug Conference on Environmental Protection

Shambhala Sun Foundation

In celebration of [World Environment Day](#) yesterday, His Holiness the 17th Karmapa spoke at the first day of the 4th [Khoryug Conference on Environmental Protection for Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries](#) — a five-day conference focusing on biodiversity, climate change, and natural disaster preparedness. Representatives from forty-five monasteries throughout the Himalayas and South Asia are gathered in Dharamsala, India, this week for the conference.

As part of his opening address, the Karmapa stated, “We should all try our hardest to protect the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayas and preserve these ecosystems. Preserving the biodiversity and the ecosystems of our region should be like the effortless practice of dharma for us. Our basic motivation to protect the environment should come from the pure desire to benefit all sentient beings on earth.”

To learn more about the conference, visit their website at khoryug.org.

<http://shambhalasun.com/news/?p=33908>

June 8, 2012

For the Future of Our Planet, a Dialogue Between Generations

By Desmond Tutu
Huffington Post

The month of June is upon us and as [Rio+20](#), the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, draws nearer, I find myself reflecting on the many great changes the past 20 years have brought, since that first Earth Summit, also in Rio, when the world met to announce a vision for its collective future.

Since then we have seen many more inspiring moments of humanity, when large numbers come together for the common good. It tells us change is possible.

But the biggest of dangers still loom large, and I share the frustration of millions, outraged at the indifference world leaders are demonstrating towards some of the toughest and most urgent challenges we face today. In the eyes of future generations, our failure to resolve these problems will overshadow everything else.

Escalating poverty is eating away at our social fabric, our dwindling ecosystems are crying out for protection, the grave threat of climate change is well-documented and yet so inadequately addressed, as though it's tomorrow's problem! Why is it that so many of our leaders -- in rich and poor countries alike -- tend to put these challenges right at the bottom of their agendas, as if tackling climate change and social injustice were some sort of luxury?

Along with a few of my colleagues from [The Elders](#), I have been [debating](#) these matters with young activists: [Esther](#) from Nigeria, [Sara](#) from Sweden, [Marvin](#) from China and [Pedro](#) from Brazil.

Their positive vision and relentless energy fills me with hope. I want to believe that the next generation of leaders will be bolder, more global in their outlook and more committed to making decisions for the common good, rather than the short-sightedness and narrow interests we have witnessed in the last 20 years.

My fellow Elders, [Mary Robinson](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#) and I have been inspired to hear in these [Elders+Youngers](#) dialogues from voices all over the world about what matters to people: What '[sustainable development](#)' means, [whether we can 'afford' it](#), whether [GDP makes us happy](#) -- and if not, then why don't we also measure what does?

For an oldie like me, it is -- there is no other word -- awesome to hold a conversation like this one, which spans the planet, digitally, and bridges generations. This is what our shared humanity is about. People are chipping in, confiding their worries and sharing their vision for the future. The whole world can read them.

For Marvin, Pedro, Sara and Esther, 'sustainability' is not just a word, it is a system that will ensure the well-being and prosperity of the planet they will inherit. They are ambassadors for the three billion youth that account for half of the world. They see that we need to abide first by our common goals and shared responsibility.

So now we are faced with a choice. We can fall in a heap or we can go to Rio+20, or watch Rio+20 from wherever we are -- and we can make a difference, exert our influence and hold leaders to account. As [Mary Robinson said to Sara](#) last week, "Make your voice heard. If necessary, interrupt!"

My fellow Elders have been [expressing concern](#) at the state of negotiations in the run-up to this summit and have urged world leaders gathering in Rio not to waste a rare and beautiful opportunity.

And we must continue to rally our global village -- before the summit, at the summit and onwards.

For the sake of our planet, a conversation that needs to be heard is the one between generations, between elders and young people around the world -- and those who are in between.

I leave you with this Kenyan proverb a young activist from Dubai sent us: "The world was not given to you by your parents; it was lent to you by your children."

The words are beautiful. Their global nature, in our digital age, is inspiring.

I hope you can join us too.

Desmond Tutu is Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, a Nobel Peace Laureate and Chair of [The Elders](#), independent global leaders working together for peace, justice and human rights.

In the run-up to Rio+20 he is taking part in [Elders+Youngers](#), an inter-generational dialogue on the future of our planet.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/desmond-tutu/earth-summit-2012_b_1580722.html

June 13, 2012

‘The Future We Want’: Christians speak out on Rio+20

By Alex Green
Ekklesia

This month (20-22 June 2012), against a backdrop of severe ecological and financial crises, world governments are meeting in Rio, Brazil, trying to reach an agreement to secure a sustainable future for the planet and its people.

The original Rio Earth Summit in 1992 addressed a number of emerging problems. Many of these are now become urgent crises. We must act now.

Rio+20 is the final flourish in a global process which has taken many months of input, debate and negotiation by states, civil society and the private sector.

But progress in these negotiations has been so slow ('painful', as one colleague put it), the Brazilian hosts are rumoured to be planning a 'Plan B' document which will be used in the event of continuing deadlock.

The theme of the Rio+20 conference is 'the future we want'. But what kind of future do we want? I'd say we need to test the Rio outcomes on three themes:

1. a just world, free from the indignity of poverty;
2. a sustainable world, valuing Creation;
3. a responsible world, living within the boundaries of the planet.

But to really be a success, Rio+20 needs to put the poorest people first because they suffer the most from environmental degradation and as a global community we have a responsibility towards the world's poorest and most vulnerable. That's the test of the global community.

How can we get a handle on this as Christians? A key principle of Catholic Social Teaching - which has also had an influence on opinion way beyond the church itself - really stands out here. That is, *Solidarity: a deep and persevering commitment to the common good*. Because what's at stake in Rio affects us all.

We need a sustainable development that puts people first, not merely the economy. Rio+20 must be at the service of people.

And when we talk about sustainable development, we're also thinking about future generations. As Pope Benedict has said, "Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources."

Progressio's policy focus is on water. Poor people must have fair and sustainable access to the water they need for their livelihoods, and should be actively involved in making that happen. We'll be bringing these issues to world leaders at Rio for them to listen, take seriously and respond appropriately.

Get involved

Don't just watch from the sidelines! It's easy to engage with Rio right now. We asked people linked with Progressio about the future they want, and compiled their responses. Watch them here: www.progressio.org.uk/futurewewant

If you head to progressio.org.uk/futurewewant, you can also leave a message about the future you want. We will take it to UK leaders before Rio and to world leaders at Rio.

It has been wonderful to hear about the ambition and energy of these ordinary people to build a better future. Here are some of the responses people have made so far:

“In an age when children and grandchildren are encouraged to judge success almost entirely by material possessions, I would like to see a greater emphasis on sharing the world's resources more fairly.” Bernard, Liverpool.

“A good quality of life respecting our planet's finite resources and not seeking everlasting 'economic growth.’” Edward, Bexhill.

“The future is something we can never be sure of... but I want to know that when I look back in years to come that I want to have done my part to make a future to be proud of, one where I took my part in the worldwide community to help others.” - Louise, Crosby.

“A just world for all, not just the rich. Respect for the environment. It is not ours, but in our care to be handed on to the next generation, our children. What will we leave to hand on?” Rev Donnelly, Bromley.

“One where there is justice for the poorest. I realise that will involve sacrifice. Changes of lifestyle and living standards will need to happen in which I and others in our comparatively affluent western countries and communities will need to let go of what is not essential; to live simply so that others may simply live.” Fr Samuels, London.

© **Alex Green** and **Daniel Hale** campaign with Progressio (<http://www.progressio.org.uk/>) - an international development charity with Catholic roots that works alongside people and communities in 11 countries to help them overcome the barriers that keep them poor. It also works with these communities to push the UK government, the EU and global bodies to adopt pro-poor policies.

Ekklesia will be running regular updates throughout Rio+20 from our colleagues at Progressio, alongside commentary from other partners and allies in the movement for climate justice.

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/16727>

June 14, 2012

Vatican position for Rio+20 conference: Beware of ‘green protectionism’

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- As the international community looks for ways to protect the environment while promoting development, it must keep the good of human beings and the protection of human dignity as its central goals, according to the Vatican.

Among the points it makes in a position paper for the upcoming U.N. Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, the Vatican warns that efforts to promote a "green economy" of environmentally friendly goods and services could lead to "green protectionism," rewarding technologically advanced countries and hurting the poor.

The Vatican's position paper was published June 14 by L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper.

The Rio+20's high-level discussions are scheduled for June 20-22 in Rio de Janeiro. A People's Summit of representatives of nongovernmental agencies and groups was scheduled to begin June 15.

The Vatican position paper applauds the "unanimous consensus" that has emerged around the notion that "protecting the environment means improving peoples' lives."

But, the Vatican says that too often the international community focuses almost exclusively on technological solutions to environmental degradation and treats the problems human beings face as simply another set of technological challenges.

"The process of development cannot be left to purely technical solutions, for in this way it would lack ethical direction," the position paper says. And it is unethical to act as if human beings are simply obstacles to sustainable development.

The key to simultaneously protecting the environment, cleaning up pollution and triggering economic growth, the Vatican says, is "adopting and promoting in every situation a way of life which respects the dignity of each human being," and promoting research and technology that safeguards creation without endangering human beings.

To be successful and truly benefit humanity, the discussions at Rio+20 "must not be muddled by blind partisan political, economic or ideological interests which shortsightedly put particular interests above solidarity," the Vatican says.

The paper calls for a serious reflection on the purpose of the economy and how it has been allowed to function. Such a reflection "is demanded by the earth's state of ecological health, and above all by the cultural and moral crisis of humanity, the symptoms of which have been evident for some time throughout the world."

Every economic and technological decision has a moral consequence, the paper says. Pope Benedict has said the ethical dimension of economic activity has largely been ignored, which is the root of the global financial crisis.

The Vatican is also concerned that the concept of the "green economy," which has not been defined clearly, be addressed in a way that promotes peace and international solidarity.

In promoting an economy that minimizes environmental damage and promotes conservation and

preservation, the paper says, care must be taken to avoid "conditioning commerce and international aid" in a way that would become "a latent form of 'green protectionism'" that would penalize countries who do not have access to advanced technologies and have economies heavily reliant on traditional uses of the environment such as farming, fishing and forestry.

<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1202505.htm>

June 22, 2012

SGI Activities at Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development

Soka Gakkai International

From June 20-22, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The event marked the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) also held in Rio de Janeiro. The Rio+20 conference focused on two themes: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

As part of the PrepCom (held from June 13-15) and the Rio+20 conference, various side events were organized at pavilions housing information booths, exhibitions and symposiums on related themes.

The Japan Pavilion showcased green technology and energy-saving innovations, and illustrated Japan's contribution to a disaster-resilient society based on lessons learned from the March 11, 2011, earthquake in Japan.

The joint SGI and Earth Charter International exhibition "Seeds of Hope: Visions of Sustainability, Steps toward Change" was on display at the Pavilion on June 13.

The Seeds of Hope exhibition was also shown at the City Planetarium in Rio de Janeiro from June 16 to July 15. The showing was organized together with the City of Rio de Janeiro and the Earth Charter International, with the support of the State of Rio de Janeiro and SGI. On this occasion several panels highlighting initiatives in Brazil were added to the original version.

At the opening of the exhibition, held on June 15, speakers included SGI Executive Director of Peace Affairs Hirotugu Terasaki, Earth Charter International Executive Director Mirian Vilela, Rio de Janeiro State Secretary for Environment Carlos Minc and Brazilian member of congress Jorge Bittar on behalf of Rio de Janeiro Mayor Eduardo Paes.

The recently created SGI video "[Nurturing Seeds of Hope in the Amazon](#)" that stresses the importance of environmental education and introduces the work of the SGI-Brazil-affiliated Amazon Ecological Conservation Center was shown at both venues.

On June 13, SGI Peace Affairs Program Coordinator Nobuyuki Asai spoke at a symposium organized by the Earth Charter International titled “Exploring Synergies Between Faith Values and Education for Sustainable Development” that introduced a publication of the same name supported by UNESCO. The publication highlights the contributions of diverse religions and faith traditions to education for sustainable development (ESD).

Mr. Asai outlined SGI’s underlying motivation for engagement in ESD and introduced SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s recent environment proposal, issued on the occasion of Rio+20, in which he stresses the importance of fostering a sense of leadership within individuals in order to create waves of transformation within communities and societies. The proposal, titled "[For a Sustainable Global Society: Learning for Empowerment and Leadership](#)" was circulated at the conference.

On June 21, Mayors for Peace organized a life-sized "Bread Tank" (a tank covered with bread to illustrate the need to redirect funding from weapons to food) which was shown in front of the Rio de Janeiro Government Pavilion with an appeal for “Disarmament for Sustainable Development.” Speakers included former UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Ambassador Sergio Duarte, Akira Kawasaki of the Executive Committee of Peace Boat, and Hiro Sakurai, Director of the SGI UN Liaison Office in New York.

SGI also cohosted an interdisciplinary [roundtable](#) on the role of education and learning in promoting sustainable development, held at Riocentro on June 20.

[Adapted from a report from SGI-OPI and articles from the June 17, 18, and 20, 2012, issues of the Seikyo Shimbun, Soka Gakkai, Japan; photos courtesy of SGI-OPI]

<http://www.sgi.org/news/s-development/sd2012/sgis-activities-at-rio20-un-conference-on-sustainable-development.html>

June 22, 2012

Inclusive Green Economy Given Go Ahead by Heads of State at Rio+20

United Nations Environment Programme

Rio de Janeiro - The Rio+ 20 Summit ended today with a range of outcomes which, if embraced over the coming months and years, offer the opportunity to catalyze pathways towards a more sustainable 21st century.

Heads of State and more than 190 nations gave the green light to a Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Nations agreed that such a transition could be 'an important tool' when supported by policies that encourage decent employment, social welfare and inclusion and the maintenance of the Earth's ecosystems from forests to freshwaters.

The decision supports nations wishing to forge ahead with a green economy transition while providing developing economies with the opportunity for access to international support in terms of finance and capacity building.

Meanwhile the Summit also gave the go-ahead to a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to bring all nations-rich and poor-into cooperative target setting across a range of challenges from water and land up to food waste around the globe.

The SDGs are expected to compliment the Millennium Development Goals after 2015: they reflect the reality that a transition to an inclusive green economy and the realization of a sustainable century needs to also include the footprints of developed nations as well as developing ones as they aim to eradicate poverty and transit towards a sustainable path.

Other potentially positive outcomes include a ten-year framework on sustainable consumption and production with a group of companies announcing initiatives to move forward, including in the area of sustainable government procurement of goods and services.

There was also a decision to work towards a new global indicator of wealth that goes beyond the narrowness of GDP, and encouragement for governments to push forward on requiring companies to report their environmental, social and governance footprints.

After some four decades of discussion and calls for the environment programme of the UN to be strengthened, governments agreed on an upgrading of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

Meanwhile the World Congress on Justice, Governance, and Law for Environmental Sustainability, supported by the Brazilian Supreme Court and UNEP among others, committed to use international and national laws to advance sustainability, human and environmental rights and the implementation of environmental treaties.

The Congress, involving some 200 delegates including senior judges, attorney-generals, chief prosecutors and senior auditors, called on governments to back an Institutional Framework for the Advancement of Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability in the 21st Century backed by UNEP.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, said: "World leaders and governments have today agreed that a transition to a Green Economy-backed by strong social provisions-offers a key pathway towards a sustainable 21st century".

"Several other important agreements were also forged that can assist in enabling that transition, ranging from assessing the potential of a new indicator of wealth and human progress beyond the narrowness of GDP to increasing the level of accountability and transparency of companies in respect to their environmental, social and governance footprints," he added.

"The outcome of Rio+20 will disappoint and frustrate many given the science, the day-to-day reality of often simply surviving as individuals and as families, the analysis of where

development is currently heading for seven billion people and the inordinate opportunity for a different trajectory. However if nations, companies and civil society can move forward on the positive elements of the Summit's outcome it may assist in one day realizing the Future We Want," said Mr. Steiner.

"Meanwhile after almost four decades of discussion, and for some disappointment, governments have decided to upgrade UNEP including in key areas such as universal membership and improved financial resources-this is welcome as one important way for improving the authority, the influence and the impact of the world's minister responsible for the environment in terms of moving development onto a more sustainable track," said Mr. Steiner.

Beyond GDP

Rio+20 addressed growing concern that Gross Domestic Product may have outlived its usefulness in a world where natural resource scarcity, pollution and social exclusion are also becoming drivers of whether a nation's wealth is truly going up or running down.

The Summit's outcome document requests the UN Statistical Commission to work with other UN bodies including UNEP and other organizations to work towards identifying new options for measuring progress.

The Commission's work will draw on a range of assessments and pilot projects on going across the globe.

- *Inclusive Wealth*, which is based on the World Bank's Adjusted Net Saving indicator, is developing a more inclusive indicator of national wealth, covering not only produced capital, human capital, and natural capital, but also critical ecosystems -and through the UN, a new Systems of Environmental and Economic Accounts has been proposed for use by member states.

UNEP and the UN University's International Human Development Programme at Rio+20 presented findings from an Inclusive Wealth Index (IWI) looking at several countries including Brazil.

Other pathways towards a new indicator include:-

- The EU effort to go "Beyond GDP" - launched in November 2007, it aims to come up with a broader set of macro-level indexes other than GDP and provide information on how economic growth affects its own foundation (stock of all assets)
- The accounting of Environmental Goods and Services Sector (EGSS) in select countries. OECD and Eurostat have pioneered the development of a statistical framework for measuring the EGSS.

Consumption and Production

Another potentially significant step forward was the adoption of a 10-year framework on sustainable consumption and production covering several sectors ranging from tourism to government procurement.

During Rio+20, over 30 governments and institutions including Brazil, Denmark, Switzerland and UNEP announced a new global *International Sustainable Public Procurement Initiative (SPPI)* aimed at scaling-up the level of public spending flowing into goods and services that maximize environmental and social benefits.

Studies indicate that sustainable public procurement, which represents between 15 and 25 per cent of GDP, offers a tremendous opportunity for green innovation and sustainability.

Examples from around the world show that sustainable public procurement has the potential to transform markets, boost the competitiveness of eco industries, save money, conserve natural resources and foster job creation.

- Across the OECD group of countries, public procurement represents close to 20 per cent of GDP (over US \$4,700 billion annually), while in developing countries the proportion can be slightly higher
- In India, for example, government procurement is worth about US \$300 billion and is expected to grow by more than 10 per cent annually in the coming years
- Japan's Green Purchasing Policy has contributed to the growth of the country's eco-industries, estimated to be worth about €430 billion in 2010
- Europe could save up to 64 per cent of energy - or 38 TWh of electricity - by replacing street lights with smarter lighting solutions
- In Brazil, the Foundation for Education Development succeeded in saving 8,800 m³ of water, 1,750 tonnes of waste and 250 kg of organohalogen compounds, providing the equivalent of one month's economic activity to 454 waste pickers, through its decision to replace regular notebooks with ones made of recycled paper in 2010

Sustainability Reporting

An estimated 25 per cent of the 20,000 companies tracked by Bloomberg are reporting their environmental, social and governance footprints-but 75 per cent are not.

Such in-depth data offers the opportunity for pension funds to invest in companies with a long-term perspective of profits through sustainability reporting while assisting governments in measuring the contribution of multi-nationals towards national sustainability goals and progress beyond GDP.

On 20 June, several countries including Brazil, Denmark, France and South Africa-several of whom already have stock exchanges requiring better reporting- announced they would move forward on the issue with support from UNEP and the Global Reporting Initiative.

UNEP Upgrade

Rio+20 also agreed to 'upgrade' UNEP in order to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development.

The decisions include addressing the limited membership of UNEP, which currently stands at 58 member states, into a body with universal membership of its Governing Council while increasing UNEP's financial resources by an increased allocation from the UN's regular budget.

The Rio+20 outcome also calls on the next General Assembly of the UN to strengthen and upgrade UNEP's ability to assist member states at the regional and national level and to build on its science-policy interface including through UNEP's flagship Global Environment Outlook process.

As part of this intensifying global relationship between scientists and governments, the International Council for Science led by Nobel Prize winner Yuan-Tseh Lee with UNEP and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also launched the 'Future Earth' initiative.

Ways to advance the participation of civil society including cities is also envisaged as part of the strengthening and upgrading process.

Governments, civil society and the private sector have been preparing for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) for around two years.

Throughout the preparations and during Rio+20 the UN including UNEP have been providing assessments, studies and policy pathways aimed at supporting member states on the science and the options for transformational change.

UNEP's work on the Green Economy, in partnership with a wide range of UN and other bodies, has led to a range of supportive reports including:-

The flagship *Green Economy Report: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*

http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/ger/ger_final_dec_2011/Green%20EconomyReport_Final_Dec2011.pdf

Measuring Progress Towards a Green Economy

http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/research_products/MeasuringProgress.pdf

The joint International Labour Organization/UNEP report *Working towards sustainable development: Opportunities for decent work and social inclusion in a green economy*

http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_181836/lang-en/index.htm

The UN's Environmental Management Group's

Working towards a Balanced and Inclusive Green Economy

<http://www.unemg.org/Portals/27/Documents/IMG/GreenEconomy/report/GreenEconomy-Full.pdf>

Why the Green Economy Matters to Least Developed Countries

http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/research_products/Why%20a%20GE%20Matters%20for%20LDCs-final.pdf

The Global Environment Outlook-5

http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/GEO5_report_full_en.pdf

During Rio+20 a further range of supportive reports and initiatives were launched on behalf of member states including:

Avoiding Future Famines: Strengthening the Ecological Basis of Food Security through Sustainable Food Systems

<http://www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/avoidingfamines/>

The Principles for Responsible Insurance

<http://www.unepfi.org/psi/>

A UN Water survey of over 130 national governments on efforts to improve the sustainable management of water resources

http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW_status_report_Rio2012.pdf

A Global Initiative for Resource-Efficient Cities

http://www.unep.org/pdf/GI-REC_4pager.pdf

Inclusive Wealth Report 2012

<http://cl.ly/2k0k300R1W0A422j0U1i>

Global Environment Outlook 5 (GEO-5) for Local Government

<http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/UNEP-ICLEI-GEO-5.pdf>

The Business Case for the Green Economy: Sustainable Return on Investment

<http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/partnerships/UNEP%20BCGE%20A4.pdf>

Building an Inclusive Green Economy for All

<http://povertyenvironment.net/pep>

Notes to Editors

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 (Rio+20) concluded on 22 June 2012.

The Green Economy www.unep.org/greeneconomy

UNEP's activities at UNCSD 2012 (RIO+20) are at <http://www.unep.org/rio20/>

For More Information Please Contact Nick Nuttall, Acting Director of the UNEP Division of Communications and Public Information and UNEP Spokesperson, on Tel: +55 11 6593 8058, after 22 June +254 733 632755, E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=2688&ArticleID=9195&l=en>

June 25, 2012

Maya Lin: A Memorial to A Vanishing Natural World

The designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is now focused on the mass extinction of species, a threat she is highlighting on an interactive Web site. In an interview with Yale Environment 360, Maya Lin talks about her “What is Missing” project, which she calls her “last memorial.”

By Diane Toomey
Yale Environment 360

In 1981, a Yale undergraduate named Maya Lin was catapulted to global prominence when her design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., was chosen over 1,441 other entries. Her striking creation — a black stone gash in the earth inscribed with the names of more than 58,000 American soldiers killed in the Vietnam War — remains one of the world’s most moving war monuments.

Now, three decades later, Lin has turned her attention to what she calls her “last memorial” — a global multimedia project aimed at drawing attention to the rapid loss of biodiversity and natural abundance. Centered around [an interactive Web site](#) that features more than 75 videos, scores of audio recordings of birds and animals, and photos and text that are an elegy for lost and threatened species, Lin’s “[What is Missing?](#)” project has the same arresting, unsettling qualities that are a hallmark of her Vietnam memorial.

In an interview with [Yale Environment 360](#) contributor Diane Toomey, Lin talks about the origins of her What is Missing? project, the media techniques she and her collaborators are using to draw attention to the biodiversity crisis, and the actions that give her hope that we can reverse the tide of nature’s destruction. “I am going to try to wake you up to things that are missing that you are not even aware are disappearing,” says Lin. “If I can get you to look at something afresh, maybe you will pay closer attention.”

Yale Environment 360: So let’s start with an overview of the memorial. It’s multimedia, multi-form, multi-location, and the Web site, [What is Missing?](#), acts as a nexus for the project. So give

us the grand tour of What Is Missing?

Maya Lin: I sort of call it my last memorial, but it is a memorial that will basically reinvent [itself]. I love rethinking what things are, changing assumptions — so what if a monument, which we normally think of as being singular and static, can exist in many places simultaneously? Then what if they are not all permanent but sometimes it is a traveling exhibit? One time we borrowed the MTV billboard in Times Square during Earth Day and for a month we played four five-minute videos.

We have a Web site that shows you what is going on with the project throughout, but also is its own memorial. And, in fact, the Web site, I would say, is the piece that pulls it all together. It will be a map of the world looked at from an ecological point of view, but it is a map that allows us to see the past, the present, and by 2013 we will be beginning to show you plausible future scenarios, what we call green print, which is really rethinking what the planet could look like. We'll be talking to many experts [who] focus on agricultural issues to economic issues to environmental issues. It is an experimental artwork, so I don't know if I'll ever be finished with it.

And even though I say it is my last memorial, I will be donating to it for the rest of my life. I set up my own not-for-profit foundation, and the goal was to raise awareness about the present crisis surrounding biodiversity loss, link it to habitat loss, and not just be about raising awareness about what we are losing, but maybe using it as a wakeup call, telling you what is being done right now by all the environmental groups, all the experts, but then let's dream up plausible ways, by 2050, to reimagine what the world could look like. People care. I think they might be a little bit overwhelmed and they might feel helpless. Maybe art could pose the problems and look at possible solutions in a way that is maybe funny at times, maybe a little abstracted at times, trying to just look at it from a different point of view.

e360: For people who haven't been on the Web site, let's talk a bit about what we can see and what we can hear there. The main feature is a dark map of the world, and it is populated by many bright dots of various colors, and users click on the dots. Where will they be taken?

Lin: Well, the dots each tell a story about the natural world. Right now there is map of the past and all those dots focus on what we are losing. That includes over 600 historical accounts of abundance of the planet. For instance, if you clicked on Manhattan, it would jump up and form fifty dots — I call those wormholes. And so we went for the earliest written accounts, from the Dutch settlers, where they found that lobsters were six feet long, oysters were twelve inches in diameter. And as you follow, say, the Manhattan wormhole, as you get further and further along, the rivers degrade, the abundance of wildlife disappears, but then there is an arc of hope. The [1970s] come, the Clean Air Act happens, the Clean Water Act, and all a sudden in present day, in the top of the line of dots, you get to seals returning to the harbor, nature comes back.

e360: The dots that one sees when one goes on the Web site can be sorted in a number of different ways and the user chooses that — by geography, by time, by type of animal. So this is really a self-guided tour in a way...

Lin: Right.

e360: And a visitor to the site is not assaulted with conservation messages. What was the thinking behind that design?

Lin: Well, part of it is like in many of my works, in fact probably all of my works, they are subtle. I mean the Web site right now — and again it is a work in progress — we are simplifying it because we know it is actually a very dense site and it is a little too cryptic. I wanted something that would be subtle, I wanted something you would want to explore. It is very layered but I don't think there has ever been a place where you could actually look at the ecological history of the planet.

We are inviting experts to come in and help us build a timeline wormhole of England, of London, of all the major cities and all the major waterways as well. [Fisheries biologist] Daniel Pauly named the phenomenon “shifting baselines” and [author] Jared Diamond calls it “landscape amnesia.” We have actually forgotten how abundant the planet used to be and I think if I can pique your memory and make you realize how incredible biodiversity was in your own backyard, then maybe it is going to spur you to action, at which point we also have something on the Web site called “what you can do” — simple things each one of us can do in our everyday lives.

e360: There is a marvelous natural soundscape that greets visitors to the site.

Lin: We have created over 75 one-to-two minute videos and they are playing continuously at the permanent installation out at California Academy of Sciences. We were given an amazing gift through Cornell ornithology labs — they donated all sounds and a lot of video. The BBC as

What I am really focused on is the diminishment [of] the quality of the planet itself.”

well as *National Geographic* have also contributed. We are a very visual species, but what if you didn't see it first but you heard it first. Again, if I can get you to look at something afresh — if I can get you to stop assuming you know what it is, maybe you will pay closer attention. It is about slowing you down, and sound is a way to get you very psychologically and personally connected to a place or a species. The videos blur out at first so you actually can't tell what you are looking at. The idea is we tease you in a bit and get you to operate almost on a visceral level.

e360: And you have said if you can get people to look differently at the world perhaps they will care more about it. So it is that shift in perspective that you are going for?

Lin: Absolutely.

e360: You recently added new material to the site. It premiered this past Earth Day.

Lin: When you click under “time travel” and you go to the map of the present, we have linked

over 40 environmental groups and that list of groups will grow. We are here to invite people in to showcase what is being done, and when you see them all as a family you can begin to say, “Oh, this is what the World Wildlife Fund is doing, this is what the NRDC is doing, this is what Cornell is doing.”

e360: And there is some good news there.

Lin: Yeah, there are some really great successes. Where would we be in this country if we didn’t have the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act? There are almost 200 stories of successes over time. So one of the things is just to prove that there have been great gains and great successes, but we have to legislate it, we have to change patterns of our own consumption and how we are treating the planet. We have to raise awareness and educate that there are many ways in which we can turn this around.

e360: And of course these success stories will mitigate that doom and gloom factor that some people may feel when they think about going onto a Web site that is dealing with endangered species.

Lin: Right, or extinct species. I think when most people thought I was doing this they thought it was all about extinct species. And I was like “Well, not really, because we can’t do anything about that.” We can talk about extinction only in terms that it will really wake you up that it is forever when a species disappears. But of course what I am really focused on is the diminishment — the diminishment not just of individual species, but the quality of the planet itself. And whether you are talking about the fact that 40 to 70 percent of declines have occurred in some of our top songbirds in our lifetime, literally that means that the landscape of sounds that we heard as children has changed drastically. So that is missing.

I am going to try to wake you up to things that are missing that you are not even aware are disappearing, because if we can get you to think about something — you know, how can we protect it if we don’t even see it? If I can get you to think of a river in its entirety and tell you the history of that river, like we have done the Columbia River. I am working on one right now for the Thames River in London. These were all places — [for example,] the Chesapeake Bay — when the settlers first came to the New World they were so stunned by how much biodiversity and abundance was there.

e360: In 2010 as part of the What Is Missing? project you traveled to about a dozen countries to ask people what is missing in their personal natural landscape. Tell me a little bit about that trek.

Lin: I was already planning a trip with my family and so I got a camera and as I went around the world I started to ask people, could they tell me what is missing from nature that they have personally witnessed. You began to see that in certain countries people said the same thing. In

Mexico, it was the forests. Everyone noticed how rapidly the forests have been deforested and they were really connected to nature in that way. In Peru, it was the frogs. There was a woman who said, "When I was a child I was scared to go out at night because there were so many frogs and they were croaking so loudly, and now there are none." And you would get to Egypt and Cairo and someone would say, "I miss the night sky's darkness. I miss seeing the lights of the stars because I can't see them anymore." Or a person said in India, "I remember when the butterflies were all over the puddles in the towns and now we have developed it."

People were very connected in most countries to nature and its diminishment. The interesting thing is that when I got to Southeast Asia and China, they didn't have as much of a memory, because, say, in China, it has been so long that they actually can't remember more of a primordial nature.

e360: As part of this memorial you designed something called the "Empty Room" in which videos of endangered species are projected towards the ceiling and visitors capture the images with a piece of plexiglass. This premiered in Beijing. I am wondering if people there responded to this installation in the way that you had hoped.

Lin: Surprisingly, you know I think the average person who experiences a video artwork it's [for] one or two minutes. [But] they were doing anecdotal time counts and people were staying for 15, 20 minutes. They were just

You might not notice it until it's too late, and that I think is what we're coming up against."

watching all these videos. And it is not just species, it is places, whether it is a mangrove forest or a specific place like the Hoh Rain Forest, which is one of our last pristine rain forests in the [U.S.]. And we were able to make more [videos] that focused on China, whether it is the soft-shelled turtle or sharks, focusing on shark fin soup, many of the animals that were used in traditional Chinese medicine. And again, it [made] people aware that these animals are on the brink of extinction and that just by not eating it you can begin to change [things].

e360: And certainly it is necessary to reach out to non-Western audiences with these messages because a lot of the world's biodiversity is not in the West.

Lin: Yes, my goal is to have a permanent installation on every continent and that there would be videos custom-made to focus on issues that are very relevant to that continent. So, we don't have enough on the Middle East, and we definitely need more for Asia and Europe because a lot of what was given to us at the start was more North American in focus. So my goal in the next two to three years is to produce enough of the core videos so that we really have a global outlook, and then the idea would be to distribute free to schools. One of the tenets of What Is Missing? is that it is free as long as you share it.

e360: So for you, Maya Lin, in your personal experience, what is missing?

Lin: Oh my God, everything. The memory I gave was of my hometown, which has stayed basically at the same population of 15,000 and I have watched as one mall went in — it was perfectly fine, but it wasn't enough — so they built a second mall. And then the first mall goes bankrupt, then they build a third mall, and then they built a fourth mall. I would go back and visit after college and little by little these amazing woods were just gobbled up.

But I actually think for me, having done a bit of research on this for five years, everything — it is the fish that are disappearing from the oceans, it is the birds — some of our top songbirds are in a 70 percent decline because of habitat fragmentation and suburbanization. Migratory birds are susceptible where they nest and where they end up traveling to for the winter and they are susceptible on their journey. A stationary species you can really see it when it diminishes, [but] if this is a species that travels through the course of the year, some to great distances, and you might not notice until it is too late, and that I think is what we are coming up against. We are not noticing. It is really not about the endangered, threatened, extinct species, because in a way they are so few it is almost too late. It is about the [fact that there were] 65 million pronghorn and now there are 250,000.

Or the fact that the gray wolf was once a robust land mammal and now, oh, we have brought them back in the western [U.S.] states, so there are 250 of them, so now we are allowed to kill off anything above that? I mean I think it is ridiculous. Are we really going to treat the planet as a zoo? I think if I could get you to realize there once were more turtles in the ocean than there were bison, and [look] where they are today — six of the seven species of [sea] turtles are threatened or endangered. Christopher Columbus, when he sailed into the Caribbean, thought he had run aground. He hadn't. He had run into a sea of turtles.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Toomey, who conducted this interview for *Yale Environment 360*, is an award-winning public radio journalist who has worked at *Marketplace*, the *World Vision Report* and *Living on Earth*, where she was the science editor. She also has reported on science, medicine and the environment for WUNC, the public radio station in Chapel Hill, N.C.

http://e360.yale.edu/feature/maya_lin_a_memorial_to_a_vanishing_natural_world/2545/

June 26, 2012

Green spirituality and the limits to modernity

By James Miller
Sustainable China

In an online report on [Religious Innovation for Sustainable Future](#), Nina Witoszek (Oslo University) surveys a “pastoral renaissance” taking place across the globe. This renaissance, she declares, is “not just a tide of projects and conferences, but a new-old mindset which aspires to reclaiming nature, culture and spirituality, influencing green architecture and furthering alternative models of consumption.” The report continues with four essays based in China [note: I wrote the essay on China], India, Ghana and Norway, which explore the various ways in which this pastoral renaissance is taking place. The major aspect of this development is that discussion about the relationship between religion and ecology is not simply academic but actively shaping projects, cultures and mindsets in these very different areas of the world. While this in itself would be an important observation, Witoszek probes further into this phenomenon, and ends the opening section of her essay with this intriguing question:

Does this green spirituality signify a curious “premodern turn” in Western conceptions of human progress?

That is to say, is the pastoral renaissance in world religions and cultures a step back from modernity, a retreat into the past, an end to the project of modernity, of relentless and inexorable progress?

To understand the worldview of modernity, Witoszek produces an acute observation from Daniel Bell, writing in the 1970s:

The theme of Modernism was the word beyond: beyond nature, beyond culture, beyond tragedy—that was where the self-infinetizing spirit was driving the radical self. We are now groping for a new vocabulary whose key word seems to be limits: a limit to growth, a limit to spoliation of environment, a limit to arms, a limit to torture, a limit to hubris – can we extend the list?”

Witoszek’s conclusion is that the affinity between religion and sustainability lies in the way they both regard the question of limit as a central concern. Sustainability is about living within the ecological limits of the planet and not degrading our biosphere beyond its ability to sustain life. Religions are also oriented towards placing limits on people’s behaviour: don’t eat pork; don’t have sex with your neighbour’s wife; don’t harm living beings. Of course these religious limits have also been oriented towards supporting one group of people’s power over another group of people: for example, refusing to admit women as religious leaders. Nevertheless, it can’t be denied that religion is one of the most powerful cultural forces that is oriented around *not* doing certain things.

From my point of view, it’s no surprise that as the world experiences the downside of industrial modernity, a healthy regard for limits should once again rise to the forefront of our cultural consciousness. In China, the quest for a sustainable future is mirrored in the “back to the future”

rise of religions. For sure this is a complex phenomenon: people pray to the gods for wealth and happiness, not for a lower ecological footprint. But at the same time, Chinese religions send messages about reducing desire, non-violence to living beings, harmony with nature, and the value of balance and moderation. Is it any wonder that people should see a profound connection between religion and sustainability?

So to answer the original question, does the renewed interest in green religion signify a retreat to the past? Certainly, as Witoszek notes, the new “pastoral renaissance” can be allied with powerful nationalist forces and reactionary fundamentalist movements (see also my blog post on the rise of a [Hindu nationalist ecological movement](http://www.sustainablechina.info/2012/06/26/green-spirituality-limits-modernity/)). At the same time, I remain hopeful that the new spirituality is part of a real and evolving consciousness centred on sustainability as a new form of “immanent transcendence,” one the capacity to root humanity deeply in the world.

<http://www.sustainablechina.info/2012/06/26/green-spirituality-limits-modernity/>

June 28, 2012

Religion and Environmental Stewardship Symposium: "Roll up our sleeves, there's work to be done."

By Steve Blackmer

Yale University Notes from the Quad

Editor's note: Steve Blackmer is a May graduate of Yale Divinity School who also holds a degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Blackmer graduated from FES in 1983, then spent 30 years in forest conservation and rural community development from his home in New Hampshire before returning to Yale to earn a degree from YDS. The Summer Symposium was the opening event for Summer Study 2012, which featured a series of five-day courses over a two-week period, June 11-15 and 18-22.

With a ritual laying down of his necktie at the podium, John Grim set the tone for the Summer Symposium on Religion and Environmental Stewardship 2012 as he told the crowd of nearly 150 gathered in Marquand Chapel, "May this ritual action be a sign that we are rolling up our sleeves and getting to work."

Grim was one of the organizers of the symposium along with his wife Mary Evelyn Tucker. They are senior lecturers and senior research scholars with joint appointment at YDS and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (FES). The three-day symposium held June 5-7 was designed to bring together YDS and FES around critical environmental issues of climate change, toxicity, and biodiversity loss. The symposium brought together seminary faculty, students, lay leaders, and clergy from around the country to learn about current science, theology, ethics, and practices regarding the expanding global challenge to ecological well being.

In his opening comments, Willis Jenkins, the Margaret A. Farley Assistant Professor of Social Ethics, invoked the namesake of his position to remind the gathering both to address the really

big questions facing the Earth and at the same time to stay focused on the practical questions that everyday people have to deal with – a timely yet challenging reminder of the difficulty of responding individually to issues of global scale and complexity.

The symposium was established with support of the H. Boone and Violet M. Porter Chair in Religion and Environmental Stewardship Fund and co-sponsored by FES, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, and the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. Reflecting on behalf of the Porter family, the Rev. Nicholas Porter '86 B.A. '94 M.Div., a BDS graduate, noted that if the central question of science is how the universe works and the central question of theology is why it exists at all, a key issue for the symposium was to explore how science can make for better theology and how theology can make for better science.

The eminent ethicist Larry Rasmussen, professor emeritus at Union Theological Seminary, laid out the challenge bluntly: "We live on a diminished planet," he said, "facing an unprecedented rate and scale of change to the ecosystems that support all life. Industrialized modernity fueled by oil, gas, and coal has driven global devastation." Rasmussen noted that we live in a new ecological reality, not that in which human civilization developed, and that "old wineskins" are not adequate to hold this new wine. Quoting Luke 5:39, Rasmussen reminded the gathering, "No one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'" But human beings are making new ecological wine and we need new wineskins to contain it. One that Rasmussen cited is the so-called New Cosmology—the story shared by all humanity of how the universe, including all matter, all life, and all human societies, has emerged from the great flaring-forth of the Big Bang through processes of "cosmogenesis."

Mary Evelyn Tucker, introduced a screening of the new film, *Journey of the Universe*, which tells this story in vivid imagery. The film, in Rasmussen's words, reminds viewers that creation as a whole has long been at the center of human ethical and metaphysical attitudes- except in our modern worldview—and that an adequate response will require an utter transformation of how we view the world and inhabit the Earth. New wineskins to hold new wine. The film, a 10 year project of Tucker and Grim along with evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme, was inspired by the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry. It has been shown on PBS and won an Emmy award for best documentary in June.

Rich and provocative as were these and other presentations by luminaries in the still-young field of religion and environmental stewardship, the energetic high point of the symposium was the panel of presentations by the current generation of YDS & FES joint degree students. Matt Riley '08 M.A.R. captured the energy of the student presentations at the end of a long, packed day of talks: "When we began, I saw quite a few tired faces out there, but with each presenter the audience grew more and more attentive and engaged. By the end, the room was reenergized and inspired. Bravo!" Joint Forestry student Troy Savage '13 M.Div., who raced back and forth between the symposium and his clinical pastoral education training in Hartford, added that when he walked into Marquand at 5:30 in the afternoon, "The faces—in fact the entire room—was animated!"

This energy continued through the third day with a compelling presentation on preaching Creation by Tom Troeger, noted preacher, hymnist, and the J. Edward and Ruth Cox Lantz

Professor of Christian Communication at YDS. Preach to the "landscape of the heart," Troeger declared, "to reach the core of meaning, passion, and visionary power that religion has tapped into across the centuries."

It is this power that scholars of religion and environmental stewardship have sought to unleash on behalf of all Creation since the academic field's emergence about 15 years ago. We must, as Troeger preached, remember that all life is a gift from God. Nothing short of this recollection is capable of stirring the human heart to take up the task of renewing Earth through Christ. Roll up our sleeves, indeed! There is work to be done – and YDS is training people to do it.

For more information about the Symposium, including the text of papers presented and a review by Matt Riley '08 M.A.R., click [here](#).

<http://notesfromthequad.yale.edu/religion-and-environmental-stewardship-symposium-roll-our-sleeves-theres-work-be-done>

June 28, 2012

Preachable Moments: Evangelical Christians and Climate Change

By Lisa Palmer

The Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media

Climate change has caused rifts among evangelical Christians, who are sharply divided on the topic. But more evangelicals now are examining a Christian response to the threat posed by a warming atmosphere.

Climate change is about science. Religion? Not so much. Yet it's religion that is among the main reasons many evangelical Christians remain skeptical about climate change. Add to the faith-based stumbling blocks a vacuum of leadership and ineffective messaging, and you find many evangelical Christians sharply divided on the subject.

About 60 percent of evangelicals think climate change has nothing to do with human activities. By comparison, less than half of all Americans, or 47 percent, share [that view](#). (Both figures are in sharp contrast to the overwhelming majority of climate scientists who agree that climate change is occurring and primarily caused by human actions.)

But the theological doors are beginning to open. Signs are that more evangelicals now are addressing climate change as a moral issue that appeals to the conscience of their Christian communities.

Accepting the science of climate change, and supporting policy action, however, has been risky among evangelicals. In 2008, Richard Cizik, then the vice president of government relations with the National Association of Evangelicals, lost his job for his stance on climate change, among

other issues. Now, a shift is occurring. The same organization that gave Cizik his walking papers now is directly addressing climate change through theology and science.

Evangelical Organization's Climate 'Conversation Starter'

In a recently published 56-page document, "[Loving the Least of These](#)," NAE describes "how changes to the environment affect the most vulnerable," and explores "the biblical basis for Christian engagement, the science of a changing environment, how climate affects the poor, and practical ways to move forward," according to a press release.

"Every time there is a natural disaster, we grieve for the poor who are most affected, rally behind relief efforts, and support on-the-ground disaster teams," NAE President Leith Anderson said in a statement. "We are concerned when we hear projections that environmental changes threaten the lives of more and more people, particularly the extreme poor."

"Loving the Least of These" is a conversation starter, says Galen Carey, current vice president of governmental relations at the NAE. "American evangelicals have not yet reached a consensus on the issue of climate change," said Carey. "We hope that this paper will help our members reflect biblically and scientifically on the issues."

Who is an evangelical?

A Christian Protestant can identify as an evangelical in a number of ways:

- as a member of an evangelical Protestant Church, such as evangelical Baptist, evangelical Lutheran, or Pentecostal;
- as a self-described evangelical even if the person is a member of Protestant denomination whose congregation as a whole doesn't consider itself evangelical; or
- as a member of a non-denominational evangelical church.

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the largest organizing body of evangelicals in the U.S., represents 450,000 churches in 40 denominations. A 2007 Pew [religious landscape survey](#) indicated that 26 percent of Americans identified as evangelical Christians.

Recently at least one of the evangelical denominations, the Christian Reformed Church, issued [its own statement](#) on climate change. According to a news release, delegates in June agreed that:

- There is a near-consensus in the scientific community that climate change is occurring and very likely is caused by human activity.
- Human-induced climate change is an ethical, social justice, and religious issue.
- The CRC [Christian Reformed Church] is compelled to take private and public action to address climate change, especially since those who are already most impacted by it live in poor countries.

Younger Evangelicals Bringing Change on Climate

Cizik, who now leads the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good, points to changing demographics as a reason evangelical views on climate are changing. “Climate change is a top-tier issue for younger evangelicals,” he said, adding that it’s also the subject of a chapter he authored in the forthcoming “A New Evangelical Manifesto” (July 2012).

Cizik approves of the steps the National Association of Evangelicals has made to begin to discuss climate change, but remains sharply critical of its failure to take a stance on the issue.

“To say that you care about the consequences of climate change, but you aren’t willing to take a position on legal action to curb it, it is like saying in the 1960s well, I appreciate the fact that African Americans want equality, but we’re not going to do anything about it,” Cizik said.

In 2006, Cizik formed the [Evangelical Climate Initiative](#) to urge action on addressing climate change. Its mission is to support evangelical belief in “Jesus Christ and his commands to love our neighbors, care for the least of these, and be proper stewards of His creation.” Today 300 leaders have signed on to the initiative.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the [Forum on Religion and Ecology](#) at Yale University, said in an interview that evangelical Christians are now taking science seriously, shifting their position, and making important inroads on climate change. Among the most effective is the Evangelical Environmental Network, she said.

“The theological doors that the evangelicals are now opening are extremely important,” Tucker said. “Through their theology and interpretations of the bible, evangelicals are addressing justice for the poor and care for creation as it relates to climate change. They are trying to raise this voice of moral concern from these two angles, and they are immensely important contributions.”

Despite the progress, evangelicals are fragmented on their climate stance.

No Pope or Bishop of Canterbury ... So Look to Pols

Texas Tech associate professor Katharine Hayhoe, a prominent climate scientist who has authored 50 peer-reviewed publications, is an expert reviewer for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and in 2011 headed a National Academy of Science committee on stabilization targets for greenhouse gases. She’s also an evangelical Christian who spends an increasing amount of time discussing climate change among her faith community.

“The evangelical world is the last significant holdout on the reality of this issue. Why is that?” said Hayhoe. “They don’t have a bishop of Canterbury or a pope to provide guidance. The evangelical church in America looks to their politicians to inform their beliefs rather than looking to their beliefs to inform their politics. It is no accident that every single GOP candidate in the recent primaries one by one openly denied the realities of this issue. There is a vacuum of leadership, and the evangelical community has looked elsewhere. It explains why, if you look at

mainline denominations, their perspective on climate change is much different than evangelicals.”

The other issue involves science. “There are some ancient divides related to evolution, age of the Earth, and stem cell research,” said Hayhoe. “On all of these lines you’ve had science on one side and evangelicals on the other. Along comes this new issue, climate change. What side are the scientists on? So it only makes sense that evangelicals have taken the other side.”

Attitudes on Climate Paired with Evolution, Stem Cell Research

Hayhoe, also the author of the 2009 book [*A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith Based Decisions*](#), with her husband Andrew Farley, an evangelical pastor, said that some groups have fed into this divide by making it an all-or-nothing issue: evangelicals have to agree with all divisive issues — with evolution, stem cell research — in order to believe in climate change. “That’s a completely false argument,” Hayhoe said.

Even though evangelicals in the U.S. have found little common ground or consensus on climate change action, the message that climate change will disproportionately affect the poor appears to be gaining traction, Hayhoe said. But she adds that the “stewardship of the Earth” message resonates better in other religious traditions but not so much among evangelicals, whose core value is loving people.

Hayhoe said the divide among evangelicals is real, but added that not all evangelicals are skeptical of climate change.

“People often tar evangelicals in the same breath. But what about the 40 percent that believes it’s a problem? There is really a lot of us who do care.”

Additional reading: [*Between God and Green: How evangelicals are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change*](#), by Katharine K. Wilkinson.

<http://www.yaleclimatemediaforum.org/2012/06/preachable-moments-evangelical-christians-and-climate-change/>

June 29, 2012

Standing with Kivalina at the 77th General Convention

By P. Joshua Griffin
Episcopal News Service

As forest fires rage across Colorado and unprecedented storms pummel the country from Florida to Minnesota, it’s pretty clear we are facing a “new normal.” It’s also increasingly obvious that climate change is not so much about future generations as it is about our most marginalized brothers and sisters, right here, right now.

This unfortunate truth is well known about one hundred miles above the Arctic Circle within the Iñupiaq community of Kivalina, Alaska, a village of 400 persons and home to the Kivalina Epiphany Church. “We’re an adaptable people, we’ve always been,” recalls Colleen Swan, who served as tribal administrator for 18 years, now sits on the Kivalina City Council, and serves as treasurer for Episcopal Church Women. “But since 2004 we just can’t adapt this fast.” That was the year when Kivalina started to experience rapid land failure—a story covered [here](#) by the Episcopal Digital Network, Wayfarer Project.

Perched atop a barrier island, the village sits between a freshwater lagoon to the east and the Chukchi Sea to the west. With sea ice forming later and later each year, Kivalina is washing away from seasonal fall storms. Flooding remains a terrifying risk and traditional hunting grounds are increasingly unreliable. But community leaders in Kivalina are determined not to become “climate refugees” and have chosen relocation over nonexistence.

The Rev. Enoch Adams Jr. chairs the Kivalina Relocation Planning Committee, which is tasked with moving the community so as to save his peoples’ place-based culture and human identity. “We get a lot of sympathy from a lot of people,” he told me, “but what we need is empathy.” With the construction of the first school in 1905, the federal government forced an autonomous and semi-nomadic society, the Kivallinirmiut, to settle on what had been a summer hunting camp. Despite its role in the forced sedentarization and assimilation of Kivalina’s people, U.S. government support remains unavailable for climate-induced relocation projects.

As General Convention deputies, the Rev. Enoch Adams Jr. and Austin Swan Sr., a village elder, will carry the concerns of their people to Indianapolis. “It’s about time,” Enoch said, “we’ve been waiting for so long to find an ally and we couldn’t find it anywhere. Not in government agencies... in nobody at all. It’s the church, it’s really incumbent on the church, I think, to take the lead on this.”

In a few short days, the Episcopal Church will have an opportunity to do just that—to affirm our commitment to Kivalina and other environmentally vulnerable communities around the world. In faithfulness to the House of Bishops recent [Pastoral Teaching](#) on the environment and sent by their parish mission committee, the Kivalina deputation will introduce a resolution that asks the Episcopal Church to pledge its solidarity with “overburdened ‘frontline’ communities... already experiencing the impacts of climate change.”

But the proposed [resolution](#) goes one step further.

Seizing upon novel conditions, made possible only through global warming, Shell will begin offshore oil exploration in the Arctic later this month. The logic of “manifest destiny” embedded in our fossil fuel economy has carried Shell to the Chukchi Sea, threatening a critical food source and the migration routes of the bowhead whale, central to Kivalina’s Iñupiaq spirituality. The threats posed to culture, ecology, health—to human and ecological dignity—by the growth of an economy powered by fossil fuel are unspeakable.

In submitting this resolution, the members of Kivalina Epiphany Church were emboldened by the 2009 General Convention’s repudiation of the [Doctrine of Discovery](#). “I’m glad the Doctrine

of Discovery concept was struck down when it was,” Enoch stated. “It is like God told somebody to write this stuff down so that when we reach an issue like oil discovery up here, we have a means to help people understand where we’re coming from when we oppose oil exploration in our waters.”

At this year’s convention, the Kivalina deputation and their allies will do the world a great service when they ask the church to commit to the kind of transition we badly need. The resolution calls on the Episcopal Church to resist not only offshore oil extraction, but all forms of increasingly unconventional and destructive fossil fuel development: strip-mining for coal in Appalachia and the Intermountain West, tar-sands oil development in Canada and Utah and “fracking” for methane gas throughout the U.S.

For indigenous cultures throughout the world there is a direct link between the violence of colonial racism and an endlessly expanding fossil fuel economy. The Rev. Enoch Adams Jr. calls us to another way: “I saw this repudiation and I knew that God’s hand was on it. Now the church has got to give it backbone. People are going to have to sacrifice their way of thinking, to repent. If they want to see this, to understand this, to know where we’re coming from, they’re going to need to repent. That’s why I started pointing out the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy requires nothing. I refuse to seek anybody’s sympathy. Come and live, come and see, take a look... live every day with the fear that what you’ve been using all your life could be gone. Something that you took for granted all your life, [and] all of a sudden its possible that it will not be there next year. And that’s the gravity of the situation, my friend. I just want to do God’s will.”

– *The Rev. P. Joshua Griffin, priest Associate at St. David of Wales Episcopal Church in Portland, Oregon. “Griff” received his M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School in 2009 and is a doctoral student in cultural and environmental anthropology at the University of Washington. He previously served as the environmental justice missionary for the Diocese of California.*

<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2012/06/29/standing-with-kivalina-at-the-77th-general-convention/>

July 6, 2012

The Real Environmental Crisis: Lessons From the Green Patriarch

By Krista Tippett
The Huffington Post

Earlier this month, His All Holiness Bartholomew, the Patriarch of 300 million Eastern Orthodox Christians, convened a two-day conversation on "environment, ethics and innovation." We gathered on the tiny, ancient island of Heybeliada off Istanbul, which was once the Patriarch's Constantinople and before that New Rome.

There were scientists there, and activists, and religious thinkers. Greenpeace was represented, and so was Dow Chemical. We did not solve any problem or draft a white paper or conceive a

plan of action. There were no expectations of these things, and so it was not, like the recent Rio conference, roundly condemned as a failure. But our discussion did yield some fresh examination of the often-unnamed obstacle to all the good solutions and plans already out there: the human condition.

The gathering convened in a former seminary, which Ataturk's successors closed as they secularized Turkey and which the present Islamic government seems poised to re-open. It was poignant, in this space, to hear James Hansen -- the NASA scientist who seminally defined the relationship between atmospheric carbon dioxide and civilization as we know it -- profess that scientists need the help of the religious in an urgent struggle for public understanding.

But really, the problem is something different from understanding. Facts are out there, knowledge is out there, and there are fewer and fewer people alive on any continent who do not have a direct experience of environmental volatility -- whatever their doubt or faith in "climate change." The problem, as the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr famously diagnosed, is that "man is his own most vexing problem." Or, as Patriarch Bartholomew more poetically invoked, "there is a long journey from the head to the heart, and an even longer journey from the heart to the hands."

We circled back to this insight over and over again, with different words and from disparate directions. Jane Goodall spoke of the intelligence that distinguishes humans among species -- our ability to teach our young about things that are not directly tangible, to recall the past, to think and organize into the future. But intelligence alone does not get us where we need to go or even necessarily where we want to go. For that, the human creature must exercise harder-won capacities of wisdom, and wise action.

I went to this conference ready to challenge theologians to more robustly articulate their vision of the relationship between humanity and the natural world. There has been an explosion of new theological thinking and scriptural scholarship across religions and denominations in recent decades, paralleling the explosion in scientific understanding of how the world is changing.

Now I suspect that the most urgent religious contribution to our environmental present may be in the knowledge it holds -- at its best -- about engaging hearts and organizing hands. Before neuroscience and brain imaging, our great religious and spiritual traditions knew that fear and anxiety are sources of suffering, but that we are prone to create more suffering rather than face these. They understood that knowing what is right is not the same as living it. They developed contemplative practices, rituals and communities in which human beings become safe and supported to aspire to their best, for the good of the whole.

The evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson has studied religions precisely in this way -- as remarkably successful examples of adaptive groups, practicing for thousands of years what evolutionary biologists are figuring out about the link between environment, values and behavior. There is altogether a fascinating convergence right now between ancient religious teachings and new science on altruism, forgiveness, empathy. We're understanding how such qualities are triggered physiologically, and how they can be made more likely.

The path Jane Goodall is now following reflects a kindred line of questioning and discernment. As she became aware of the destructive force of human beings on chimpanzee habitats, she simultaneously attended to the human suffering behind it. New conservation initiatives have been realized for the chimpanzees of Gombe, which began with meeting human fear and need. And her program, Roots and Shoots, is yielding practical projects all over the world; it is in essence about emboldening hope and courage in young people paralyzed by the deluge of environmental bad news.

Stonyfield Farms founder Gary Hirshberg is another voice for both profitability and what he calls "restorative commerce." He pays organic farmers generously to put carbon back into their soil and has far poorer gross margins than his commercial competitors -- including Danone, the global food giant that bought a majority stake in Stonyfield Farms a decade ago. But Hirschberg also has higher net margins, a confounding equation that led Danone to leave the business model in his control. He's achieved this in part by eschewing traditional advertising budgets but reaching directly to consumers, one might say, at the head-heart-hands nexus. His paradigm, he said on Heybeliada, is peace of mind. His customers' motivation -- and his own -- is having children.

This is language that reframes behavior, taking our sense of necessary actions out of the realm of guilt and into the realm of deeply desired good. And this is another thing religions have always understood: the power of words, specifically of naming, to make new realities possible. The word "environmentalism" itself segregates the importance of what happens in places like Rio. It makes the work of nurturing and restoring the environment seem the domain of experts and activists. It points away from near universal, life-giving experiences like having children, loving the place one comes from, and discovering courage in the presence of dignity and beauty.

The great question -- beyond Heybeliada and Rio and all the conferences to come -- is how to open environmental and scientific discourse and passions up into the human and civilizational discourse and passions they rightly are. Another scientist who came to Heybeliada, Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute, evokes spiritual traditions along with scientific innovation in a virtue he calls "applied hope." How interesting and fitting that the natural world might be the ground that brings science and religion back to a shared sense of purpose after a few hundred years of estrangement. And what a relief that this could be the story history will tell in the next century, if we survive to see it, rather than the distracting narrative of discord that we privilege at our peril.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/krista-tippett/the-real-environmental-crisis-lessons-from-the-green-patriarch_b_1646625.html

July 20, 2012

Convention moves to balance 'environmental' and 'economic' justice

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

In the past 20 years the state of Iowa has experienced three crisis-level [floods](#), the latest, in 2008, put nearly a third of the state underwater.

“It was a 500 year flood, causing \$60 billion in damages,” said the Very Rev. Cathleen Bascom, dean of the [Cathedral Church of St. Paul](#) in downtown Des Moines, adding that the frequency of the floods “is what opened our eyes to the climate change issue.”

The cathedral, which sits on High Street along with the four other remaining “old churches,” weathered the storms, but the low-lying areas – mostly home to low-income residents and immigrants – “suffered the most,” she said.

“One of the economic justice issues I was made aware of following the flood was that the levee above Birdland [a low-lying neighborhood in north Des Moines] was allowed to remain weak, so it [broke](#),” said Bascom, adding that areas downriver, including the city’s financial district, have experienced re-gentrification. “So the water, then, was not a threat to higher income properties.”

Bascom, an Iowa deputy to the 77th General Convention in Indianapolis July 3-13, testified before the National and International Concerns Committee in Indianapolis on behalf of a resolution to address environmental justice ([B023](#)).

In a post-convention telephone interview with ENS, Bascom said one of the things she really liked about the resolution was its call to action, which implores institutions, the church, dioceses and congregations “to support to implementation of grassroots, community-based solutions to climate change,” including ecological restoration, promoting food sovereignty and making local adaptations toward resilience. The latter being something the cathedral has done already by mitigating storm-water runoff.

Replacing dilapidated asphalt with permeable pavement and a filtration system, the cathedral has the capacity to keep 12 swimming pools worth of water out the storm-sewer system and out of the river, Bascom said. The cathedral also planted a garden, including native-plant species like prairie grasses, that is irrigated by the water. The garden also serves as a “welcome mat” and place of respite for nearby workers and a conservation laboratory for urban children, she added.

In addition to B023, General Convention passed Resolution [D055](#), which advocates for public policy to reduce climate-change emissions. Both B023 and D055, in addition to previous general convention resolutions, form the basis for the church’s environmental and economic justice work in the coming triennium.

“To me, two of the issues about which the church is called to be more and more visible and proactive are climate change and poverty/economic inequity,” said Michael Schut, the Episcopal Church’s officer for environmental and economic affairs. “Resolution B023 calls us to ‘resist the development and expansion of ever more unconventional, dangerous, and environmentally destructive sources of fossil fuel.’”

“That resistance may mean we need to be out on the streets in peaceful protest of such efforts. Such resistance obviously answers the call to be more proactive about climate change. But the

resolution recognizes that in such resistance the church must support those who might lose their jobs in the transition from a fossil-fuel-based economy to a clean energy economy... which answers the call to address poverty.”

Balancing the need to protect the environment while simultaneously working to alleviate poverty, however, can often leave Episcopalians in the trenches feeling at odds, especially in states like Pennsylvania where the unemployment rate is high and where generations have made a living working in the mines and the oil and gas fields.

“Finding the social justice right mix representing the church’s good stewardship of the environment and its love and concern for people and to mitigate poverty is not an easy path,” said Joan Gundersen, who served as a deputy of the Diocese of Pittsburgh and on convention’s National and International Concerns Committee, in a July 17 interview with Episcopal News Service.

In Pittsburgh, the diocese has a “double concern,” Gundersen said: “Of course we are interested in the environment, and making sure that whatever is done, is done safely, but we are also cognizant of the high unemployment rates and the hunger for jobs.”

Pittsburgh sits over the Marcellus Shale, an enormous natural gas reserve lying a mile beneath the surface and covering an area from New York through parts of Pennsylvania into Ohio and West Virginia. Given its location near major population centers in the eastern United States, some see the Marcellus as ripe for development.

In 2010, the city of Pittsburgh voted to ban corporations from drilling for natural gas, including hydraulic fracking, within the [city limits](#). The diocese, which includes rural, high-unemployment areas like Northern Cambria, hasn’t taken a position on fracking and hasn’t had a “deep conversation” on the matter, said Gundersen. In addition, General Convention discharged a resolution to “oppose dangerous fracking.”

During a hearing on Resolution D055, Gundersen testified that selling the resolution in Pittsburgh might not be difficult, but the same wouldn’t hold true in surrounding rural areas.

“When you’re in the countryside where 39 percent of the population is unemployed and these fuels are their livelihood,” she said. “... How do you sell it in the rural depressed coal mining areas?”

Unlike in West Virginia, where the state receives a bigger cut of the profits generated from resource extraction, which it can use to repair roads and for environmental restoration projects, Pennsylvania where infrastructure and regulation have [lagged](#) doesn’t receive the same revenue. And depending on where you are in Pennsylvania, reaction is mixed regarding environmental contamination, the extent and its existence, she said.

A natural gas processing [plant](#), Gundersen added, is poised to open along the Pennsylvania-Ohio border, bringing at least 2,000 jobs to the area.

Resolution D055's explanation states: "... Other costs of fossil fuels include oil spills, contamination of ground water with mercury and other pollutants from coal mining, and accumulation of improperly stored radioactive waste as a result of hydrofracking. There are many concomitant health care costs from our exposure to these pollutants..."

It continues, "The continued use of fossil fuels is not sustainable."

Also during the testimony, the Rev. [Barbara Schlachter](#), a visitor to convention from the Diocese of Iowa who helped found [Iowa City Climate Activists](#), called attention to the real costs of low-cost fuels, as pointed out in the resolution's explanation, and called for support for renewable energy sources. Schlachter said reducing reliance of fossil fuels is a "moral issue."

"What is going to happen to our environment, our atmosphere," she asked. "It's [climate change] has already come to some parts, and it's coming here."

During his testimony on B023 before the committee, Austin Swan Sr., a deputy from the Diocese of Alaska, and a resident of [Kivalina](#), an Inupiaq island-community where climate change threatens the community's continued existence, shared his experience.

"I am a lifetime resident of Kivalina, born and raised there. When I was a child, we had probably two-thirds more land and now have 35 percent of that land, all this loss due to erosion mostly in the last four or five years," he said.

And despite living in an environment rich in natural resources, including the world's largest zinc mine located upriver, Swans said: "We still live in third world conditions. Where does that money go?"

Proposed by Alaska Bishop Mark Lattime, the resolution resolves "That the 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church stands in solidarity with those communities who bear the greatest burdens of global climate change: indigenous peoples, subsistence communities, communities of color, and persons living in deprivation around the world..."

The village of Kivalina sits on the tip of a six- to eight-mile-long barrier island – a quarter-mile at its widest – some 80 to 120 miles above the Arctic Circle between the Chukchi Sea and the Kivalina Lagoon in Alaska. It is home to about 400 people and reachable only by plane and boat in the summer and plane, and snowmobile in winter.

Of the 200 native coastal communities in Alaska, varying degrees of erosion affect about 180 of them, according to the federal government's General Accounting Office. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has said that Kivalina is one of three native communities in need of relocation. As explained in the resolution's explanation, Kivalina "has been ever-increasingly at risk because of global climate change. Loss of sea ice has led to increased coastal erosion, land failure, and unreliable, if not perilous, conditions for the practice of subsistence hunting."

In 2008, the village of Kivalina filed a [lawsuit](#) against 24 oil, electricity and coal companies, including Exxon Mobile Corp., Conoco Phillips and BP. The claim alleges that, as significant

contributors to greenhouse-gas emissions, the corporations have exacerbated global warming, thereby accelerating erosion in Kivalina and leaving the island vulnerable to storm surge and flooding.

Further, the resolution's explanation stated, that Shell Oil was set this month to begin oil exploration in the Chukchi Sea, "the deepest source of Inupaiq food, cultural identity and spirituality alike."

California Bishop Marc Andrus, who endorsed B023 and sat on the National and International Concerns Committee, said the people of Kivalina "identify with the island and its surroundings," and to move is not as simple as moving from Alabama to San Francisco, as he did when he became bishop.

Not unlike with the Guarani, a formally nomadic indigenous tribe in Brazil that has lost much of its ancestral land, for the people of Kivalina to move, "is a kind of death," he said.

(Through a companion relationship with the Diocese of Curitiba in Brazil, the Diocese of California has supported the Anglican Church of Brazil's efforts to [stand with](#) the Guarani.)

While at convention, hearing the stories of the Guarani and the situation in Kivalina, who are in "much more extreme" situations, reminded Bascom, she later said, of a lecture Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams once gave called "[Renewing the Face of the Earth: Human Responsibility and the Environment](#)," in which he said:

"It is possible to argue about the exact degree to which human intervention is responsible for these phenomena ... 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."

- Lynette Wilson is an editor/reporter for Episcopal News Service.

<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2012/07/20/convention-moves-to-address-balance-environmental-and-economic-justice/>

July 26, 2012

"Zen Buddhist Temple in Pennsylvania Endangered by Natural Gas Fracking": An open letter to the American Buddhist community

Shambhala Sun Foundation

Buddhist teachers Rev. Dai-en Bennage, Rev. Daishin McCabe, Rev. Norman Fischer, Roshi Joan Halifax, Jack Kornfield, Rev. Taigen Dan Leighton, David Loy, Joanna Macy, Susan Moon, Roshi Enkyo Pat O'Hara, Sharon Salzberg, and Rev. Alan Senauke have issued the following letter.

Mount Equity Zendo is located in the small rural village of Pennsdale in central Pennsylvania, twenty minutes from Williamsport, now called the “Dallas of the north,” the hub of the state’s natural gas fracking industry, about 2 hours north of Harrisburg and 3 hours west of Philadelphia. The Abbess, Rev. Dai-En Bennage, trained over fifteen years in Japan at various monasteries before founding Mount Equity Zendo, near her native home of Lewisburg. Fifty members come from 2 to 4 hours away to attend monthly sesshins or other practice events at Mount Equity.

Mount Equity Zendo is included in the serious threat from the slick water hydraulic fracturing process, known as “fracking,” in the Marcellus Shale. This very deep deposit of rock spans several states, including New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. Marcellus Shale contains the largest deposit of natural gas in the United States, an estimated 500 trillion cubic feet, the equivalent of 80 billion barrels of oil. Averaging a mile below the earth’s surface and below the water table, it is now being mined due to new technology that allows fracking, to political pressures to develop our native natural resources, and to diminishing oil supplies.

Slick water hydrofracking was developed by Halliburton and others, and requires up to 9 million gallons of fresh water per well. This water is mixed with dangerous chemicals including benzene, biocides, and hydrochloric acid, which make it “slick” so as to dissolve shale and release natural gas to the surface. Each well is bored deep into the earth, then turned 90 degrees boring into the shale, often with several horizontal wells spurring off each vertical well. Slick water is then forced at high speeds down into the well to release the gas. Less than a third of the water returns to the surface with the natural gas and other toxins, including NORM, or naturally occurring radioactive materials. This contaminated water can be re-used in other wells, but more often is stored in an effluent pit, or treated and simply dumped into the river, or turned into cakes shipped out of state.

Hydrofracking is an extremely dangerous procedure for many reasons both seen and unseen. Mount Equity Zendo members have witnessed many effects in their region. The most obvious though superficial impact is the extensive increase in dirty air and truck traffic. The temple is less than a mile from a major route where water and gas is carried. Gas-related trucks comprise over 80% of the local traffic. With the increase of noisy truck traffic, 24 hours a day, also come toxic spills and overturned trucks. Last year a geologist who was working for a gas company joined for zazen at Mount Equity. He’d been fired because he complained to his boss about the inhumane working conditions. Gas jobs are 12-hour workdays: 4am to 4pm, or 4pm to 4am. He came to the Zendo burnt out after less than six months on the job. They had often called him in the middle of the night to help clean up “hazmat” spills.

What goes unseen is legal dumping of treated slick water into the nearby Susquehanna River and forested areas. When Dick Cheney of Halliburton was in office he facilitated the passing of laws that exempted the oil and gas industries from the Clean Air and Water Act. Local consequences

of this include sightings of diseased, spotted fish, and of a purple squirrel, the purple fur probably from drinking the chemicals and brine in the fracking effluent pits. Also many dead deer and geese are seen in and around these pits. Some pits have fences around them, but this does not prevent geese from entering. Because the gas industry did not account for the amount of rainfall in the area, the fluids in the pits overflow, contaminating the ground and river, poisoning grazing lands and crops.

Natural gas is purported to be “clean” energy, but it certainly is not. In the gas refining process many greenhouse gases including methane are released into the atmosphere, leading to concern for air quality. Just north, in the small town of Dimock, cases have been reported of gas contaminating well water, making it undrinkable and even flammable. The gas companies often do not take responsibility, claiming the well water was always like that. Recently gas companies claimed that a year after contamination the water is safe, with no more need for them to distribute bottled water. People on wells like Mount Equity have been encouraged to have their well water tested every few months to ensure it remains safe to drink.

Mount Equity Zendo Abbess Dai-en Bennage and her Dharma successor, Rev. Daishin Eric McCabe, are witnessing the contamination of their river, wells, land, and air, along with the tearing apart of communities and people’s lives. Now their zendo itself is in peril, as their next-door neighbor leased his field, right over their well water, to a gas drilling company. The Mount Equity Zendo sangha has actively reached out to aid displaced people, such as residents at a nearby mobile home community where many had lived for thirty years before the owner sold the land to a water company. Mount Equity members have worked with the local Interfaith Sacred Earth Coalition and others to organize opposition to the fracking. Inspired by the Thai monk who ordained old-growth trees to protect them from loggers, Dai-en considered ordaining the nearby, endangered Susquehanna River, the longest river east of the Mississippi. But since local people might not understand the ordination, instead Rev. Bennage organized an interfaith Flowers on the Water ceremony for blessing the river in May, 2011. This year many groups have performed similar ceremonies.

For those who want to help, Mount Equity Zendo is not asking for personal aid for themselves, but for assistance for their endangered surrounding community. The most effective place in the region to send donations to increase public awareness about fracking is the [Responsible Drilling Alliance](#), a fine informational resource. Buddhists are also encouraged to contact Mount Equity Zendo’s national representatives in support of the area’s environment so these representatives know that people outside are watching. Please contact:

Senator [Robert Casey](#), 202-224-6324

Senator [Patrick Toomey](#), 202-224-4254

Representative [Tom Marino](#), 570-322-3961

For more information or to express support, contact Dai-en or Daishin at www.mtequity.org.

In addition, the undersigned ask Buddhists to be more active in helping local communities understand the Buddhist perspective of life, that we are all interconnected with all beings, including animals, plants, water, and minerals, and that our acts have consequences. Buddhists can present a stronger voice in the larger community, as well as in our sanghas. Many environmental organizations, social activist groups, and Christian ministers are eager to dialogue with serious Buddhist practitioners. Fracking is happening in many parts of the country, including California, although state legislators there do not even know where it is occurring. People need to collectively speak out in an organized way about the ethical implications of natural gas development. As Buddhists we have a unique perspective toward the Earth and a responsibility to share what we know through compassionate dialogue.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dai-en Bennage, Mount Equity Zendo

Rev. Daishin McCabe, Mount Equity Zendo

Rev. Norman Fischer, Everyday Zen Foundation

Roshi Joan Halifax, Upaya Zen Center, Santa Fe

Jack Kornfield, Spirit Rock Meditation Center

Rev. Taigen Dan Leighton, Ancient Dragon Zen Gate, Chicago

David Loy, Zen teacher & author, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory*

Joanna Macy, The Work that Reconnects, Berkeley

Susan Moon, lay teacher, Everyday Zen Foundation

Roshi Enkyo Pat O'Hara, Village Zendo, New York City

Sharon Salzberg, Insight Meditation Society, Barre, MA

Rev. Alan Senauke, Berkeley Zen Center

<http://shambhalasun.com/news/?p=35929>

July 30, 2012

World Heritage Committee Decision on Selous Game Reserve Boundary Changes

Uranium-Network Press Release

Elephants, Rhinos and the environment under threat from 60 million tons of radioactive waste as World Heritage Committee agrees boundary change that will allow uranium mining at the Tanzania Selous Game Reserve - a World Heritage site.

Freiburg, Germany -- A foreign uranium mining conglomerate will be allowed to exploit the precious Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania after the World Heritage Committee (WHC) decided, at its July 2012 session in Russia, to accept what was described as a "minor boundary change" of the site. The change had been requested by the Government of Tanzania, in order to make way for the development of a major uranium mine, Mkuju River Uranium Project, owned by Russian ARMZ and Canadian Uranium One.

The decision to allow the boundary change would allow the Mkuju River uranium project, situated in the South of the Selous Game Reserve at its transition to the Selous Niassa Wildlife Corridor, to go forward. The Tanzanian Government lobbied heavily for the boundary change, after declaring its intent to "win the battle" against the UNESCO WHC.

Dozens of environmental groups around the world, many of them members of the German-based Uranium Network, decried the WHC decision which could lead to the creation of 60 million tons of radioactive and poisonous waste by the mine during its 10-year lifespan (139 million tons if a projected extension of the mine should be implemented). The radioactive wastes pose a serious threat to Selous Game Reserve which is home to the world's largest elephant population and other wildlife. No proven methods exist to keep the radioactive and toxic slush and liquids from seeping into surface waters, aquifers or spreading with the dry season wind into the Reserve.

It remains completely unclear how the company or the Government of Tanzania will guarantee that the impact of millions of tons of radioactive and toxic waste will be "limited". The WHC's decision appears to be influenced by heavy corporate and government lobbying and not by sound science. It sets a horrible precedent that could threaten other World Heritage Sites with similar dangerous and damaging exploitation.

The decision is in stark contrast to previous decisions of the WHC of 2011 stating that mining activities would be incompatible with the status of Selous Game Reserve a World Heritage site.

The environmental groups question whether WHC members have fully understood and given adequate attention to the implications of a uranium mine - including diesel generators, uranium mill, housing, heavy truck roads, as well as the creation of millions of tons of radioactive and toxic waste which should be contained safely and separate from the environment for thousands of years.

Uranium mining creates radioactive dust, contaminates waterways and groundwater aquifers and depletes often precious water supplies. Once abandoned, the radioactive contamination from the mines can persist for decades or even hundreds of years.

The WHC's decision was made at a time when Russia was chairing the WHC session in St. Petersburg, Russia; Mkuju River uranium project - which basically lives or dies with the decision on the boundary change - is majority owned by Russian ARMZ, a subsidiary of ROSATOM - who bought it from Australian Mantra Resources earlier in 2012.

The environmental groups urge the World Heritage Committee to reconsider its decision on the Selous Game Reserve Boundary Change and call upon the Government of Tanzania to refrain from licensing a uranium mine in Selous Game Reserve or on lands cut out from it.

Gunter Wippel
uranium-network.org, Freiburg, Germany

For full press release, visit:

http://www.uranium-network.org/images/pdfs_tanzania/PressRelease-WHC-decision.pdf

<http://www.uranium-network.org/index.php/africalink/tanzania/253-press-release-re-world-heritage-comittee-decision-on-selous-game-reserve-boundary-changes>

July 31, 2012

Samye Ling opposes construction of plant on Holy Isle

Shambhala Sun Foundation

Samye Ling, a Karma Kagyu lineage monastery on Holy Isle in Scotland, is worried by a proposed power plant in nearby Arran. Founded by [Dr. Akong Tulku Rinpoche](#) and [Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche](#), Samye Ling [was the first](#) Tibetan monastery in Europe (the name Samye comes from the first successful Buddhist establishment in Tibet).

[Lama Yeshe Rinpoche](#), current abbot of Samye Ling, has expressed concern that the proposed plant would be unsightly, producing unwanted noise and pollution. [Speaking to Deadline News](#), Lama Yeshe said “it’s just going to ruin the potential of Arran and Holy Isle.” The Rinpoche also worries about the environmental impact: “We feel Holy Isle is beautiful, environmentally and ecologically sound, and we care about nature and the wild animals.”

<http://shambhalasun.com/news/?p=36066>

August 2012

Eye on the Sparrow

By Beth Norcross
Sojourners magazine

WHEN I READ about the dire impacts of global warming, I think about Howard Thurman. This might be perplexing to those more familiar with Thurman as the author of *Jesus and the Disinherited*, a book Martin Luther King Jr. was said to carry with him wherever he went.

While Thurman is well-known as a theologian, prolific writer, mystic, seminary professor, and religious leader, few realize that—well before environmentalism became mainstream—Thurman articulated a complex theology of the “original harmony of creation,” a harmony that human action had significantly disturbed. As he lamented in 1971, “Our atmosphere is polluted, our streams are poisoned, our hills are denuded, wildlife is increasingly exterminated, while more and more [humanity] becomes an alien on the earth and a fouler of [our] own nest.”

From the early years of his life at the start of the 20th century, Thurman’s faith was formed in intimate connection with the natural world—specifically, the Halifax River and northeast Florida woods and coastline, where he wandered and played as a boy. Thurman’s relationship with nature deepened when a heartbreaking event estranged him from organized religion. When he was 7, his beloved father died quite suddenly. The family pastor refused to conduct a funeral because his father was not a regular churchgoer, and a traveling minister who officiated at the service took the opportunity to expound on the dangers of dying “out of Christ”—to the small boy’s wonderment and rage, “preach[ing] my father into hell,” as he later recalled.

In contrast, the young Thurman found solace and comfort in nature’s seasons and cycles:

Here I found, alone, a special benediction. The ocean and the night together surrounded my little life with a reassurance that could not be affronted by the behavior of human beings. The ocean at night gave me a sense of timelessness, of existing beyond the reach of the ebb and flow of circumstances.

Sitting against an oak tree, he would “reach down in the quiet places” of his spirit, take out his “bruises and ... joys, unfold them, and talk about them ... know[ing] that I was understood.” As an adult, Thurman began to understand that it was God that had been stirring there; when “the boundaries of my life spilled over into the mystery of the ocean and the wonder of the dark nights,” it was a “cosmic religious experience.” In young Thurman’s sense of intimate belonging to something deeply personal and intuitive as well as grand and external, he experienced both the immanent and transcendent God. He found the quiet space necessary for his spirit to meet the Spirit.

THROUGHOUT HIS career, Thurman would return to nature as a means of expressing his personal theology. In his meditation “Surrounded by the Love of God”—published in 1953, but first developed as part of his ministry at the pioneering interracial Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, which he began to co-pastor in 1944—he wrote:

The earth beneath my feet is the great womb out of which the life upon which my body depends comes in utter abundance. There is at work in the soil a mystery by which the death of one seed is reborn a thousandfold in newness of life ... it is order, and more than order—there is a

brooding tenderness out of which it all comes. In the contemplation of the earth, I know that I am surrounded by the love of God.

While Thurman was decidedly not a pantheist (one who believes that God is nature), he did see God's spirit, God's very breath, in each and every one of God's creatures. As he wrote in his 1963 book *Disciplines of the Spirit*, Jesus saw and taught that:

God breathed through all that is: the sparrow overcome by sudden death in its flight; the lily blossoming on the rocky hillside; the grass of the field and the clouds, light and burdenless or weighted down with unshed waters; the madman in chains or wandering among the barren rocks in the wastelands; the little baby in his mother's arms ...

As his reputation as a theologian and religious leader grew, Howard Thurman carried with him his deep connections to the earth community.

ALTHOUGH HE DID not link the oppression of African Americans to the oppression of nature as explicitly as do present-day figures such as James Cone, in *Disciplines of the Spirit* Thurman drew a connection between the way the dominant culture treated nature and the manner in which that culture treated other humans. He explored that connection in a passage in which, inspired by South African writer Olive Schreiner, he affirmed that Christianity has misunderstood Jesus' teaching in Matthew 10 that a sparrow does not fall to the ground "apart from your Father." While this passage is certainly meant to be reassuring to humans, Thurman, like Schreiner, believed that Christians too often forget its literal premise: God cares deeply for the sparrow.

"Christianity as it has developed since the time of its founder wrongly limits the ethical concept of reverence for life to human personality," Thurman wrote, where "personality" means that which culture defines as fully human. This limitation, he pointed out, leaves the door open for the mistreatment of *both* the nonhuman creature and of the person to whom the dominant race does not ascribe full humanity: "Deny personality to [certain] human beings and the ethical demand no longer obtains ... People who are victimized by injustices must be defined as being, in Kipling's phrase, 'the lesser breeds without the law.'"

To illustrate his point, Thurman told the story of a young white girl for whose family he worked when he was growing up in Florida. One day, as she kept re-scattering the leaves he was raking, he threatened to report her to her father. In retaliation, she pricked young Thurman with a pin. When he drew back in obvious pain, the little girl was taken aback, saying, "That didn't hurt you really! You can't feel." By denying Thurman's full humanity, the girl gave herself permission to do him violence.

In a meditation published in 1951, Thurman articulated the connection between the oppression of nature and that of humans in the evolution of human power. In early times, Thurman wrote (in

the gendered-language convention of the day), “man learned how to use a club in self-defense and thus to extend his control over an area farther than his arm unaided could reach. When he learned to throw this club with precision and power, it meant that the control of his environment was farther extended.” Thurman then traced the increasing sophistication of human power over the earth from club to “bow and arrow, gunpowder, gasoline engine, through various kinds of vehicles and machines up to ... the atomic bomb.” The challenge then to “modern man is to match spiritual and moral maturity with the amazing power created by ... mastery over nature. He has learned a part of the secret of energy by unlocking the door of the atom, yet he continues to be moved by prejudice, greed, and lust!” The use of power began as a means of controlling one’s own environment and quickly expanded to the violent domination of other peoples.

HOWARD THURMAN COULD not have foreseen the extent to which humans have used their power to unravel the original harmony of creation, most notably by significantly altering the climate of the planet. However, his most famous book—*Jesus and the Disinherited*, published in 1949—offers poignant insights as Christianity attempts to come to grips with the impacts of climate change on the earth’s most vulnerable. In this work, Thurman made the compelling case that, despite Christianity’s historical use by dominant powers to affirm their dominance, “the basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed.” Jesus stands, side by side, with those who have “their backs against the wall.”

As I reread this book today, it is hard not to think of the farmers of Bangladesh, struggling to grow rice on flooded fields, or the villagers of Shishmaref, Alaska, an Indigenous community being forced to relocate from its ancestral lands due to the melting permafrost. It’s hard not to think of the nearly 10 million people in the Horn of Africa who face a severe food crisis, brought on by a prolonged drought. It’s hard not to think of the “climate gap” in the mainland United States, where the poor are bearing a disproportionate burden of climate change impacts. As temperatures soar and sea levels rise, Thurman offers hope to the oppressed, as well as a distinct challenge to those of us who, by our own actions and inaction, have become the oppressors. Thurman reminds us that Jesus was, first and foremost, a poor Jew who suffered the indignities of the mighty Roman Empire, not to mention from the religious authorities of his time. As such, he speaks, always, on behalf of those who are afflicted, on behalf of those who suffer at the hands of the powerful.

While he boldly confronted the dominating powers of his time, Howard Thurman also was an unwavering believer in the potential of humankind to alter the course of history when we are open to the leading of the Spirit. More than 60 years ago, Thurman wrote the following words in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, in the face of the pernicious racism of the mid-20th century: “The disinherited will know for themselves that there is a Spirit at work in life and in the hearts of [humans] which is committed to overcoming the world ... For the privileged and underprivileged alike, if the individual puts at the disposal of the Spirit the needful dedication and discipline,” he

or she “can live effectively in the chaos of the present the high destiny of a [child] of God.” Today, Thurman’s words offer renewed hope as we confront the seemingly overwhelming challenges of our overheating Earth home.

Howard Thurman’s understanding of God, and the human relationship with God, was molded in large measure by his intimate connection with the natural world. It was here that he saw the Creator’s original intent for creation—harmony and unity. It was here that he found the divine in the complex entanglement between all creatures, human and non-human. That unified, loving community, which binds us all together, holds our primary hope for redemption and renewal.

Beth Norcross (www.bethnorcross.com) speaks, teaches, and writes about faith and ecology, and is the co-founder of the Green Seminary Initiative and adjunct faculty at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

Links:

- [1] <http://sojo.net/magazine/2012/08>
- [2] <http://sojo.net/biography/beth-norcross>
- [3] <http://sojo.net/magazine/2012/08/eye-sparrow#comment-covenant>
- [4] <http://sojo.net/letter-to-the-editor?post=Eye%20on%20the%20Sparrow>
- [5] <http://sojo.net/donate>
- [6] <http://sojo.net/sites/default/files/article/image/Article.Banner.12.08.Norcross.JPG>
- [7] <http://www.bethnorcross.com>

<http://sojo.net/magazine/2012/08/eye-sparrow>

August 7, 2012

Churches speak out on Northern Gateway oil sands pipeline

By John Cotter
The Canadian Press

Churches across Canada say they have a religious duty to speak out on the proposed Northern Gateway oil sands pipeline.

Next week, delegates at the United Church of Canada general council meeting in Ottawa are to debate a resolution that calls on the church to reject construction of the \$6-billion Enbridge project that would take diluted bitumen from Alberta to the British Columbia coast.

The resolution was drafted in support of aboriginals in B.C., who worry a spill would poison the land and water, and directs the church to send the results of its vote to the federal, B.C. and Alberta governments and the media.

Mardi Tindal, moderator of the United Church, said care of the Earth is an important part of the faith and the church can't shy away from the pipeline just because it is controversial and politically divisive.

"People care so much about this. People understand that you cannot separate economic health from ecological health," she said from Toronto.

"The church has a responsibility to contribute to the conversations that make for the best public policy for the common good."

The United Church of Canada is not alone.

Earlier this year, the Anglican Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon issued a statement that questioned the integrity of the pipeline's environmental impact review.

The diocese of New Westminster of the Anglican Church of Canada has declared its outright opposition to Northern Gateway, and is looking at excluding Enbridge stock from the diocese's investment portfolio.

A group representing 28 Presbyterian churches in B.C.'s Lower Mainland has written a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper that accuses the government of weakening environmental reviews and demonizing people who oppose projects as radicals trying to sabotage Canada's economy.

In her letter to Harper, Rev. Diane Tait-Katerberg wrote there is already "overwhelming evidence the government of Canada has already made up its mind about the safety of these projects, and is arranging things so that nothing stands in the way of the development of the oilsands and the approval of these pipelines."

There is so much buzz about the pipeline in religious circles that the ecumenical justice organization Kairos has written a primer on the Enbridge project entitled Ethical Reflections on the Northern Gateway Pipeline. It's meant to help churches make their own value judgments on the project.

The primer says Northern Gateway presents intersecting challenges for the economy, ecology and Canada's relations with aboriginal people.

It says the focus on the anticipated wealth the pipeline would create threatens to obscure the magnitude of the profound challenges it would pose to the environment.

"In a very immediate way, Northern Gateway threatens the survival of the First Nations whose territory it would cross," the report says.

"A spill would devastate livelihoods, the land, food sources and the ability to pass on to future generations values, principles, languages and core aspects of how these people's cultures are practised."

Kairos member churches include the Anglican Church of Canada, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Mennonite Central Committee of Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the United Church of Canada.

Ed Bianchi, a Kairos spokesman, said the report is impartial on Northern Gateway.

“I don’t think it is a political issue. I think it is an issue that is of concern to our society because it has so many potential impacts on so many people,” he said.

Enbridge said it has no problem with churches weighing in with their opinions on Northern Gateway. But the Calgary-based corporation added it is concerned about whether people are basing their opinions on facts.

Enbridge vice-president Janet Harder said the company has been working hard to explain the project to people who live along its 1,200-kilometre route, but hasn’t done enough to explain it to the rest of Canada.

Harder said Enbridge plans to release more information this fall about the environmental standards it would have for the pipeline and how the company would protect the ocean from spills. The information could include an advertising campaign in B.C. and Alberta and perhaps the rest of the country.

As well, she said, more facts will come out during the next phase of joint review panel hearings that begin in Edmonton next month. Government and intervenor groups will be able to ask Enbridge detailed questions about the project.

Harder is confident people who are saying ‘no’ to the pipeline now may change their position before the panel wraps up by the end of next year.

“We don’t need to win the hearts and minds of people over the next couple of months,” she said. “We do have time to communicate and help people understand what this project is all about.”

The intervenor phase is to run from Sept. 4 to Sept. 28. It is to examine the economic need for the project, how it would be financed and the toll structure it would use.

When the hearings shift to Prince George, B.C., in October, the panel is to hear questions on the environmental effects of the pipeline and Enbridge’s plans to deal with accidents and malfunctions.

The final questions phase to be held in Prince Rupert, B.C., in November and December is to look at the potential impacts of the pipeline on aboriginals and the environmental risks of shipping bitumen by super tanker in the waters along the rugged B.C. coast.

<http://business.financialpost.com/2012/08/07/pulpits-and-the-pipeline-more-churches-speaking-out-on-northern-gateway-project/>

August 11, 2012

Anti-Glacier Prayer "Worked Too Well"—Vatican Approves New Ritual

After 350 years, and amid a changing climate, Alpine pilgrims warm up to ice.

By Laura Spinney

National Geographic News

Fiesch, Switzerland -- About 50 people set out on foot from the Swiss village of [Fiesch](#) at dawn on July 31. As the sun rose over 13,000-foot (4,000-meter) Alpine peaks, the procession moved slowly up a mountainside and into the cool of a pine forest, stopping at a tiny church.

By 7:30 the group had swollen to around a hundred—too many to fit inside the chapel of Maria Heimsuchung, or Mary of the Visitation, so a makeshift altar was erected outside.

"Glacier is ice, ice is water, water is life," intoned priest Toni Wenger, before beseeching God to stop the glaciers high above them from melting.

By changing a few, crucial words in the liturgy, Father Wenger reversed a Catholic ritual that for 350 years had implored the heavens to push back the glaciers.

The [Vatican](#) had approved the change as the effects of [global warming](#) became all too tangible in the Alps.

Climate change's effects are accentuated in mountainous regions, and in the 20th century temperatures in Alpine [Switzerland](#) increased by twice the global average. Today Swiss glaciers are shrinking by nearly 33 feet (10 meters) a year, on average. What's more, alpine communities are reporting more rain and stronger winds than in centuries past.

(Read *National Geographic* magazine's ["Meltdown: The Alps Under Pressure"](#))

When Global Cooling Killed

The people of devoutly Catholic Fiesch and Fieschertal have made the annual pilgrimage since 1674, when Europe was in the grip of the Little Ice Age. (Related: ["Little Ice Age Shrank Europeans, Sparked Wars."](#))

Looming over the villages, the two largest glaciers in the Alps—the [Aletsch \(satellite picture\)](#) and [Fiescher \(satellite picture\)](#)—grew over the next two centuries, reaching their maximum lengths around 1850. Around that time, the Aletsch stretched some 16 miles (26 kilometers); the

Fiescher was larger by similar proportions, though exact measurements aren't available for the smaller glacier.

The consequences for the villagers were dire.

When pieces of the Aletsch fell into Lake Märjelen—which lies between the two glaciers—the lake overflowed. Three hundred and fifty-three million cubic feet (10 million cubic metres) of water rushed down the valley below, inundating settlements, damaging property, and killing villagers. Extremely poor until the late 19th century, the locals had few options but to rebuild.

Having endured hundreds such diasters, the villagers—with the help of local Jesuits—organized the pilgrimage, to be held annually on July 31: the Catholic feast day dedicated to the Jesuits' founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Answered Prayers?

The glaciers began receding in the 1860s, and they continue to shrink today. ([Watch a glacier recede in a time-lapse video.](#))

The Aletsch—now 13 miles (21 kilometers) long, about half a mile (0.8 kilometer) wide, and roughly 3,000 feet (900 meters) deep—has lost nearly 3 miles (5 kilometers) in length and 650 feet (200 meters) in depth since 1864.

"We prayed for the ice to recede, and our prayer worked—too well," said Herbert Volken, mountain guide and mayor of Conches, the district that includes Fiesch.

In 2009 the local parish council petitioned the Vatican to allow a change in the wording of the prayer. A year later the Holy See agreed, and Volken hopes the new prayer will work as well as the last one.

Today the villagers no longer worry about floods, he said, but about having less drinking water, energy, and food for their animals, and more forest fires. Another problem is the impact the dwindling glaciers could have on tourism—the main source of income, besides [hydropower](#), for the district—which is already strained by recession and the [Eurozone crisis](#).

So far, icemelt doesn't appear to be a factor in the tourism dropoff, Volken said. But "if the [Aletsch] glacier isn't there any more, the tourists won't come."

(See [pictures of the melting Alps](#).)

Glacial Pace

The effects of global warming are being felt throughout the region. ([Video: Melting Alps.](#))

Not far from Fiesch, the Giesen glacier has developed a gigantic crack and is at risk of collapsing and inundating villages below. In Zermatt—where a shifting glacier defines an international border—the Swiss and Italian governments are in the process of renegotiating their frontier.

The impact of the changing climate will eventually be felt wider still. The Aletsch and Fiescher glaciers—along with many other, smaller ones—feed the *Rhône river system*, one of Europe's most important.

[Hanspeter Holzhäuser](#), a [University of Bern](#) geographer who specializes in glacier history, said the Aletsch is losing about 75 feet (23 meters) a year in length.

He's tracked the glacier's fluctuations over several millennia—using historical records and analyses of ice cores, fossil soils, and wood trapped in the ice—and found clear signs of climate variation.

During the balmy Bronze Age, for example, the Aletsch was between 2,000 and 3,000 feet (610 and 915 meters) shorter than it is today. But the warmth then, he adds, wasn't abetted by human activities.

"Even if all the new prayer does is to draw attention to man-made global warming," he said, "it's a good thing."

(Related: ["Alps Could Be Ice Free by 2100, Study Warns."](#))

Whatever the revised prayer's effects, they're unlikely to be immediate.

Holzhäuser is confident, based on past trends, that the rapid warming—and subsequent melting—will continue for at least the next 30 years. And the consequences may not be entirely obvious.

Earlier this summer, a British couple walking on Aletsch Glacier discovered human remains. The bones, which have been sent to the University of Bern for DNA analysis, are thought to have belonged to local men who disappeared in 1926, probably by falling into a crevasse that then closed above them.

According to [Renato Julier](#), Fiesch's head of tourism, other walkers have gone missing in the region since then. "We expect more gruesome discoveries in the future," Julier said.

If attempts to combat global warming work—or, depending on your beliefs, if God is listening to the people of Fiesch—those missing walkers may remain missing. Arguably, it would be a small price to pay for ensuring the water supply for much of Europe for centuries to come.

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/08/120810-glaciers-vatican-prayer-alps-science-global-warming/>

August 13, 2012

Youth Appeals Climate Case

Iowa's Supreme Court Is Asked To Combat The Climate Crisis

Our Children's Trust
Press Release

Des Moines, IA – Glori Dei Filippone, a 14-year-old Iowan, filed her final brief today with the Iowa Supreme Court on the issue of whether the State of Iowa has an obligation to protect the atmosphere under the Iowa Constitution and the Public Trust Doctrine. Both Glori and the defendant, Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), have requested oral argument before the Supreme Court in this critical case about whether the people of Iowa have a right to a healthy atmosphere. Glori appealed a lower court decision that affirmed the Iowa DNR denial of a petition for rulemaking to reduce statewide carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from fossil fuels consistent with what current scientific analysis deems necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change.

“A Judge in Texas has ruled that the atmosphere is protected under the Public Trust Doctrine and the Texas Constitution,” says Julia Olson, Executive Director of Our Children's Trust, an organization dedicated to fighting climate change. “We are hopeful that Iowa's Supreme Court will also recognize that the atmosphere is imperiled and must be protected by State officials.”

In ***TRUST Iowa***, a documentary film about Glori, from the series *Stories of TRUST: Calling for Climate Recovery*, Glori, a member of Kids vs. Global Warming's iMatter Campaign, asks judges to “think about their children or their children's children and about how this decision is going to affect them.”

“Iowa has a moral obligation to provide my generation, and future generations, with a livable state,” says Glori, “The ruling in Texas energizes me. Climate change is the most important moral issue of our time and I hope our Court will also protect our rights.”

Glori's drive for entering the lawsuit comes from the alarming research of our nation's top scientists. According to leading climate scientist, Dr. James Hansen, “the science is crystal clear—we must rapidly reduce fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissions if we are to have a chance of

protecting Earth's natural systems for these young people." Dr. Hansen released a new paper last week showing that weather events, like the current drought in Iowa, are linked to climate change.

Current climate science calls for a return to 350 parts per million (ppm) CO₂ in the atmosphere by the end of the century. To get there, Iowa must reduce its CO₂ emissions by six percent each year or risk our climate reaching tipping points beyond which there is no return. Each year Iowa delays making the necessary reductions, makes it harder to reach 350 ppm in time to save our atmosphere and protect the Iowa way of life.

"Historically, the courts have been called upon to protect people's rights, including civil rights and property rights," said Glori's attorney, Channing Dutton. "Today, we are asking the court to protect a right so fundamental to every Iowan, and that is the right to our life-sustaining atmosphere, for today's children and tomorrow's."

Note to Media: Recent press coverage of other Atmospheric Trust Litigation by Youth can be found here:

<http://ourchildrenstrust.org/page/247/media-coverage-youth-atmospheric-trust-legal-actions-july-2-2012-current>

***Our Children's Trust** is a nonprofit focused on protecting earth's natural systems for current and future generations. We are working with lawyers, scientists, and youth to support atmospheric trust legal efforts around the world. We are here to empower and support youth as they stand up for their lawful inheritance: a healthy planet. We are mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers. We are adults, part of the ruling generation, and we care about the future of our children--and their children's children. www.ourchildrenstrust.org/*

***iMatter** is a youth-led campaign of the nonprofit group, Kids vs Global Warming, that is focused on mobilizing and empowering youth to lead the way to a sustainable and just world. We are teens and moms and young activists committed to raising the voices of the youngest generation to issue a wake-up call to live, lead and govern as if our future matters. www.imattercampaign.org/*

***WITNESS** is the global pioneer in the use of video to promote human rights. We empower people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change. In partnership with the iMatter TRUST Campaign we seek to bring visibility to the challenges our youth already face because of the changing climate and call for a massive assault on fossil fuel emissions. Without an all out assault effects will range from drought to disease, from food shortages to tainted water supplies, from the loss of homes due to floods, erosion and fire to massive relocations. The human rights challenge is most*

succinctly summarized by Mary Robinson, "Climate change will, in short, have immense human consequences." WITNESS partnered on this campaign in hopes that predictions will not become realities. To view Stories of TRUST: Calling for Climate Recovery told by our youth plaintiffs, go to www.witness.org/campaigns/all-campaigns/imatter or www.ourchildrenstrust.org.

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<http://yubanet.com/usa/Youth-Appeals-Climate-Case.php#.UCrq4KPa-So>

<http://ourchildrenstrust.org/page/85/press-releases>

August 13, 2012

Native American Leaders Share Concerns About Sacred Sites

By Scott Theisen
KSTP

The Obama administration on Monday began reaching out to Native American political and spiritual leaders to address concerns over the protection of sacred sites on federal land.

Tribal leaders said they're frustrated. Some feel consultation between the federal government and tribes has become just a formality despite promises by the administration to improve discussions.

About four dozen tribal leaders from New Mexico, Arizona and elsewhere packed a meeting room in Albuquerque for the first of a few listening sessions planned by the U.S. Interior Department.

Pointing to the importance of sacred sites to religious and cultural practices, the department is aiming to develop some kind of uniform policy for addressing the protection of such sites. That could mean a consultation policy specific to sacred sites or changes in law that would allow for greater protections, officials said.

Representatives of the Quechan Tribe of the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation complained Monday about renewable energy projects on federal land being fast-tracked by the administration without adequate review of potential effects on sacred sites.

Mandatory consultation meetings have not resulted in any protections and the tribe feels it is being "stonewalled" by high-level federal officials, said John Bathke, the tribe's historic preservation officer.

"These projects, they're going on with complete disregard to Indians. It's like we don't have any

say," Bathke said, explaining that siting of the projects is more about spirituality than land planning for many tribes.

"These renewable energy projects are part of a re-election campaign and we don't want to see this administration get re-elected at the expense of sacred sites, at the expense of native culture."

As part of gauging Indian Country's concerns with current protections of sacred sites, the agency has asked tribes to comment on whether it should attempt to define the term "sacred site."

Santa Ana Pueblo Gov. Ernest Lujan said that would be near impossible, especially considering future legal ramifications that could come from adopting a narrow definition.

"We're not only looking at a hillside or rock feature," he said. "We're looking at water, we're looking at land, we're looking at plants."

Dion KILLSBACK, counselor to the assistant secretary of Indian Affairs, acknowledged that developing a policy for addressing sacred sites is made even more difficult given the secrecy surrounding many native religious and cultural practices.

KILLSBACK said the goal is to find a way to "bridge the gap" by including tribal leaders at the outset of projects so some kind of balance can be worked out that respects tribal beliefs but allows for projects to move forward.

Meetings on sacred sites are also planned later this month in Montana, Minnesota and Connecticut.

<http://kstp.com/article/stories/S2726694.shtml?cat=89>

August 27, 2012

What Can Islam Do For The Environment? Lots, Actually...

By Arwa Aburawa

Green Prophet

Answering (or at least attempting to answer) what now feels like an age-old question

What can [Islam do for the environment](#)? That's a question I have been asking myself for some years now and, in all honesty, I am nowhere near answering it fully. I have definitely enjoyed looking into the [green ethics of Islam](#) in a bid to help Muslims worldwide take up the [environmentally-friendly path](#), but I still have lots of questions. Like how can we get Muslims to embrace the greener side of Islam? How do we translate belief into action? How do green Muslims, who are coming at the climate change issue from a different perspective, link up with more mainstream and non-faith green organisations? Yep, lots of questions but I'm still having fun trying to answering them. Here's an excerpt from an article I wrote for the [world's leading site for international politics students about what Islam can do for the environment](#).

..[E]mbracing geo-engineering as ‘Plan B’ is not only dangerous as the outcomes of planetary-scale experiments are highly uncertain; it is undemocratic, irresponsible and ignores the fact that we have a perfectly good ‘Plan A’ – to cut our emissions. We just need better ways of convincing people to do that. One area that is commonly overlooked when exploring ways to encourage greater climate awareness and action is faith and religion. Islam, in particular, which is perceived as the faith of oil-rich sheikhs is sidelined with sparse academic research highlighting the insights Islam has to offer an environmentally vulnerable planet.

The primary source of all Islamic thought and practice, the Holy Qur’an, is full of exhalation of nature, its beauty and the need to protect it. Nature is portrayed as God’s glory, a gift of sustenance and humanity is divinely ordained responsibilities to care for the natural world and keep the harmony and balance placed within it.[1] In the Qur’an there are “ample instructions as well as warnings to the faithful not to abuse their power in dealing with the environment. Distortion of the natural order and ill-treatment of God’s creatures, whatever they are, are considered as sins that lead to punishment.”[2] Wastefulness is discouraged and excessive consumption or greed is actively prohibited. Indeed, the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) warned his followers to not waste precious resources such as water and encouraged them to protect land and improve its fertility.

With this in mind, it is not hard to make the link between Islamic ethics and the need to curb our excessive use of non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels which are poisoning the air and land. As such, Islam has “the capability of helping to solve one of the greatest problems of our time, namely that of ‘the environment’. Islam need not be a hindrance, but could be a great help, in educating the faithful about good environmental conduct.”[3] Cairo, the Islamic capital with one thousand minarets, is one of the most polluted cities in the world and Bangladesh and the Maldives – which are both Muslim nations – will be the worst affected countries when climate change hits due to flooding and droughts. [4] Indeed, environmental problems plague many Muslims countries whether it be deforestation in Indonesia, desertification and over-development in the Middle East or drought in North Africa.

These nations and many others have everything to gain by tackling climate change and environmental pollution by embracing the green ethics of Islam. Today, the Muslim faith commands influence (to varying degrees) of 18% of the world’s population and covers a very large area where some of the greatest environmental problems exist. [5] As such, highlighting the green tenants of the Islamic faith is hugely beneficial to tackling climate change and may become increasingly useful with the predicted doubling of the Muslim population by 2030 to 26.4%.[6] If Muslims across the world garner greater awareness of their Islamic duties to the environment, it is also perceivable that they would be able to pressure their governments into making the right ‘green’ decisions when it comes to water, food, recycling and energy use. It would also mean that rich Gulf Muslim nations such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain wouldn’t be as obstructive at important climate summits if their populations could rally for the environment based on Islamic tenants. [7]

[1] Murad M. *Islamic Environmental Stewardship: Nature and Science in the Light of Islamic Philosophy in Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, (2011) Vol. 63: pg147-8

[2] Kula, E. (March 2001) *Islam and environmental conservation. Environmental*

Conservation: Vol. 28 (Issue 1), p4.

[3] Kula, E. (March 2001) *Islam and environmental conservation. Environmental Conservation: Vol. 28 (Issue 1), p7.*

[4] N. Ammar, *Islam and Deep Ecology*, in D. Landis and R. Gottlieb, Eds., *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Grounds* (State University of New York Press, 2001), p193.

[5] *Ibid*, p2.

[6] Jones, H. (January 27 2011) 2.2 Billion: World's Muslim Population Doubles. *TIME*.

<http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/01/27/2-2-billion-worlds-muslim-population-doubles/>

[7] Sanchez, R. (November 11 2011) US 'blocking' climate change fund ahead of Durban conference. *The Telegraph*.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/climatechange/8914511/US-blocking-climate-change-fund-ahead-of-Durban-conference.html>

: Image of [sitting bedouin and donkey](#) via Shutterstock.com

::[For the full article see 'How Can Islam Help Us Tackle Climate Change?'](#)

For more on Islam and climate change issues see:

[Green Iftar Guide – Breaking the Ramadan Fast Sustainably](#)

[How Islam Could Help Fight Water Scarcity](#)

[Islam's Environmentally Friendly Architecture – Where Did It Go?](#)

<http://www.greenprophet.com/2012/08/what-can-islam-do-for-the-environment/>

August 31, 2012

Lockdown on the Pipeline: How a Houston Businessman Helped Shut Down Keystone for a Day

By Candice Bernd

Nation of Change

Tar Sands Blockade activists halted Keystone XL construction for a full day on August 28 after locking themselves to a truck carrying pipes in Livingston, Texas.

As Hurricane Isaac made landfall in New Orleans on the eve of Hurricane Katrina's seventh anniversary, climate justice organizers in Texas were [locking themselves to the axle](#) of a massive TransCanada truck carrying 36-inch pipes intended for Keystone XL construction, in hopes that they might turn the climate crisis around.

Four activists were locked to the truck Tuesday, with two providing direct support—that is, up until the point of their arrest. Fortunately enough, TransCanada workers stepped in to fill their shoes by bringing water to the blockaders throughout the afternoon.

With help from TransCanada workers themselves, these six people were able to shut down operations at the Livingston pipe yard and cut off the transportation of pipes to construction sites across the southern leg of the Keystone XL pipeline, after police were forced to dismantle the truck to make arrests.

"Growing up, I saw the social movements of the sixties as very inspirational. The climate justice movement is our generation's movement of that magnitude. It affects us all," said Chris Voss, a farmer from Fannin County who locked down Tuesday.

The action comes in response to a [recent court ruling](#) giving TransCanada the green light to seize a piece of Texas landowner Julia Trigg Crawford's home. Lamar County Judge Bill Harris informed her of this decision by sending a 15-word summary judgment to her from his iPhone in Washington, D.C., on August 15.

It was this mistreatment of landowners, among other reasons, that motivated Houston businessman Ray Torgerson to lock down. "The fact that this corporation can check a box on a form and steal someone's land is insulting," Ray said. "We are here to defend our homes and stand with landowners like Julia."

[Julia Crawford](#) is one of the few Texas landowners that never signed one of TransCanada's contractual agreements - holding out against blatant intimidation tactics that so many landowners have said coerced them to sign on to TransCanada's shady dealings. She sought to challenge TransCanada's claim as a "common carrier" in court.

Common carrier status is granted by the Texas Railroad Commission and allows corporations the power to seize private property through eminent domain. But, in Texas, all TransCanada had to do to apply as a common carrier was simply fill out a government form for a permit, known as the T-4 form, and check a box labeled "common carrier."

Crawford's case was backed up by the [Texas Rice Land vs. Denbury Green decision](#) in which the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the T-4 permit granted by the Railroad Commission does not conclusively establish the power of eminent domain.

The ruling is another example of a legal system that works against the interests of the many, and one more reason why Tar Sands Blockade organizers believe direct action is necessary. The lockdown at the pipe yard is only the first of many actions to unfold as we turn up the heat on one of the [hottest summers ever recorded](#).

Denny Hook, a retired minister in Gainesville, Texas, describes himself as "an environmentalist that happens to be a minister." Hook hopes to inspire more people to join the movement. "Things are so dire that if all of us don't rise up, we won't make it. This pipeline means the difference between Earth on the edge and Earth over the edge."

The four blockaders were threatened with pain compliance and pepper spray, causing one person to unlock themselves. In addition to the six blockaders arrested Tuesday, Garrett Graham—the

videographer for Tar Sands Blockade as well as my partner and friend—was arrested while filming the lock down.

With Mitt Romney talking [dirty energy](#) this week at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, and President Obama [walking back from his claim](#) that he had rejected the pipeline altogether, both major political parties and the court system are backing a toxic tar sands pipeline that could spell "game over" for the climate.

But people like Tammie Carson, a lifelong Texan from Arlington, are willing to outlast them. Carson was the last blockader arrested Tuesday, earning herself a new nickname—Lone Star Tammie.

"I'm doing this for my grandchildren," Carson said. "I'm outraged that multinational corporations like TransCanada are wrecking our climate. The planet isn't theirs to destroy, and I'm willing to take a risk to protect my grandchildren's future."

Candice Bernd is an organizer with [Tar Sands Blockade](#). She wrote this article for [Truth-Out.org](#), a media nonprofit dedicated to providing independent news and commentary on a daily basis.

<http://www.nationofchange.org/lockdown-pipeline-how-houston-businessman-helped-shut-down-keystone-day-1346421393>

September 11, 2012

National Council of Elders to release Greensboro declaration in three U.S. cities

Fellowship of Reconciliation

On Wednesday, September 12, the newly-formed National Council of Elders (NCOE) will release the Greensboro Declaration, the first statement of the organization since its founding a month ago. The NCOE founding conference was held in Greensboro, NC, site of the historic Greensboro lunch counter sit-ins, which represented a major advance in the civil rights struggle.

The Declaration will be presented at significant historic sites of struggle and freedom, with the anchor site being the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington D.C. Other sites will be in Detroit, MI; and New York. Press conferences will be held at 11:00 a.m. in the areas' respective time zones.

Greensboro Declaration Launch Sites

Washington, DC: ML King, Jr. Memorial Center

New York: Zuccotti Park

Detroit: New Bethel Baptist Church

Wednesday, September 12, 2012

11:00 a.m. (local time)

“This statement represents a new epoch,” said 97-year-old Detroit revolutionary theorist and activist Grace Lee Boggs, author of *The Next American Revolution*. “It calls on Americans to become engaged in a different kind of citizenship, one that *transforms their souls* in addition to asking them to go to the polls.” Dr. Boggs is the eldest member of the NCOE.

Other NCOE members and signers of the Declaration include:

- Bernice Johnson Reagon, Founder, Sweet Honey in the Rock
- Harry Belafonte, Activist/Performer
- Dolores Huerta, Labor Leader / Civil Rights Activist
- Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, Professor & Freedom Summer Participant
- Nelson Johnson, Activist/Organizer
- Shirley M. Sherrod, Former Georgia State Director of Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Arthur Waskow, Author/Activist/Rabbi
- Danny Glover, Activist/Actor/Producer
- Mel White, Author and LGBT Activist

Council members decided to release the Declaration after both Republican and Democratic National Conventions, believing that following the presentations by elected officials, it would be important to offer individual citizens and community groups an opportunity to voice their concerns and demands. The NCOE members will invite community activists to be present at the press conferences to engage in a dialogue on the issues commented upon in the Declaration as well as other concerns that may be raised by those in attendance.

Called into formation by civil rights veterans Rev. James Lawson, Rev. Phil Lawson, and Dr. Vincent Harding, members of the NCOE represent years of committed activism in every major human rights movement of the 20th century.

Recognizing that movement elders were continuing to play critical roles in human rights movements in the U.S., the founders had been considering organizing the Council for some time. Inspired by the determined calls for justice by the emerging Occupy movement, the Lawson brothers and Dr. Harding were moved to bring their vision to fruition.

Members of the NCOE will extend their support to Occupy and other younger generation activists while continuing their own civic engagement in arenas where they have worked for years. They are also committed to the documentation and archiving of their own movement experiences in order to leave a substantial, accessible legacy for the justice workers who will come after them.

Media Contacts:

- [Rabbi Arthur Waskow](#) (The Shalom Center), Philadelphia, PA, 215-844-8494
- Nelson and [Joyce Johnson](#) (The Beloved Community Center), Greensboro, NC, 336-230-0001
- [Father Paul Mayer](#), 973-675-2142

- [Ron Scott](#), Detroit, MI, 313-399-7345

Read the Greensboro Declaration: <http://fore.research.yale.edu/files/Greensboro-Declaration.pdf>

<http://forusa.org/blogs/for/national-council-elders-release-greensboro-declaration-three-us-cities/11038>

September 13, 2012

Opinion: How would Jesus vote?

On climate, Republicans see a hoax and Democrats pay lip service. No vote from Jesus here.

By David Lillard
Blue Ridge Press

If there's one trait politicians of all stripes share, it's that they all roll out the Good Book when it suits their purposes. For a few election cycles, the GOP claimed to be the Lord's standard-bearer, but recently people of faith across the aisle rallied their troops with similar claims, saying Democratic policies best represent a Christian perspective.

For people who say there's no place for religion in politics, I say: Get over it. For believers, and I am one, voting is an act of conscience. And separating conscience from faith is like separating your circulatory system from your body.

Still, it's possible for people of faith to arrive at different conclusions on public policy, and also differ on the question: "How would Jesus vote?"

Here are a few examples:

Climate change

Scientists often disagree with one another in the spirit of inquiry. It's their job. Yet few credible climate scientists dispute that human activity is rapidly escalating global warming.

Among Christians, divisions about what to do concerning climate change often arise from the interpretation of two opposing biblical teachings: that we're stewards of God's creation, or that humans have dominion over all living things.

Christians who believe God placed us here to care for the earth tend to favor political candidates who see government's environmental role as stewardship. The Evangelical Environmental Network, for example, supports government regulation of greenhouse gases, and bolsters its position with scripture: "Christ died to reconcile all of creation to God" (Col. 1:20), and, "All of creation belongs to Jesus" (Col. 1:16; Ps. 24:1).

Former GOP presidential candidate and evangelical Rick Santorum expressed an opposing view: "We were put on this Earth as creatures of God to have dominion over the Earth... for our benefit not for the Earth's benefit." Climate change, he argues, is "an absolute travesty of scientific research" aimed at giving government greater power. The Cornwall Alliance, a faith-based group, also dismisses most climate science, saying that regulating fossil fuels will wreck the global economy and cause terrible human suffering.

The Republican Party, by and large, sees climate change as a hoax or a joke, requiring no action. The Democrats may give climate change lip service but have done little to stop it. Both parties fail the biblical test. No vote from Jesus here.

Mercury pollution and the unborn

Roughly 600,000 U.S. children, one of six born annually, are exposed as fetuses to levels of mercury pollution that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency deems unhealthy. Sources of that mercury are varied – some are human, some natural. But the largest human-made source of mercury in our environment comes from coal-burning power plants. And the exposure those children face could alter their brain's development and impair their mental abilities for life [\[pdf\]](#).

Richard Cizik, president of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good, speaks against mercury contamination: "It's a sanctity of human life issue that relates to the environment." It's a "call to protect the innocent, the unborn," he says.

However, the Cornwall Alliance rejects the science and asserts that the mercury issue is merely intended to "water down the meaning of 'pro-life,' split the 'pro-life vote' and cripple the effort to protect the lives of the unborn in America."

Republicans largely oppose industry regulation and have opposed federal rules to reduce mercury pollution at power plants. Meanwhile, the Obama administration has moved decisively to curb such emissions. Democrats get Jesus's vote here for protection of the unborn.

Environmental justice

There's an old expression that "everyone lives downstream of something." But the poor tend to live downstream of everything – water pollution, toxic dumps, the most hazardous working conditions. For instance, studies show that concrete plants – among the worst air polluters – are centered in poor communities far from affluent ones.

The Evangelical Environmental Network says such facts require compassionate action: "Christians are called by our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, to love our neighbors and do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We are thereby called to protect our most vulnerable populations." The Cornwall Alliance sees it differently, asserting that regulating industry hurts business, which causes unemployment and hurts the poor.

Republicans who reject environmental regulation that would reduce toxic emissions end up disregarding harm to the disempowered. Democrats may say they support such rules, but often compromise on watered-down laws that don't protect the underprivileged.

Jesus, a strong advocate for the poor, would not approve. He would expect Republicans to "Do unto others," and Democrats to back their convictions with courage.

People of faith should care about and act to protect "the least of our brethren" in our churches, our communities – and with our ballots.

That's what Jesus would do.

David Lillard is editor of The Observer in Jefferson County, W.Va. and an editor of Blue Ridge Press, a news service that has been providing environmental commentary and news to U.S. newspapers since 2007.

DailyClimate.org is a foundation-funded news service covering climate change. Views expressed are those of the author and not DailyClimate.org. Contact DailyClimate.org editor Douglas Fischer at [dfischer \[at\] dailyclimate.org](mailto:dfischer@dailyclimate.org)

<http://www.dailyclimate.org/tdc-newsroom/2012/09/jesus-votes-climate-mercury>

September 14, 2012

Religious Ivory Demand Killing Elephants by Thousands, Report Says

Despite global ivory ban, tusks carved into Jesuses, prayer beads, amulets.

By Oliver Payne

National Geographic News

[Elephants](#) are being illegally killed across [Africa](#) at the highest rates in a decade, and the global religious market for ivory is a driving force. ["Blood Ivory,"](#) the cover story in the October issue of [National Geographic](#), offers the first in-depth investigation of this untold story.

While it's impossible to say exactly how many elephants are slaughtered annually, a conservative estimate for 2011 is more than 25,000. And thousands of those are dying to satisfy religious devotion, their tusks smuggled into countries to be carved into religious artifacts: ivory baby Jesuses and saints for Catholics in the [Philippines](#), Islamic prayer beads for Muslims and Coptic crosses for Christians in [Egypt](#), amulets and carvings for Buddhists in [Thailand](#), and in [China](#)—the world's biggest ivory-consumer country—elaborate Buddhist and Taoist carvings for investors. ([Interactive graphic: elephant decline, poaching estimates, and ivory seizures.](#))

If someone in the Philippines wants to smuggle an ivory statue of the baby Jesus to the U.S., Msgr. Cristobal Garcia is happy to advise, writes *National Geographic* investigative reporter

[Bryan Christy](#). "Wrap it in old, stinky underwear and pour ketchup on it so it looks shitty with blood," Garcia told Christy. "This is how it is done."

Monsignor Garcia is head of protocol for the [archdiocese of Cebu](#), the largest in the Philippines, giving him a flock of nearly 4 million in a country of 75 million Roman Catholics, the world's third largest Catholic population. The tradition of carving ivory into religious pieces in the Philippines is so deeply rooted that in Cebu the word for ivory, *garing*, also means "religious statue."

Christy reports that another prominent Filipino Catholic, Father Vicente Lina, Jr. (Father Jay), advises people to buy religious icons made of "new" ivory—"so the history of an image will start in you." By "new" Father Jay means smuggled.

In 1990 a global ban on ivory trade came into force, and to get around it, Father Jay told Christy, Muslims from the Philippines' southern island of Mindanao smuggle ivory in from Africa. It comes "through the back door. You just keep on paying so many people so that it will enter your country."

The Roman Catholic catechism states that, "It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly." Earlier this week *National Geographic* asked the Vatican to comment on the devotional use of ivory, which is fueling the current African elephant crisis. As of September 14, a statement had not been received.

"Ivory Removes Bad Spirits"

The elephant is revered in Buddhism and is a symbol of Thailand. Monks there give out ivory amulets in return for donations. Kruba Dharmamuni, a prominent monk known as the Elephant Monk, wears an ivory elephant-head pendant suspended from ivory prayer beads representing the 108 human passions.

"Ivory removes bad spirits," Dharmamuni told *National Geographic*. Ivory also earns him money. The Elephant Monk takes in thousands of dollars a month from amulets of ivory and other materials sold in his temple gift shop.

In China, religious themes are common in carved ivory pieces. Newly rich Chinese are snapping up ivory in the form of Buddhist and Taoist gods and goddesses. Prices can be astronomical: Christy reports seeing a carved ivory Guanyin on sale for the equivalent of U.S. \$215,000. Guanyin is the Buddhist goddess of mercy, a Madonna-like figure who doubles as a fertility goddess.

Buddhist monks in China perform a ceremony called *kai guang*, the opening of light, to consecrate religious icons, just as some Filipino priests will bless Catholic images made of illegal ivory for their followers. "To be respectful of the Buddha," the report quotes a Chinese collector, "one should use precious material. If not ivory then gold. But ivory is more precious."

The *National Geographic* October cover story also exposes key flaws in analysis and decision-making by the leadership of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([CITES](#)), which sets international wildlife trade policy. [CITES approved a massive sale of legal ivory](#) to China and Japan in 2008. That decision, the report concludes, has only increased the world's appetite for illegal ivory, fueling the current elephant poaching frenzy across Africa. ([Find out how you can help.](#))

See the Full *National Geographic* Magazine Report

- [Read "Blood Ivory" Online](#)
- [Get the October Issue for iPad Now \(U.S.\)](#)
- [Get the October Issue for iPad Now \(Outside U.S.\)](#)
- Buy the October Issue on Newsstands September 25
- [Plus: Read a Behind-the-Scenes Q&A With "Blood Ivory" Editor Oliver Payne](#)

More Ivory Coverage

- [In War to Save Elephants, Rangers Appeal for Aid](#)
- [Massive Pile of Elephant Ivory Burned in Gabon—A First](#)
- [Pictures: Ivory Wars](#)
- [Ebay Bans Ivory Sales Amid Conservation Concerns](#)
- [Ton of Illegal Ivory, Hippo Teeth Seized in Kenya](#)
- [Record Ivory Cache Traced to Zambia Elephants, DNA Shows](#)
- [Illegal Ivory Trade Boosted by Angola Craft Markets, Conservationists Say](#)
- [U.S. One of Largest Ivory Markets, New Study Says \(2008\)](#)

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/09/120914-ivory-religious-elephants-ban-science-religion/>

September 14, 2012

Most Widely Ratified Treaty in UN History Marks Silver Jubilee

United Nations

PARIS/NAIROBI, 14 September 2012 – Hailed as the most successful treaty in United Nations history -- for achieving universal ratification and meeting its targets ahead of schedule -- the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer will celebrate its 25th anniversary on 16 September.

The Protocol, which has been ratified by 197 countries, has enabled reductions of over 98 per cent of all global production and consumption of controlled ozone-depleting substances.

The Protocol also oversaw the global phase-out of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) by 2010.

Global observations have verified that atmospheric levels of key ozone-depleting substances are going down and it is believed that with implementation of the Protocol's provisions, the ozone layer should return to pre-1980 levels by 2050 to 2075.

Thanks to controls implemented under the Protocol, the global community will be spared millions of cases of skin cancer and cataract -- in addition to trillions of dollars in health care.

Direct health care savings in the United States alone is estimated at \$4.2 trillion.

Globally, the Protocol is estimated to have prevented 19 million more cases of non-melanoma cancer, 1.5 million more cases of melanoma cancer and 130 million more cases of eye cataracts.

Action under the Protocol has also had significant climate benefits.

Because ozone-depleting substances are also global warming gases, the reduction in the production and use of these substances yielded a net integrated reduction of approximately 25 billion tonnes of CO₂ between 1990 and 2000.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said: "As we look to mitigate and adapt to climate change, tackle other environmental threats and implement the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, the story of the Montreal Protocol highlights the benefits of pursuing an inclusive green economy. It shows that, in acting on one issue, many others can be addressed too."

"The Montreal Protocol has demonstrated that fundamental principles – such as science-based policy-making, the precautionary approach, common but differentiated responsibilities and equity within and between generations – can benefit all nations," he added.

The Montreal Protocol's Multilateral Fund has assisted developing countries to meet their compliance commitments by financing industrial conversion, technical assistance, training and capacity-building support worth over \$2.8 billion.

It is estimated that, without the Protocol, by the year 2050 ozone depletion would have risen to at least 50 per cent in the northern hemisphere's mid-latitudes and 70 per cent in the southern mid-latitudes, about 10 times worse than current levels.

UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said: "The establishment of the Montreal Protocol in 1987 set the world on track to reduce and phase-out a wide range of chemicals found in products from hairsprays and fire fighting equipment to foams and air conditioners that were destroying the ozone layer and leading to dangerous "holes" over

Antarctica and also the Arctic. Recently, the world has learnt that these cuts and phase-outs have also benefited the climate because the substances of concern are also powerful greenhouse gases.”

“The Green Economy, in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, may be a recent term. But the work on repairing the ozone layer and now combating climate change underlines that a Green Economy has been forged over many years even if we did not use that term at the time,” added Mr. Steiner.

Despite the successes, Governments still face major challenges.

Under the Protocol, developing countries will need to phase out the consumption and production of HCFCs which have adverse effects on ozone protection and the global climate.

Marco Gonzalez, Executive Secretary of the UNEP Ozone Secretariat, said: “Perhaps the best way to appreciate these accomplishments is to consider what the world might have looked like today without both the inquisitive minds of the world’s scientists and the forward-looking determination of its leaders, diplomats and negotiators who shaped the Montreal Protocol. If concerted action was not taken, by now we would be living a nightmare, with significant increases in skin cancers and cataracts, and substantial impacts on ecosystems.”

“Our actions over the past quarter century have helped usher in an Ozone-Safe Generation. This is truly worthy of celebration!” he added.

The International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer was designated by the UN General Assembly through resolution 49/114 in 1994.

This year’s International Day is celebrated under the theme “Protecting our atmosphere for generations to come”.

More information can be found at <http://ozone.unep.org> and www.unep.org/ozonaction

Notes to Editors

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the United Nations system’s designated entity for addressing environmental issues at the global and regional level. Its mandate is to coordinate the development of environmental policy consensus by keeping the global environment under review and bringing emerging issues to the attention of governments and the international community for action.

UNEP Compliance Assistance Programme (CAP): UNEP as an Implementing Agency of the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol has a unique regionalized programme that delivers compliance assistance services to countries to assist them meet the international commitments under the Protocol. The compliance regime requires countries to: achieve and sustain compliance, promote a greater sense of country ownership and implement the agreed Executive Committee framework for strategic planning.

Ozone Secretariat is the Secretariat for the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and for the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Based at the UNEP offices in Nairobi (Kenya), the Secretariat functions in accordance with Article 7 of the Vienna Convention and Article 12 of the Montreal Protocol.

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is an international treaty designed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out the production and consumption of a number of substances believed to be responsible for ozone depletion. The treaty was opened for signature on 16 September 1987 and entered into force on 1 January 1989. Since then, it has undergone five revisions, in 1990 (London), 1992 (Copenhagen), 1995 (Vienna), 1997 (Montreal), and 1999 (Beijing). Due to its widespread adoption and implementation it has been hailed as an example of exceptional international cooperation "Perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date..."

The Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol is managed by an Executive Committee which is responsible for overseeing the operation of the Fund. The Committee comprises seven members from developed and seven members from developing countries. The 2012 Committee membership includes Belgium, Canada, Finland, Japan, Romania, the United Kingdom and the United States (developed countries) and Argentina, China, Cuba, India, Kenya, Jordan and Mali (developing country members) and is chaired by Mr. Xiao Xuezhi (China). The Committee is assisted by the Fund Secretariat which is based in Montreal.

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http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/climatechange/pages/gateway/template/news_item.jsp?cid=36447

September 17, 2012

What is the state of international climate talks?

By Michael Jacobs

The Guardian

Despite near-collapse at each of the last three annual conferences of the UN Framework Convention on [Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#), the international negotiations always seem to pull back from the brink. Why? Because no country is willing to abandon the goal of an international regime which will effectively combat dangerous [climate change](#). So the search for international agreement continues.

The negotiations tackle four principal issues: ambition, legal form, assistance to developing countries, and rules and institutions.

On **ambition** – the goals the international community sets to reduce emissions – there are in practice no real negotiations at all. Countries commit to whatever their domestic economic and political pressures determine. The global emissions reduction, and its distribution between countries, is then whatever collectively results. At present the sum of country commitments falls far short of the UN's own agreed goal to limit global warming to a maximum of 2C above pre-industrial times. At the 2011 conference in Durban, it was agreed that this "emissions gap" must be closed; but it remains difficult to see who will make the extra effort, at least before 2020. Much will depend on whether countries' experience of implementing low-carbon measures gives them greater confidence in the possibility of further reductions in the future. The problem of equity remains a major obstacle: developing countries ask why they should do more if the richest countries – particularly the US – do not do enough. It remains to be seen whether sufficient pressure can be applied by the poorest and most climate-vulnerable countries, and by domestic and international civil society, to change the major emitting countries' commitments.

On **legal form**, the 2011 conference [achieved an unexpected breakthrough](#). It was agreed to begin a new round of negotiations towards a new "protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force", to be concluded by 2015 and to take effect after 2020. At the same time the [Kyoto protocol](#), thought to be on the verge of collapse, was kept alive until at least 2017. This was remarkable because the goal of a new internationally legally binding agreement had been specifically rejected at the 2009 conference in Copenhagen, in an effective deal between the US and the "Basic" group of emerging economies (China, India, Brazil and South Africa). This goal has not only now been accepted but explicitly made "applicable to all countries", which is widely understood to mean that developing as well as developed countries should in future take on binding commitments. This overcomes the principal objection which the US always had to the Kyoto protocol – that it didn't apply to the major emerging countries such as China. There remains huge contention over the precise nature of "an agreed outcome with legal force", and no guarantee of final agreement, but the deadline of 2015 gives a powerful boost to the negotiation process.

On **financial assistance** to developing countries, both for [adaptation](#) to the effects of climate change, and to help them mitigate their emissions, negotiations have effectively stalled. In Copenhagen developed countries committed to providing \$100bn by 2020. But there is dispute over how much of this must be public finance and how much can be private; and whether the public money will be "additional" to existing aid commitments. Moreover few developed countries have yet said what they will provide in the much shorter term of 2013. In the present economic climate the likelihood is that assistance levels will fall, which will increase anger among developing countries and induce further accusations of broken pledges.

On **technology**, the goal of developing countries has long been the free or cut-price transfer of low-carbon technologies from developed countries, including the intellectual property rights which would allow domestic manufacture. But this has always been rejected by developed countries, concerned to protect their trading advantages. Negotiations are now focused on more limited goals of co-operation on technology development and deployment.

Negotiations also continue on a number of **new institutions and rules**, most of which were agreed in outline at the 2010 conference in Cancun but which still require more detailed design. The most important of these include the governance and operation of the green climate fund, which will provide a channel for financial assistance to developing countries; the rules on how emissions from land use change and forestry should be counted; and new mechanisms to support adaptation and to prevent the loss and degradation of [forests](#).

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of current climate negotiations is the **shifting alliances and positions of different countries**. Traditionally, negotiations have been conducted with developed ('Annex 1') and developing countries ('Non-Annex 1') on opposing sides. At Copenhagen and Cancun a fissure opened up among developing countries, with the emergence of the Basic grouping and increasingly open divergence of interest between them and the poorest and most vulnerable nations. At the Durban conference, the final outcome owed much to a new coalition between the EU, the least developed countries and the Alliance of Small Island States. Its success caused further rifts within the Basic group, with India attempting to hold out against the legal goal but in the end not being supported by China, Brazil or South Africa. As negotiations re-start in earnest at the December 2012 conference in Qatar, much will depend on how these shifting alliances develop over the next few years. Much can happen between now and the new deadline of 2015.

This article was written by Michael Jacobs of the [Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment](#) at LSE in collaboration with the Guardian

http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/sep/17/international-climate-talks-faq?CMP=twf_fd

September 18, 2012

Race Is On as Ice Melt Reveals Arctic Treasures

By Elisabeth Rosenthal
The New York Times

NUUK, Greenland — With Arctic ice melting at record pace, the world's superpowers are increasingly jockeying for political influence and economic position in outposts like this one, previously regarded as barren wastelands.

At stake are the Arctic's abundant supplies of [oil](#), gas and minerals that are, thanks to [climate change](#), becoming newly accessible along with increasingly navigable polar shipping shortcuts. This year, China has become a far more aggressive player in this frigid field, experts say, provoking alarm among Western powers.

While the United States, Russia and several nations of the European Union have Arctic territory, China has none, and as a result, has been deploying its wealth and diplomatic clout to secure footholds in the region.

"The Arctic has risen rapidly on China's foreign policy agenda in the past two years," said Linda Jakobson, East Asia program director at the Lowy Institute for International Policy in Sydney, Australia. So, she said, the Chinese are exploring "how they could get involved."

In August, [China sent its first ship](#) across the Arctic to Europe and it is lobbying intensely for permanent observer status on the Arctic Council, the loose international body of eight Arctic nations that develops policy for the region, arguing that it is a "near Arctic state" and proclaiming that the Arctic is "the inherited [wealth of all humankind](#)," in the words of China's State Oceanic Administration.

To promote the council bid and improve relations with Arctic nations, its ministers visited Denmark, Sweden and Iceland this summer, offering lucrative trade deals. High-level diplomats have also visited Greenland, where Chinese companies are investing in a developing mining industry, with proposals to import Chinese work crews for construction.

Western nations have been particularly anxious about Chinese overtures to this poor and sparsely populated island, a self-governing state within the Kingdom of Denmark, because the retreat of its ice cap has unveiled coveted mineral deposits, including [rare earth](#) metals that are crucial for new technologies like cellphones and military guidance systems. A European Union vice president, Antonio Tajani, rushed here to Greenland's capital in June, offering hundreds of millions in development aid in exchange for guarantees that Greenland would not give China exclusive access to its rare earth metals, calling his trip "raw mineral diplomacy."

Greenland is close to North America, and home to the United States Air Force's northernmost base in Thule. At a conference last month, Thomas R. Nides, deputy secretary of state for management and resources, [said the Arctic was becoming](#) "a new frontier in our foreign policy."

In the past 18 months, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea have made debut visits here, and Greenland's prime minister, Kuupik Kleist, was welcomed by President José Manuel Barroso of the European Commission in Brussels.

"We are treated so differently than just a few years ago," said Jens B. Frederiksen, Greenland's vice premier, in his simple office here. "We are aware that is because we now have something to offer, not because they've suddenly discovered that Inuit are nice people."

Chinese activity in the Arctic to some extent mirrors that of other non-Arctic countries, as the region warms.

The European Union, Japan and South Korea have also applied in the last three years for permanent observer status at the [Arctic Council](#), which would allow them to present their perspective, but not vote.

This once-obscure body, previously focused on issues like monitoring Arctic animal populations, now has more substantive tasks, like defining future port fees and negotiating agreements on [oil spill](#) remediation. "We've changed from a forum to a decision-making body," said Gustaf Lind, Arctic ambassador from Sweden and the council's current chairman.

But China sees its inclusion "as imperative so that it won't be shut out from decisions on minerals and shipping," said Dr. Jakobson, who is also an Arctic researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. China's economy is heavily dependent on exports, and the polar route saves time, distance and money to and from elsewhere in Asia and Europe, compared with traversing the Suez Canal.

So far there has been little actual exploitation of Arctic resources. Greenland has only one working mine, though more than 100 new sites are being mapped out. Here, as well as in Alaska, Canada and Norway, oil and gas companies are still largely exploring, although experts estimate that more than 20 percent of the world's oil and gas reserves are in the Arctic. Warmer weather has already extended the work season by a month in many locations, making access easier.

At one point this summer, 97 percent of the surface of Greenland's massive ice sheet [was melting](#). At current rates, Arctic waters could be ice-free in summer by the end of the decade, scientists say.

“Things are happening much faster than what any scientific model predicted,” said Dr. Morten Rasch, who runs the Greenland Ecosystem Monitoring program at Aarhus University in Denmark.

Ownership of the Arctic is governed by the United Nations Convention of the [Law of the Sea](#), which gives Arctic nations an exclusive economic zone that extends 200 nautical miles from land, and to undersea resources farther away so long as they are on a continental shelf. The far northern Arctic Ocean belongs to no country, and conditions there are severe. In a place where exact boundaries were never much of a concern, haggling over borders has begun among the primary nations — between Canada and Denmark, and the United States and Canada, for example.

The United States has been hampered in the current jockeying because the Senate has refused to ratify the [Convention of the Law of the Sea](#), even though both the Bush and Obama administrations have strongly supported doing so. This means the United States has not been able to formally stake out its underwater boundaries. “We are being left behind,” Deputy Secretary Nides said.

But experts say boundary disputes are likely to be rapidly resolved through negotiation, so that everyone can get on with the business of making money. There is “very little room for a race to grab territory, since most of the resources are in an area that is clearly carved up already,” said Kristofer Bergh, a researcher at the Stockholm Institute.

Even so, Arctic nations and NATO are building up military capabilities in the region, as a precaution. That has left China with little choice but to garner influence through a strategy that has worked well in Africa and Latin America: investing and joining with local companies and financing good works to earn good will. Its scientists have become pillars of multinational Arctic research, and their icebreaker has been used in joint expeditions.

And Chinese companies, some with close government ties, are investing heavily across the Arctic. In Canada, Chinese firms have acquired interests in two oil companies that could afford them access to Arctic drilling. During a June visit to Iceland, Premier Wen Jiabao of China signed a number of economic agreements, covering areas like [geothermal](#) energy and free trade.

In Greenland, large Chinese companies are financing the development of mines that are being developed around discoveries of gems or minerals by small prospecting companies, said Soren Meisling, head of the China desk at the Bech Bruun law firm in Copenhagen, which represents many of them. A huge iron ore mine under development near Nuuk, for example, is owned by a British company but financed in part by a Chinese steel maker.

Chinese mining companies have proved adept at working in challenging locales and have even proposed building runways for jumbo jets on the ice in Greenland's far north to fly out minerals until the ice melts enough for shipping.

"There is already a sense of competition in the Arctic, and they think they can have first advantage," said Jingjing Su, a lawyer in Bech Bruun's China practice.

The efforts have clear political backing. Greenland's minister for industry and mineral resources was greeted by Vice Premier Li Keqiang in China last November. A few months later, China's minister of land and resources, Xu Shaoshi, traveled to Greenland to sign cooperation agreements.

Western analysts have worried that China could leverage its wealth, particularly in some of the cash-poor corners of the Arctic like Greenland and Iceland.

But Chinese officials have cast their motives in more generous terms. "China's activities are for the purposes of regular environmental investigation and investment and have nothing to do with resource plundering and strategic control," the state-controlled Xinhua news agency wrote this year.

Michael Byers, a professor of politics and law at the University of British Columbia, said the Chinese were unlikely to overstep their rights in a region populated by NATO members. "Despite the concerns I have about Chinese foreign policy in other parts of the world, in the Arctic it is behaving responsibly," he said. "They just want to make money."

Next February, the Arctic Council is scheduled to choose the countries that will be granted permanent observer status, which requires unanimity vote. Though Iceland, Denmark and Sweden now openly support China's bid, the United States State Department, contacted for comment, declined to say how it would vote.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/science/earth/arctic-resources-exposed-by-warming-set-off-competition.html?pagewanted=all&_moc.semityn.www

September 18, 2012

Spirituality holds the key to climate change, says UNEP-ROA Director

By Henry Neondo
Africa Science News Service

The African Regional Director of the United Nation's Environment Programme's Office for Africa Mr Mounkaila Goumandakoye confessed in Nairobi Tuesday that the global community has not succeeded in reversing some of the trends of the environmental degradation because the world has failed to look at the issues through the lenses of spirituality, morality and faith.

Addressing participants at the ongoing Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference in Nairobi, Mr Goumandakoye said "the responsibility taken by the faith groups and their long-term commitments for a living planet will help shape the beliefs, behavior and actions for a greener and better Africa and the world".

He said this commitment by the faith groups in environment conservation for human well-being are among the driving forces for positive change as humanity is grappling with challenges of colossal consequences.

Mr Goumandakoye disclosed that many scientists now agree that the world has entered a new geologic time, the anthropocene era that is characterized by human deep alteration of earth, by massive impact on the planet.

"What science is telling us is that collectively, we have crossed several of the most prominent bio-physical tripping points at the planetary level," he said.

He added that resources exploitation already exceeds the earth biological capacity by 25 per cent and that humanity increased its global ecological footprint from 0.5 earth planet in 1950 to 1.25 now. "If the trends continue, very soon we will need two planet earths to satisfy our needs," he added.

For example, he said, the challenge of climate change alone continues to grow with an increase of carbon dioxide of about 40 per cent above pre-industrial levels.

At a recent African Ministers of Environment meeting in Arusha, Tanzania noted with concern that developed countries continue to increase their emissions.

The ministers expressed concern that the current inadequate mitigation pledges by developed countries are likely to lead to an increase of the global average temperature of greater than 2 degrees celsius and possibly 5. This, said Mr Goumandakoye will have a global impact and more so Africa due to its high vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and low adaptive capacity.

Kenya's Permanent Secretary in the ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources, Mr Ali Mohamed said in a speech read on his behalf by Richard Mwendandu that environmental conservation is usually about moral values.

He said understanding the inter-dependence of the planetary systems, inter-dependence between living organisms and between living and no-living organisms are essential in maintaining the natural balances.

Mr Mohamed however said that this balance has over the years been affected through human action with the resultant effects manifesting in diverse ways that are yet to be fully understood.

“While governments around the world continue to respond to these challenges through policy, law and regulatory measures, the size and the complexity of the challenges continue to grow,” he noted.

He cited the destabilizing climatic systems, the loss of biological diversity, depletion of oceanic stocks and pollution of water systems as challenges that continue to baffle the global community.

“The problem, says Martin Palmer, Secretary General, Alliance for Religion Conservation, the UN and global governments’ approach to these problems is way out of touch. He adds that despite the many Conferences of Parties by the UN and many resolutions by governments, “no agreement is on sight”.

“Yet the religious groups have the answer,” he said adding that the religious groups have practical steps that can be emulated across many villages, regions and countries with action-oriented grassroots projects and programmes whose impacts are seen. “They are also more trusted by their local communities in ways that governments are not,” he added.

“With 90 per cent of Africa’s population being either Christian or Muslim, the way to the heart of Africa is through faith. And faith is at the heart of these plans,” said Mr Palmer.

He said faith groups all around Africa are rediscovering how the mandate to protect the richness of God’s Creation is clearly set out in their holy texts and this is leading to profound practical action – everything from restoring habitats and planting trees to reducing energy use and training young people in environmental care and protection.

He said many COPs are attended by people who do not believe in the processes they are involved in. “many of those delegations are either attending these COPs to help save their governments from paying money or make sure that their governments do nothing about climate change and conservation.

http://www.africasciencenews.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=603:spirituality-holds-the-key-to-climate-change-says-unep-roa-director-&catid=52:environment&Itemid=115

September 19, 2012

Ending Its Summer Melt, Arctic Sea Ice Sets a New Low That Leads to Warnings

By Justin Gillis

The New York Times

The drastic melting of Arctic sea ice has finally ended for the year, scientists [announced](#) Wednesday, but not before demolishing the previous record — and setting off new warnings about the rapid pace of change in the region.

The apparent low point for 2012 was reached Sunday, according to the [National Snow and Ice Data Center](#), which said that sea ice that day covered about 1.32 million square miles, or 24 percent, of the surface of the Arctic Ocean. The previous low, set in 2007, was 29 percent.

When satellite tracking began in the late 1970s, sea ice at its lowest point in the summer typically covered about half the Arctic Ocean, but it has been declining in fits and starts over the decades.

“The Arctic is the earth’s air-conditioner,” said [Walt Meier](#), a research scientist at the snow and ice center, an agency sponsored by the government. “We’re losing that. It’s not just that polar bears might go extinct, or that native communities might have to adapt, which we’re already seeing — there are larger climate effects.”

His agency waited a few days before announcing the low to be sure sea ice had started to refreeze, as it usually does at this time of year, when winter closes in rapidly in the high Arctic. A shell of ice will cover much of the Arctic Ocean in coming months, but it is likely to be thin and prone to melting when summer returns.

Scientists consider the rapid warming of the region to be a consequence of the human release of greenhouse gases, and they see the melting as an early warning of big changes to come in the rest of the world.

Some of them also think the collapse of Arctic sea ice has already started to [alter atmospheric patterns](#) in the Northern Hemisphere, contributing to greater extremes of weather in the United States and other countries, but that case is not considered proven.

The sea ice is declining much faster than had been predicted in the last big United Nations [report](#) on the state of the climate, published in 2007. The most sophisticated computer analyses for that report suggested that the ice would not disappear before the middle of this century, if then.

Now, some scientists think the Arctic Ocean could be largely free of summer ice as soon as 2020. But governments have not responded to the change with any greater urgency about limiting greenhouse emissions. To the contrary, their main response has been to [plan for exploitation](#) of newly accessible minerals in the Arctic, including [drilling](#) for more oil.

Scientists said Wednesday that the Arctic has become a prime example of the built-in conservatism of their climate forecasts. As dire as their [warnings](#) about the long-term consequences of heat-trapping emissions have been, many of them fear they may still be underestimating the speed and severity of the impending changes.

In a panel discussion on Wednesday in New York sponsored by Greenpeace, the environmental group, [James E. Hansen](#), a prominent NASA climate scientist, said the Arctic melting should serve as a warning to the public of the risks that society is running by failing to limit emissions.

“The scientific community realizes that we have a planetary emergency,” Dr. Hansen said. “It’s hard for the public to recognize this because they stick their head out the window and don’t see that much going on.”

A prime concern is the potential for a large rise in the level of the world’s oceans. The decline of Arctic sea ice does not contribute directly to that problem, since the ice is already floating and therefore displacing its weight in water.

But the disappearance of summer ice cover replaces a white, reflective surface with a much darker ocean surface, allowing the region to trap more of the sun’s heat, which in turn melts more ice. The extra heat in the ocean appears to be contributing to an accelerating melt of the nearby Greenland ice sheet, which does contribute to the rise in sea level.

At one point this summer, [surface melt](#) was occurring across 97 percent of the Greenland ice sheet, a development not seen before in the era of satellite measurements, although geological research suggests that it has happened in the past.

The sea is now rising at a rate of about a foot per century, but scientists like Dr. Hansen expect this rate to increase as the planet warms, putting coastal settlements [at risk](#).

A scientist at the snow and ice center, [Julienne C. Stroeve](#), took a ride on a Greenpeace ship recently to inspect the Arctic Ocean for herself. Interviewed this week after pulling into port at the island of Spitsbergen, she said one of her goals had been to debark on ice floes and measure them, but that it had been difficult to find any large enough to support her weight.

Ice floes were numerous in spots, she said, but “when we got further into the ice pack, there were just large expanses of open water.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/20/science/earth/arctic-sea-ice-stops-melting-but-new-record-low-is-set.html>

September 19, 2012

Arctic ice shrinks 18% against record, sounding climate change alarm bells

Scientists and environment groups say the fall is unprecedented and the clearest signal yet of global warming

By John Vidal
The Guardian

[Sea ice](#) in the [Arctic](#) shrank a dramatic 18% this year on the previous record set in 2007 to a record low of 3.41m sq km, according to the official US monitoring organisation the [National Snow and Ice Data Centre](#) in Boulder, Colorado.

Scientists and environment groups last night said the [fall was unprecedented](#) and the clearest signal yet of [climate change](#).

The data released showed the arctic sea beginning to refreeze again in the last few days after the most dramatic melt observed since satellite observations started in 1979.

This year's sea ice extent was 700,000 sq km below the previous [minimum of 4.17m sq km set in 2007](#).

"We are now in uncharted territory," said Nsidc director Mark Serreze. "While we've long known that as the planet warms up, changes would be seen first and be most pronounced in the Arctic, few of us were prepared for how rapidly the changes would actually occur."

Julienne Stroece, an Nsidc ice research scientist who has been monitoring ice conditions aboard the Greenpeace vessel Arctic Sunrise, said the data suggested the Arctic sea ice cover was fundamentally changing and predicted more extreme weather.

"We can expect more summers like 2012 as the ice cover continues to thin. The loss of summer sea ice has led to unusual warming of the Arctic atmosphere, that in turn [impacts weather patterns in the northern hemisphere](#), that can result in persistent extreme weather such as droughts, heatwaves and flooding," she said.

Other leading ice scientists this week predicted the complete collapse of sea ice in the Arctic within four years. "The final collapse ... is now happening and [will probably be complete by 2015/16](#)," said Prof Peter Wadhams of Cambridge University.

Sea ice in the Arctic is seen as a key indicator of global [climate change](#) because of its sensitivity to warming and its role in amplifying climate change. According to Nsidc, the warming of Arctic areas is now increasing at around 10% a decade.

Along with the extent of the sea ice, its thickness, or volume, has also significantly decreased in the last two decades. While this is harder to measure accurately, it is believed to have decreased around 40% since 1979.

The collapse of the ice cap was last night interpreted by environment groups as a signal of long-term climate warming caused by man.

"I hope that future generations will mark this day as a turning point, when a new spirit of global cooperation emerged to tackle the huge challenges we face. We must work together to protect the Arctic from the effects of climate change and unchecked corporate greed. This is now the defining environmental battle of our era," said Kumi Naidoo, director of Greenpeace International.

Other groups called on the UK government, and industries across the world to heed the warning signs from the Arctic and act "with urgency and ambition" to tackle climate change.

Rod Downie, polar expert at WWF-UK said: "With the speed of change we are now witnessing in the Arctic, the UK government must show national and global leadership in the urgent transition away from fossil fuels to a low carbon economy.

"This is further evidence that Shell's pursuit of hydrocarbons in the Arctic is reckless. It is completely irresponsible to drill for oil in such a fragile environment; there are simply too many unmanageable risks."

Author and environmental campaigner Bill McKibben said: "Our response [so far] has not been alarm, or panic, or a sense of emergency. It has been: 'Let's go up there and drill for oil'. There is no more perfect indictment of our failure to get to grips with the greatest problem we've ever faced."

Arctic sea ice follows an annual cycle of melting through the warm summer months and refreezing in the winter. It has shown a dramatic overall decline over the past 30 years.

Sea ice is known to play a critical role in regulating climate, acting as a giant mirror that reflects much of the sun's energy, helping to cool the Earth.

The UN Environment programme warned that the extra shipping and industry likely to result from the thawing of sea ice could further accelerate sea ice melting.

"There is an urgent need to calculate risks of local pollutants such as soot, or black carbon, in the Arctic. Soot darkens ice, making it soak up more of the sun's heat and quickening a melt," said UNEP spokesman Nick Nuttall in Nairobi.

• **This article and its headline were amended on 20 September.** The original wrongly said the ice extent had shrunk 18% in a year; this has been corrected to reflect the 18% decrease was 2012 against 2007, not 2012 against 2011.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/sep/19/arctic-ice-shrinks?newsfeed=true>

September 21, 2012

Environmental Satellite Cooperation Circle Announces 2012 Environmental Seed Grant Awards

United Religions Initiative

In the spirit of "Sustainable Peace for a Sustainable Environment," the theme of this year's United Nations [International Day of Peace](#), the [Environmental Satellite Cooperation Circle](#) announced the recipients of the 2012 Environmental Seed Grants on this year's Peace Day, Sept. 21.

The Environmental Satellite CC is one of the [United Religions Initiative](#)'s 550 member Cooperation Circles located around the world. The Environmental Seed Grants, now in their second year, are made possible through a gift from a California philanthropist committed to environmental protection and innovation.

The grants support awareness raising, education and training programs, individual projects and longer term programs carried out by Cooperation Circles in their local communities.

Twelve grants were awarded this year for projects in India, Uganda, Malawi, Palestine, Morocco and the United States. A total of 20 CCs are involved with CCs working collaboratively on several of the projects.

Projects in India include [enhancing sustainable livelihoods for tribal people](#) in the Bankura District of West Bengal; an [innovative eco-awareness education program](#) together with the planting of trees and medicinal plants in Kerala; and [awareness raising and environmental action](#) by primary school youth in Jharkhand through plantings along a highly-polluted river.

Ugandan projects include promoting environmental education through [environment clubs in schools](#) in the Kampala, Mukono and Wakiso districts and a [reforestation program](#) to mitigate the local impacts of climate change and preserve livelihoods of peace in Eastern Uganda.

Grants to three Malawi projects will [support the establishment of tree seedling nurseries](#) and seedling distribution for ecological restoration and to counteract climate change; the [removal of sanitary waste and rubbish](#) along roads and river banks and planting of trees and lemon grass along mountain rivers and streams in Bangwe Township; and the [establishment of a tree seedling nursery](#) for reforestation of the Likhubula River bank, together with promoting backyard gardening in a low-income township of Blantyre District.

Two grants to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region of URI include one that will create green space, plant olive trees, and [create a youth movement linking peacebuilding and the environment](#) in the city of Tiflet, Morocco, as well as a program involving seven Palestinian CCs in creating a multilingual (Arabic and English) [Environment Awareness Encyclopedia](#) website plus a competition for the best photos, cartoons, and environmental awareness program designs, which will be distributed throughout the MENA region.

Finally, two projects to be funded in the United States include one in South Florida that will [develop educational materials and training programs](#) for community groups on climate change

and ocean acidification and a project in the rural community of Cottonwood, Alabama, to [educate local groups](#) about the hazards of burning trash, especially plastics and other hazardous materials, as well as bringing faith-based groups together for a shared practical experience of building an earthen outdoor pizza oven.

These grants are for periods of up to one year, and progress and final reports will be posted on the URI Web site in the coming months.

http://www.uri.org/the_latest/2012/09/environmental_satellite_cooperation_circle_announces_2012_environmental_seed_grant_awards

September 23, 2012

God and mammals: In Kenya, religious leaders pray to thwart poaching

African religious leaders toured Kenya's Nairobi National Park to learn about the urgent threat to elephants and rhinos from poaching – and to share ideas about using their moral clout to stop it.

By Mike Pflanz
Christian Science Monitor

Nairobi, Kenya - Just before sunset on a low hill in [Nairobi](#)'s safari park, some 50 religious leaders stood in a solemn circle around a pit containing the charred remains of 13 tons of elephant ivory burned to keep it out of poachers' hands.

Led first by an Anglican Christian, then by a Muslim imam, a trio of Hindu devotees, and a Buddhist, prayers were offered, each asking for forgiveness for the damage that humans are inflicting on wildlife and the environment.

The quiet moment under the reddening sky followed a three-day gathering of African religious leaders, organized by conservationists keen to explain to these community trendsetters the reality of the current crisis in wildlife protection on the continent. The hope is that they then return home and pass the message on to their congregations.

Together, the 50 men and women here for the meeting reach more than 180 million followers, according to the [Alliance of Religions and Conservation](#), a Britain-based group that helped arrange the event.

“Protection of the environment and its creatures is I think one of the major points of convergence between all religions,” says Dekila Chungyalpa, a Buddhist and director of Sacred Earth, a new [World Wildlife Fund](#) program to forge closer connections between religions and conservationists. “We as conservationists can frame the discussion on stopping poaching, for example, in legal and ecological terms. But these religious leaders can frame it in a moral context, and talk about the religious duty to act to protect the environment. As an individual in a congregation, it then becomes unavoidable that you must act.”

The illegal wildlife trade is now the world's fifth-largest illicit transnational activity, after counterfeiting and the illegal trafficking of drugs, people, and oil, according to Global Financial Integrity in Washington.

It is worth as much as \$10 billion a year, and surging demand for elephant ivory in [China](#) and [Thailand](#) and rhino horn in [Vietnam](#) made 2011 the deadliest for more than two decades for these two iconic species.

There were more large-scale ivory seizures in Africa and in destination markets last year than since records began more than 20 years ago. In [South Africa](#) alone, 448 rhinos were poached in 2011, up from just 13 four years before.

"These statistics, they are just shocking. Truly few of us had any idea," said the Rev. Denis Kumbo, a Presbyterian pastor from Buea in western [Cameroon](#).

One recent afternoon, the Monitor joined him, another Presbyterian from [Kenya](#), and a Muslim from [Uganda](#) on a three-hour safari drive around [Nairobi National Park](#).

"There is the idea that some men go to the jungle to find meat for their family, and that is poaching," Mr. Kumbo went on. "Now we see that it is organized criminals, and they are using helicopters, night-vision goggles, automatic weapons. It is as sophisticated as the drugs trade."

Getting the message across

The challenge, says Hajjat A.K. Sebyala, a Muslim woman from [Kampala](#), Uganda's capital, is making the value of conserving wildlife clear to people who live far from wilderness areas and have other priorities.

"All this talk of elephants, of rhinos, what does this matter to people living in a city who are struggling for their daily bread?" she asks.

She tells a story of giving fellow Muslims tree seedlings as gifts during [Ramadan](#) three years ago. Everyone complained, asking why she did not offer sugar or porridge, something they could eat immediately.

"Then the second year," she says, "people saw the sugar had gone but the tree was still providing fruit. They wanted more seedlings. By the third year, they were fighting over the seedlings."

Her point, she says, is that it is important first to "improve understanding" about any given issue – in this case, protecting the environment and helping to stop poaching.

"You will only inspire positive and sustained action from people if they first understand," she says. "Without understanding, there will be no change."

At that moment, the safari van, its roof popped up to allow better wildlife spotting, stopped suddenly.

Isabella Nyabua, our [Kenya Wildlife Service](#) guide, pointed into the grasslands to the left, where a huge white rhino was ponderously ambling up from a mudbath.

'This truly is God's work'

“This is a gift. This truly is God’s work,” the Rev. Patrick Mureithi, the Kenyan Presbyterian in the car, said softly. Mrs. Sebyala stood and demanded pictures with the rhino in the distance, shooting questions at Ms. Nyabua.

The excitement and the awe at seeing the animal in the wild held everyone in the vehicle rapt for several long minutes. “This is a gift,” repeated Mr. Mureithi.

For Hamza Mtunu, director of the National Muslim Council of Tanzania, the job of all of the religious leaders attending the Nairobi event now is to try to convey that sense of spiritual awe to their congregations.

“It’s important to change people’s perception that protecting the wildlife and the environment is purely a secular concern; it’s not,” he says. “In the Quran, we hear not just of the importance of protecting animals, but also of how it is wrong not to act if you see someone harming animals or the environment.

“Yes, we learn that we are instructed to make use of the fruits of the environment,” he continues. “But killing animals for their teeth or their horn, for trinkets, is that not pure mischief and against Scripture? That is what I will go home and talk about.”

As the sun finally slipped beneath the horizon and the prayers at the ivory burning memorial hung in the air, one final promise was made by the leaders gathered there.

“We as the people of God,” they said together, “promise to work together to protect the creation of God.”

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2012/0923/God-and-mammals-In-Kenya-religious-leaders-pray-to-thwart-poaching>

September 27, 2012

Oxford theologian calls for national animal cruelty offenders’ register

Independent Catholic News

A call for a national animal cruelty offenders’ register will be made by Professor Andrew Linzey, a theologian at Oxford University and the director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, in an address at St Albans Cathedral on Sunday 30 September.

The Animal Offenders' register is recommended, along with compulsory empathy training, as a 'two stage approach based on Christian principles of repentance and compassion' in response to the many thousands of animal cruelty cases each year.

“For a long time, animal protectionists have been calling for stricter penalties for those convicted of animal abuse. And the usual measures, including fines and community orders, seem a pretty weak-kneed response to those who deliberately inflict cruelty. That is why some are now calling for automatic prison sentences for cruelty and long ones at that. But prison, it seems to me, is not the answer. We know that around 40% of prisoners reoffend and prison frequently dehumanises people.

"We have to find a way in which the seriousness of animal cruelty can be registered, offenders effectively treated, and animals saved from cruelty. This requires a radical rethink", argues Linzey.

“Compulsory empathy training for offenders would not be a soft option. Over a period of months, even years, people who are cruel would need to attend classes that require them to confront their own proclivities toward violence and learn to empathise with the suffering of animals.”

“Animal protectionists should step up to the plate and embrace this opportunity to lead empathy training courses. They should help fund them, run them, and staff them with professionals. It is too easy just to condemn; animal protectionists need to invest in the change they want to see in the world.”

“For those who cannot or will not undergo empathy training, or those who do not successfully complete the course, or those who reoffend, then their name needs to be placed on a national register. Those on the register would be forbidden from keeping an animal, or working with them. This register could be consulted by individuals and employers and it would become an offence to sell an animal to such a person or employ them in animal-related work.”

Professor Linzey argues that the low priority given to animal cruelty in the criminal justice system is reflective of a much deeper blindness: “Our society hasn't yet appreciated what is at stake for human beings. Cruelty is not just a vice; it is a social vice. There is a well-established link between animal abuse and human violence supported by hundreds of psychological, medical, sociological, and statistical studies. A world in which animal cruelty goes unchecked is bound to be a less morally safe world for human beings.”

This is an extract from a sermon to be preached by Professor Linzey at St Albans Cathedral on Sunday 30 September at 6.30pm. All are welcome to attend. Tickets are not required.

The Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey is a Member of the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford. He is Honorary Professor at the University of Winchester and Professor of Animal Ethics at the Graduate Theological Foundation, Indiana.

The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, founded in 2006 by its director Professor Andrew Linzey, is an independent Centre with the aim of pioneering ethical perspectives on animals through academic research, teaching and publication.

For more information see: <http://www.oxfordanimalethics.com>

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=21135>

October 1, 2012

Proclamation on Native American Heritage Day by California Governor Jerry Brown

By Gov. Jerry Brown

Indian Country Today Media Network

California has been home to human beings for at least 12,000 years, with the period of European-American settlement representing only a tiny fraction of this time. The first Europeans to arrive in California encountered hundreds of thousands of people organized into hundreds of distinct tribal groups. They flourished in the bountiful hills and valleys of what would someday become the Golden State.

The contact between these first Californians and successive waves of newcomers over the three succeeding centuries was marked by the utter devastation of Native American people, families and society. The colonial regimes of Spain and Mexico, through disease and slavery, reduced the indigenous population by more than half. Then the Gold Rush came, and with it a wave of new diseases and outright violence that halved the population again in just two years. The newborn State of California institutionalized violence against Native Americans, enacting policies of warfare, slavery and relocation that left few people alive and no tribe intact. In his 1851 address to the Legislature, our first Governor, Peter Hardeman Burnett, famously stated, "That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct, must be expected."

In spite of Burnett's prediction, California today is home to the largest population of Native Americans in the 50 states, including both the rebounding numbers of our native Tribes and others drawn to the Golden State by its myriad attractions. The success of tribal businesses and the rise of tribal members in all walks of life today stand as testament to the resilience and enduring spirit of our native peoples. If Governor Burnett could not envision a future California including Native Americans, it is just as impossible for us today to envision one without them.

NOW THEREFORE I, EDMUND G. BROWN JR., Governor of the State of California, do hereby proclaim September 28, 2012, as "Native American Day."

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of California to be affixed this 8th day of September 2012.

October 2, 2012

Editorial from *Journal of Animal Ethics*: Leading Animal Ethicists Call for Full Disclosure on Testing

Johns Hopkins University Press Release

Patients prescribed drugs tested on animals should be told details of exactly what it involved, including any suffering caused, say some of the world's leading animal ethicists.

The editors of the *Journal of Animal Ethics* (JAE), published this month by the University of Illinois Press, want full disclosure on the nature of testing used in drug development. They say people should know "not only whether animals were used, but also what kind, how many were used, the precise procedures to which they were subject, and the nature and severity of the pain and suffering, if any, that they had to endure."

The editors point to the comments of Lord Robert Winston, the famous pioneer of fertility treatment, in a debate on animal experiments in the House of Lords in the United Kingdom. Lord Winston stated: "I do not think we can argue that there is any substitute for animal research. Of course, reduction is possible but I do not think that substitution is ... We need to say very clearly that it would be unthinkable to take any drug which has not been tested on an intact animal. In fact, there is a case for having legislation to make it clear that a particular drug has only been possible for human consumption because of animal testing. This could be stamped on the packet, rather like a cigarette packet."¹

However, they consider Lord Winston's proposal too modest: "Animals are subject to a whole range of uses in laboratories from the routine testing of household products, cosmetics (though some limitations have been placed on this in Europe) including the testing of agricultural products, poisons, sprays and herbicides, even fire-extinguisher substances. And that doesn't include the use of animals in military experiments. If full disclosure, based on the right to know, is the position of animal researchers, and they have nothing to hide, there can be no grounds for postulating that only medical products should be singled out. Let us know all the details, the benefits (if any) and also the costs to the animals themselves."

In the editorial the authors also call for information about "the way in which some animal experiments lead to no worthwhile discovery, those experiments that have impeded medical progress, even how many animal-tested drugs have been recalled after harming humans." The editors ask whether we should not all have the right to know "about the experiments on human animals that have also, directly or indirectly, contributed to the increase of scientific knowledge

as well as drugs and vaccines?” They suggest that Lord Winston may “have overlooked the long history of experiments on human subjects, including prisoners of war, enlisted soldiers, people of color, and the mentally challenged. Have these contributed nothing to medical advances? To take just one example, what of the early clinical trials of tuberculin treatments on orphan children (“intact [*human*] animals”) that took place in Philadelphia in 1908?”²

They call for a full disclosure: “Yes, let there be disclosure. Let the facts and the history be known. Let us not shirk the details. Anything less may serve particular interests but is less than the full disclosure we have a right to expect.”

The *JAE* has been launched by a US and UK academic partnership with the goal of widening international debate about the moral status of animals, and is the result of years of collaboration between the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics and the University of Illinois Press. It is edited by the internationally known theologian the Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey, Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, and Professor Priscilla Cohn, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Penn State University and Associate Director of the Centre.

Multidisciplinary in nature and international in scope, the *JAE* covers theoretical and applied aspects of animal ethics. To subscribe to the *Journal*, please visit the *Journal*’s website at <http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jane.html>.

For more information, please contact Sam Calvert, Samantha Calvert Marketing & PR, sam@samcalvert.plus.com / +44 (0)1782 505430 / +44 (0)7967 042050.

Notes to editors

¹ Lord Robert Winston, *Hansard* (House of Lords), 24 October 2011, column 623, available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/111024-0002.htm#11102443000399>, see also the report in the Daily Telegraph for the following day; available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/8858219/Drugs-should-carry-animal-testing-labels.html>.

² Susan E. Lederer, *Subjected to Science: Human Experimentation in America before the Second World War* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), see pp. 78-82.

- The Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey is a Member of the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford. He is Honorary Professor at the University of Winchester and Professor of Animal Ethics at the Graduate Theological Foundation, Indiana. He has written or edited 20 books, including *Animal Theology* (SCM Press/University of Illinois Press, 1994) and *Creatures of the Same God* (Winchester University Press/Lantern Books, 2007), and *Why Animal Suffering Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
- The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, founded in 2006 by its director Professor Andrew Linzey, is an independent Centre with the aim of pioneering ethical perspectives on animals through academic research, teaching and publication. The

Centre has more than 50 Fellows drawn from a variety of academic disciplines from throughout the world. For more information about the Centre and its Fellows, please see its website at www.oxfordanimalethics.com.

- The Centre is dedicated to the memory of the celebrated Catalan philosopher José Ferrater Mora. His prodigious scholarship is widely acclaimed, and the Centre honours his name because of his outstanding contribution to humanitarian thought, particularly in the area of animal ethics.

http://altweb.jhsph.edu/news/2012/call_for_full_disclosure_testing.html

October 3, 2012

Bhutan aims to be first 100% organic nation

channelnewsasia

NEW DELHI: The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, famed for seeking "happiness" for its citizens, is aiming to become the first nation in the world to turn its home-grown food and farmers 100 percent organic.

The tiny Buddhist-majority nation wedged between China and India has an unusual and some say enviable approach to economic development, centred on protecting the environment and focusing on mental well-being.

Its development model measuring "Gross National Happiness" instead of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been discussed at the United Nations and has been publicly backed by leaders from Britain and France, among others.

It banned television until 1999, keeps out mass tourism to shield its culture from foreign influence, and most recently set up a weekly "pedestrians' day" on Tuesdays that sees cars banned from town centres.

Its determination to chart a different path can be seen in its new policy to phase out artificial chemicals in farming in the next 10 years, making its staple foods of wheat and potatoes, as well as its fruits, 100 percent organic.

"Bhutan has decided to go for a green economy in light of the tremendous pressure we are exerting on the planet," Agriculture Minister Pema Gyamtsho told AFP in an interview by telephone from the capital Thimphu.

"If you go for very intensive agriculture it would imply the use of so many chemicals, which is not in keeping with our belief in Buddhism, which calls for us to live in harmony with nature."

Bhutan has a population of just over 700,000, two-thirds of whom depend on farming in villages dotted around fertile southern plains near India and the soaring Himalayan peaks and deep valleys to the north.

Overwhelmingly forested, no more than three percent of the country's land area is used for growing crops, says Gyamtsho, with the majority of farmers already organic and reliant on rotting leaves or compost as a natural fertiliser.

"Only farmers in areas that are accessible by roads or have easy transport have access to chemicals," he explained, saying chemical use was already "very low" by international standards.

In the large valleys, such as the one cradling the sleepy capital Thimphu, chemicals are used to kill a local weed that is difficult to take out by hand -- a challenge compounded by a lack of farm labour.

Elsewhere, the fertiliser urea is sometimes added to soil, while a fungicide to control leaf rust on wheat is also available.

"We have developed a strategy that is step-by-step. We cannot go organic overnight," Gyamtsho said, describing a policy and roadmap which were formally adopted by the government last year.

"We have identified crops for which we can go organic immediately and certain crops for which we will have to phase out the use of chemicals, for rice in certain valleys for example."

Bhutan's only competitor for the first "100 percent organic" title is the tiny self-governing island of Niue in the South Pacific, which has a population of only 1,300. It aims to reach its objective by 2015-2020.

Nadia Scialabba, a global specialist on organic farming at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, says the organic food market and its premium prices are attractive for small countries and territories.

"This is happening in very small countries that are not competitive on quantity, but they would like to be competitive in quality," she told AFP.

The global organics market was estimated to be worth 44.5 billion euros (57 billion dollars) in 2010, according to figures from the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements.

Bhutan sends rare mushrooms to Japan, vegetables to upmarket hotels in Thailand, its highly-prized apples to India and elsewhere, as well as red rice to the United States.

By shunning fertilisers and other chemicals, the country also stands to gain by reducing its import bill -- a particular concern for a country short on foreign currency.

Peter Melchett, policy director at Britain's organic Soil Association, says the main benefit of becoming 100 percent organic is an assurance of quality to consumers.

"Because there won't be pesticides or other chemicals on sale in the kingdom, they would be able to offer a high level of guarantees that products are organic," Melchett explained.

In countries like Spain, for example, there is a problem of contamination when organic farms are next to highly industrialised producers using large quantities of artificial chemicals, Melchett said.

"It's difficult for organic farmers in those circumstances to keep their crops and supply-chain free of contamination."

Bhutan's organic policy would "start to give the country a reputation of high quality organic food which in the long-run would give them a market advantage and the possibility of price premiums," he added.

Jurmi Dorji, a member of the 103-strong Daga Shingdrey Pshogpa farmers' association in southern Bhutan, says his fellow members are in favour of the policy.

"More than a decade ago, people realised that the chemicals were not good for farming," he told AFP. "I cannot say everyone has stopped using chemicals but almost 90 percent have."

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/featurenews/view/1229314/1/.html>

October 7, 2012

Prayer for the Air, Water, Earth, Fire of Our Planet

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow
The Shalom Center

We invite you to meditate upon this photo of Earth suspended in space, seen from the barren surface of the Moon — a warning as well as a platform. You might first expand the photo by clicking on it; pause to meditate on it; and then lift up this prayer. We have used it at several different gatherings of protest against the actions of corporations that are wounding Planet Earth, our mother and our selves. — Rabbi Arthur Waskow

You, O Holy One of Being —
Interbreathing of all life —
Known to all Your cultures and communities
By many sacred Names;

You, YYYYhhhhwwwhhhh, [*pronounce by just breathing*]
Who breathe transforming life into us
Just as we breathe a transforming Voice into the Shofar;
You, Who breathe life into us all
So that we breathe in what the trees breathe out
And the trees breathe in what we breathe out —
You who breathe into us the wisdom
To shape our breath into words,

To shape our words so that they aim
Toward wisdom —

May the words we are with Your help sharing today,
Speak deeply — with Your help — to our nation and the world.
Help us all to know that the sharing of our breath with all of life
Is the very proof, the very truth, that we are One.

These ancient words remind us:
“I am The Interbreathing of all life,
And of Me, for Me, from Me, with Me,
Comes all the Earth.
You do not own it.
You must not poison and destroy it.
You must share its bounty with all life —
For you are but My guests and visitors.” (*paraphrased from Lev. 25*)

Remind us that if some few among us,
Drunk on their own wealth and power,
Pour poison into earth and air and water,
Then it is poison that we ALL eat and breathe and drink.
Our sustenance arises from the interweb of life,
And it is only through greed and coercion
That it is gobbled and poisoned by the few.

Together today we call upon our selves
And all our neighbors
To prevent the over-burning of our fossil fuels
That imposes drought and famine on our farms,
Floods our rivers and our coastlines,
Scorches our planet.

We know that what we call the Climate Crisis
Is a crisis in the balance of the gases
In our planet's atmosphere,
A crisis in the Breathing of our planet,
A Crisis in Your Name,
YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh [*pronounce by just breathing*]
Yes, a crisis in the very Name of God.

So we light for You this candle,
This fire of enlightenment,
To light up the Rainbow
In the many-colored faces of Your human cultures
And in the many-colored faces of all life-forms;
To affirm that the Earth is not for burning;

To affirm that in all our faces
Is the One Spark of Your Presence. [*Light candle*]

Send us forth from here,
With the commitment to turn these words into action;
Into compassion, into justice, into healing —
Into shaping the Beloved Community
Throughout the Earth.

We call out
In the Name of the One Who is many;
In the name of the many who are One.

And may the people say, Amen! Ah'meyn! Ah'min!

<https://theshalomcenter.org/prayer-air-water-earth-fire-our-planet>

October 9, 2012

TRUST Oregon Film Released as Oregon's Court of Appeals Decides to Hear the Case

Our Children's Trust

Eugene, Oregon – Last Thursday the Oregon Court of Appeals decided to hear the climate change lawsuit brought by two Eugene youth.

The lawsuit was filed against Governor Kitzhaber and the State of Oregon for failing to protect essential natural resources, including the atmosphere, as required under the Public Trust Doctrine. Kelsey Juliana, Olivia Chernaik, and their mothers brought the case to compel the Oregon State government to create a viable climate recovery plan for reducing carbon dioxide emissions in order to protect Oregon's natural resources. "I hope the Court of Appeals understands the need to protect the atmosphere to ensure a livable planet for mine and future generations," said 16-year-old Kelsey Juliana.

Today Kelsey's story documenting her concerns over Oregon's changing climate is being released in [TRUST Oregon](#), a mini-documentary film. Her film is the eighth film in the ten-part, award-winning documentary series [Stories of TRUST: Calling for Climate Recovery](#) featuring the voices of daring youth from across the country who are pursuing lawsuits and asking the ruling generation to hear their climate change concerns. TRUST Oregon will be part of the Climate Reality Project's 24-hours of Reality on November 14 and has already been prescreened at the Women's Congress for Future Generations in Moab, Utah.

"Kelsey is an amazing inspiration and her story is remarkable," says Tanya Sanerib one of the lawyers representing Kelsey and Olivia. "I am delighted Kelsey's tale will be shared with more than just the judges who are deciding her case. By capturing Kelsey's story on film, her hope and

passion for Oregon and our natural world can be shared beyond the lawsuit and inspire other youth leaders to demand action for our climate before it is too late."

Thus far, the TRUST films have made an impression with their audiences with films being selected to air at festivals from Montana and Colorado to New York and the UK. The films share the youngest generations' call for action. Current climate science calls for a return to 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by the end of the century.

To do its part, Oregon must reduce the state's carbon dioxide emissions by six percent each year or risk our climate reaching tipping points – like the defrosting of the tundra and resulting release of methane gas – beyond which there is no return. Each year Oregon delays making the necessary reductions, makes it harder to protect our climate system and the Oregon way of life.

To learn more about the Oregon Climate Case visit:

<http://crag.org/2011/05/05/oregon-youth-go-to-court-to-halt-climate-disr...>

<http://ourchildrenstrust.org/state/oregon>

Learn the Story Behind the Youth Climate Case:

<http://ourchildrenstrust.org/sites/default/files/Oregon%20Press%20Release.October%208%20Final.pdf>

<http://ourchildrenstrust.org/article/393/trust-oregon-film-released-oregons-court-appeals-decides-hear-case>

October 18, 2012

Cue the math: McKibben's roadshow takes aim at Big Oil

By Wen Stephenson
Grist

It was game time. The Saturday night crowd on the Vermont campus was festive, boisterous, pumped. People cheered and whooped when told that one of their heroes, climate activist Tim DeChristopher — serving a two-year federal sentence for his civil disobedience opposing new oil and gas drilling in Utah — would soon be back on the field.

When the man on the stage, 350.org's Bill McKibben, said it was time to march not just on Washington but on the headquarters of fossil fuel companies — "it's time to march on Dallas" — and asked those to stand who'd be willing to join in the fight, seemingly every person filling the University of Vermont's cavernous Ira Allen Chapel, some 800 souls, rose to their feet.

McKibben and 350, the folks who brought us the Keystone XL pipeline protests, are now calling for a nationwide divestment campaign aimed at fossil fuel companies' bottom line. Beginning with student-led campaigns on college campuses, modeled on the anti-apartheid campaigns of the 1980s, they'll pressure institutions to withdraw all investments from big oil and coal and gas. Their larger goal is to ignite a morally charged movement to strip the industry of its legitimacy.

“The fossil fuel industry has behaved so recklessly that they should lose their social license — their veneer of respectability,” McKibben tells his audience. “You want to take away our planet and our future? We’re going to take away your money and your good name.”

I was there in Burlington on Saturday to spend some time with the 350.org team, watch their run-throughs, and attend the night’s show, a sort of “dress rehearsal” for the 20-city [Do The Math tour](#), officially launching in Seattle on Nov. 7, the day after the election. The tour builds off of McKibben’s *Rolling Stone* article, [“Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,”](#) which appeared in July and is one of the most widely read pieces in the magazine’s history. Buzz is clearly building, and not just in McKibben’s home state of Vermont. The Seattle show is sold out. The Boston show, on Nov. 15, sold out in less than 24 hours and has moved to a venue three times larger, the Orpheum Theater, with 2,700 seats. ([Full disclosure](#): McKibben sits on Grist’s board of directors.)

Part multimedia lecture — with video appearances by 350.org allies like Naomi Klein, James Hansen, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu — and part organizing rally, with a live musical performance, the Burlington event gave a taste of what’s to come. The tour will “evolve,” with different elements and onstage guests along the way — for example, Klein and filmmaker Josh Fox, of [Gasland](#) fame, will join McKibben onstage in various cities. Although it was a little rough around the edges on Saturday night, nobody seemed to mind (McKibben was playing, wisely, to his hometown crowd). The basic structure and central message of the show were well in place — and, just as important for 350’s objectives, the organizing wheels were well in motion.

As 350’s Matt Leonard, serving as “tour manager” for Do The Math, explained it to me, the tour isn’t simply about “getting butts in seats” for a lecture or concert (thus the relatively low emphasis on the musical guests in each city, most of whom are yet to be announced). It’s about getting “the right people” in those seats. “This isn’t just for publicity and outreach,” he says. “We’re putting tremendous effort into making sure students, community leaders, college trustees, and influential decision-makers are a part of this event, because they are the ones that will turn this from a talk into a hard-hitting campaign.”

Sure enough, there in Burlington, students at UVM and other area colleges were already talking up divestment campaigns. Elsewhere in New England, a [student-led divestment movement](#), spearheaded by the network [Students for a Just and Stable Future](#), is off and running — at Harvard, Tufts, Brandeis, Amherst, the University of New Hampshire, and a dozen other campuses. Similar campaigns are being discussed on campuses around the country. And on Saturday night, McKibben told the crowd that Hampshire College in western Massachusetts, the first to divest from South Africa in 1977, is the first school in the nation to [move toward divestment from fossil fuels](#).

This is real. And it’s just getting started.

Clearly, McKibben and 350 know their audience for this tour, and it's not simply the general public. Far from attempting to communicate climate science to the uninformed, or disinformed, in a lowest-common-denominator way, Do the Math is about lighting a fire under the movement, rallying the troops, and mustering forces for a major new offensive — what the Do the Math website bills as “the next phase of the climate movement.”

Before heading up to Burlington, I asked McKibben what that means. “Fighting Keystone,” he told me by email, “we learned we could stand up to the fossil fuel industry. We demonstrated some moxie.” But, he added: “We also figured out that we're not going to win just fighting one pipeline at a time. We have to keep all those battles going, but we also have to play some offense, go at the heart of the problem.”

The *Rolling Stone* piece and McKibben's Do the Math lecture leave no doubt what the heart of the problem is. Drawing on [a widely circulated report from the Carbon Tracker Initiative](#), a group of U.K. financial experts and environmentalists, McKibben shows that the fossil fuel industry's known reserves contain five times the amount of carbon needed to raise the planet's temperature more than 2 degrees C above preindustrial levels — the point beyond which, according to international consensus, all bets for a livable climate are off.

As McKibben points out, we've already burned enough carbon to raise the global thermometer almost 1 degree C, with disastrous effects. At the current rate, we'll have burned enough additional carbon in the next 16 years to propel us over the 2-degree line this century. To prevent that from happening — to slow the process down and ultimately stop it — the fossil fuel industry would need to commit to keeping 80 percent of its reserves in the ground, forever, and help bring about a rapid shift to clean energy.

Obviously, given the sheer amount of money at stake — many trillions of dollars — the odds of anything like that happening under current political conditions are nil. McKibben is arguing that, if there's any hope at all of preserving a livable climate, those conditions must change decisively. And they can — but only if and when enough people understand the simple climate math and realize that the fossil fuel industry is prepared to cook humanity off the planet unless somebody stops it.

Far more than money is at stake. At risk, the Do the Math presentation makes clear, are countless human lives. The most affecting display in Burlington was a show of faces of [people, all around the world](#), who are already suffering the impact of climate change — in Kenya, Haiti, Brazil, India, and Pakistan, and many other places, including the United States. Projected on the screen behind McKibben, they're a powerful reminder of the human face, and cost, of global warming.

Likewise, this tour, and the movement it aims to galvanize, are about far more than math. They're about justice and injustice, right and wrong — what you could call the moral equation.

The tone of the climate movement is shifting. Maybe it all goes back to 2009 and 2010, and the failure of Copenhagen, the collapse of climate legislation in the Senate, and the disillusioning,

infuriating lack of climate leadership by Barack Obama. You could feel it in the air then — a palpable sense that the system itself was hopelessly paralyzed and corrupted, and that politics-as-usual would never be enough to save us. With a kind of desperation, but with history as a guide, people began talking and writing in earnest about building a grassroots movement based on something more, something broader and deeper, than all the lobbying money and the corporate-style, K-Street-friendly communications strategies. A movement built on something more like moral outrage.

McKibben's tone has changed markedly as well. There were hints of it in those brutal opening chapters of [Eaarth](#), released in the spring of 2010, where he surveyed the planet's damage and the almost certain ravages to come. And when the watered-down-to-nothing climate bill died in the Senate that July, he let loose with a much-quoted broadside headlined "[We're hot as hell and we're not going to take it anymore](#)." As though finally venting emotions long suppressed (he's a native New Englander, after all), he wrote with trademark but now seething understatement: "I'm a mild-mannered guy, a Methodist Sunday school teacher. Not quick to anger. So what I want to say is: This is fucked up. The time has come to get mad, and then to get busy."

Still every bit the soft-spoken, self-effacing speaker — and still witty, even laugh-out-loud funny, on stage — McKibben has both darkened and toughened his message. It's as though, as a man of faith, he's discovered his "prophetic voice." (In all seriousness, you should hear him preach sometime. He knows how to use a pulpit.) He may not thunder — that will never be his style — but he's become, I want to say, a sort of Jeremiah. (I'm sure he'd reject the comparison.)

McKibben seems to have remembered a basic truth of transformative social movements: that they're driven not merely by positive visions — much less any simplistic, poll-tested "win-win" market optimism — but by sheer moral outrage at some deep, intolerable injustice. The movements that change the world are moral struggles.

At a key moment, maybe *the* key moment, in McKibben's Do the Math talk, he plays a video clip of [Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson at the Council on Foreign Relations in June](#). McKibben eviscerates him in a darkly comic back-and-forth that would make Jon Stewart proud. Tillerson, having made news by acknowledging that climate change is real, and that warming "will have an impact," goes on to express confidence that "we'll adapt."

"It's an engineering problem, with engineering solutions," intones the onscreen Tillerson — who, as McKibben notes on stage, makes \$100,000 a day.

"No," McKibben replies. "It's a greed problem. Yours."

On Saturday, after McKibben, Leonard, and the rest of 350's small production crew ran through the Do the Math script in the empty, echoing, freezing-cold Ira Allen Chapel, I tagged along with them for lunch a short walk from the UVM campus. Over soup, basmati rice, and lentils, McKibben and I had a chance to talk, and I asked him how the idea for the tour had been born.

It all goes back, he said, to that seminal 2011 report from the Carbon Tracker Initiative in London. When McKibben and friend Naomi Klein, a 350.org board member, read the U.K. report early last spring — and saw the numbers — they both realized the implications.

“It exposed a real vulnerability of the fossil fuel industry,” McKibben told me, “because it made clear what the outcome of this process was going to be if we continued.”

There was a long pause. “There’s always been this slight unreality to the whole climate change thing,” he continued. “Because most people, at some level, kept thinking — and rightly so — *Yeah, but no one will ever actually do this. No one will actually, knowingly, destroy the planet by climate change.* But once you’ve seen those numbers, it’s clear, that’s exactly what they’re knowingly planning to do. So that changes the equation, you know?”

Without making any apologies for the fossil fuel industry, I noted that the people who built the industry didn’t set out to wreck the planet. It’s an incredible historical accident that we ended up in this position.

McKibben nodded. There was, of course, “a sound historical reason” for the development of fossil fuels. “But that sound historical reason vanished the minute Jim Hansen basically explained, 25 years ago, that we’re about to do in the Earth. And now that we’ve melted the Arctic — it’s well under way — at this point, it’s outrageous, is all it is.”

That sort of gut-level outrage, I suggested, is very different from the sort of positive messaging we’ve been told will motivate people to act on climate.

“There’s been an endless discussion over the years, among people in the climate community, about the right framing or messaging, or whatever,” McKibben told me. “I’ve never paid that much attention to it. Because I’ve always had fairly good luck getting people to listen simply by saying what seemed obvious to me — each time we got a new set of facts, explaining it, setting it out.”

That raised my eyebrows, I admit. Then came the kicker: “Now we have the new, and in some ways, the most important set of facts since the original science around climate. This stuff on who owns what, in terms of reserves — it’s the [Keeling Curve](#) of climate economics and politics. These are the iconic numbers for understanding where we are now.”

So can divestment, I asked, be an effective strategy? Can it generate enough economic leverage to make a difference?

“I think it’s a way to get a fight started,” McKibben said without hesitation, “and to get people in important places talking actively about the culpability of the fossil fuel industry for the trouble that we’re in. And once that talk starts, I think it does start imposing a certain kind of economic pressure. Their high stock price is entirely justified by the thought that they’re going to get all their reserves out of the ground. And I think we’ve already made an argument that it shouldn’t be a legitimate thing to be doing.”

In other words, as in South Africa, as with Big Tobacco, there's economic leverage in the moral case?

"Absolutely."

What, then, I wanted to know, is the "theory of change," right now, in Bill McKibben's mind?

"It's not a question of coming up with the right set of policies," he said. "Nobody's really come up with a new set of policy stuff for 20 years. We just haven't ever tried the things that the economists all told us to try, because the fossil fuel industry got in the way. So it's about figuring out what power is in the way."

"Look, our job as organizers, our most important job, is to take the next step — throw a big rock in the pond, see what ripples it creates, and then figure out how to surf those and how to launch the next one. We think that if we're able to explain to people what the fossil fuel industry is doing, it will weaken their position — weaken it morally, politically, and economically. And that will make more things possible than are possible now."

For all the cheering and whooping, the real emotional climax of the Burlington show came midway through, when musical guest Anais Mitchell sang a devastating, solo-acoustic cover of Bob Dylan's "[A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall](#)." With images of this summer's epic flooding in the Philippines on the screen behind her, Mitchell's performance not only evoked the civil rights, antiwar, and early environmental movements of the '60s. Her high, piercing vocal also captured the sadness and fear behind McKibben's numbers. It was cathartic, I think, for the audience. It certainly was for me.

But McKibben's presentation, and the whole Do the Math show, evokes much more than those emotions of sadness and fear. It also articulates what had been missing from climate advocacy, at least in public, for so long — that sense of outrage.

And yet, if anything, the show doesn't punch hard enough. It spells out the new carbon math, and it shows us those human faces, but it never really spells out what science tells us are the all-too-likely impacts of runaway warming. It doesn't paint the nightmare vision of the planet today's children and future generations could inhabit if the fossil fuel industry and its political enablers have their way — what Joe Romm aptly calls "[hell and high water](#)," and what McKibben himself already portrayed in [Eaarth](#). [New research suggests](#) that 400,000 people are already dying around the world each year from the effects of climate change, a number that could well rise into the millions. The show could lay such numbers — such math — at the industry's feet.

In fact, there's another Dylan song that might be a better, more fitting, anthem. "You that hide behind desks/I just want you to know/I can see through your masks," Dylan sings in "[Masters of War](#)." Only now, instead of the bomb-building military-industrial complex, it's the planet-burning carbon-industrial complex Dylan could be addressing. "You've thrown the worst fear/That can ever be hurled," he practically spits. "Fear to bring children/Into the world ..."

Let me ask you one question
Is your money that good
Will it buy you forgiveness
Do you think that it could
I think you will find
When your death takes its toll
All the money you made
Will never buy back your soul

Some of the hardest, toughest, most *prophetic* song lyrics ever written. And if I have any advice for McKibben and my friends at 350.org, I'd humbly suggest that's exactly the kind of thing we need. Maybe not Dylan; we need newer voices. But we also need that fierce moral indictment — pointed where it belongs, at the perpetrators of the crime unfolding against humanity and the Earth.

Full disclosures: *Bill McKibben is a member of the Grist board of directors. Wen Stephenson serves on the volunteer working board of Better Future Project, a nonprofit in Cambridge, Mass., that works closely with 350.org, and he helped launch the volunteer grassroots network 350 Massachusetts, in which he is active.*

Wen Stephenson, a former editor at The Atlantic and The Boston Globe, contributes frequently to Grist and has written about climate and culture for the Globe, The New York Times, and Slate. On Twitter: @wenstephenson

<http://grist.org/climate-energy/cue-the-math-mckibbens-roadshow-takes-aim-at-big-oil/>

October 18, 2012

Church support for community energy is vital tool in combatting fuel poverty, says Energy Secretary

The Church of England Press Release

The Church of England is well placed to support community energy initiatives which will help the fuel poor while supporting energy projects in the developing world, said Ed Davey, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change today.

He was speaking at a roundtable meeting at Church House, Westminster to launch the Community Energy Coalition's* '*Manifesto for a community energy revolution*'. He added that the Church was good at motivating people to help build a new sense of society

The coalition is supported by Shrinking the Footprint the Church of England's national environment campaign along with other organisations including the Co-operative, the National Trust, The National Federation of Women's Institutes and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

The Secretary of State spoke of the importance of community energy initiatives and the Government's commitment to them. He said that the decline in cost of solar power could help poor communities in the UK and internationally gain access to cheaper energy with local ownership. The Church, he said "was particularly well placed to make those links with the poor".

The Church of England has more than 100 solar installations on churches across the country including a Brighton Energy Co-Operative partnership. Renewable heat is also an area of growth with an increasing number of churches taking advantage of new technology (GSHP & ASHP & Biomass). [A national conference](#) run by the Archbishops' Council's Cathedral and Church Buildings Division is being held on 3rd December giving practical guidance to churches keen to engage with community energy.

David Shreeve the Church of England's National Environment adviser said: "With a Church of England presence in every community the Secretary of State is right to comment on the importance of our churches being well placed to encourage the scaling up of local renewable projects which puts benefit straight back into community."

Paul Monaghan, Head of Socials Goals at The Co-operative, said: "The majority of people in the UK want to see a massive increase in renewable energy, however, there is a powerful minority set against this. Community-owned renewables offer a brilliant way to break this log jam, and this Manifesto sets out what needs to happen in order for this to happen. Our towns, villages and districts are full of hundreds of groups all chomping at the bit to do their bit to generate and save energy locally and fight climate change."

Notes

The full manifesto can be read at www.uk.coop/energymanifesto

*In February 2012, The Co-operative and Forum for the Future led the formation of the 'Community Energy Coalition'. www.forumforthefuture.org/project/community-energy-coalition/overview

At the Liberal Democrat Conference in September 2012, Ed Davey MP, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, said "I want nothing short of a community energy revolution. Let's start by buying energy together. But let's also save it and generate it together. Just look at Germany to see what is possible...Nearly 600 energy co-operatives. So next spring I will bring forward with a new community energy strategy - so people can and will see the benefits of a green economy for them".

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2012/10/church-support-for-community-energy-is-vital-tool-in-combatting-fuel-poverty,-says-energy-secretary.aspx>

October 23, 2012

Animal cruelty crimes should be treated with the same seriousness as crimes against humans, claims leading psychologist.

Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics

“Almost without exception, the perpetrators of animal cruelty crimes are the same individuals who carry out aggressive and violent acts including assault, partner and child abuse. Thus, animal cruelty crimes should be treated with the same seriousness as crimes against humans. Moreover, the punishments should reflect their severity”, claims leading psychologist Professor Eleonora Gullone, Associate Professor in Psychology at Monash University, Australia.

The claim is made in Professor Gullone’s pioneering new book *Animal Cruelty, Antisocial Behaviour, and Aggression: More Than A Link* published this month. She argues that animal cruelty behaviours are a form of antisocial behaviour that appear right alongside human aggression and violence. The book maintains that “by enacting adequate animal cruelty laws that properly indicate the seriousness of the animal cruelty crime committed, future violence toward both human and animal victims can be prevented.”

The book is part of the Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics book series in partnership with the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. The Palgrave Macmillan book series is jointly edited by the internationally known theologian the Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey, Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, and Professor Priscilla Cohn, Emeritus Professor in Philosophy at Penn State University and Associate Director of the Centre.

In addition to being Professor in Psychology at Monash University, Professor Gullone is a Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society, the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, UK, and the Institute for Human-Animal Connection, University of Denver, USA. Her research areas include emotional development and regulation, antisocial behaviour and animal cruelty. Professor Gullone’s research has focussed upon the emotional development of children and adolescents, including empathy development and she has published more than 100 articles in internationally renowned journals.

Commenting on the publication, Professor Andrew Linzey says “This carefully researched and groundbreaking book provides clinching evidence that a world in which animal cruelty goes unchecked is bound to be a morally unsafe world for human beings”.

Animal Cruelty, Antisocial Behaviour, and Aggression: More Than A Link is published on 26 October in the U.K. priced GBP 55.00 and 27 November in the US priced USD 85.00.

For more information about the book, see [here](#).

<http://www.oxfordanimaethics.com/2012/10/animal-cruelty-crimes-should-be-treated-with-the-same-seriousness-as-crimes-against-humans-claims-leading-psychologist/>

October 26, 2012

Green Festival, Green Hevra, Green Earth

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow
The Shalom Center

Green is the color of today.

Our own Green Hevra, the green of trees and grasses, and the green of Islam in one of its great festivals.

Today, as many of us who are involved in the Green Hevra (there's a description below) are both taking joy in and mulling over the excellent work we did in an intensive two-day retreat this week, we might also pause to take note of today's beginning of the four-day Muslim Festival of *Eid-al-Idha*.

The festival remembers and honors a moment that Jews remember as well. Abraham / Ibrahim / Avraham prepared to obey God's command to offer up his son as a sacrifice – and then at the last moment heard God calling on him to save his son and offer instead a ram caught by its horns in a nearby thicket. And obeyed.

Muslims honor his willingness to obey God, and they translate this honor into feeding the poor and the outcast. Drawing on Ibrahim's offering of the ram, Muslims will take the meat of a ritually slaughtered lamb to share with their extended families and with the poor.

The Shalom Center says to the Muslim world — *Eid Mubarak!* May your festival be blessed!

May it help us all to make real the teaching of these days: "Do not kill your children; Feed the poor!"

May we deeply learn that our present mode of life is lifting the deadly "knife" of overburning fossil fuels — the knife that will kill our children and grandchildren. May we turn away, to make an offering of life, instead.

I've just returned from a two-day intensive retreat of the year-old Green Hevra, a network of about 15 Eco-Jewish organizations, ranging from Jewish organic farms and an eco-focused summer camp to an educational center for kids in Jewish schools for learning Torah of the Earth to groups focused on the hands-on physical greening of Jewish buildings to several organizations (including The Shalom Center) that fuse Jewish wisdom and practice with eco-policy activism.

The gathering was deeply joyful for me, both collectively and personally — because the Hevra took several important decisions to address the climate crisis, and because the Hevra honored me as a teacher in a circle of blessing.

The *GREEN HEVRA* decided to adopt “Growing a Sustainable Climate” as a focus for the work of the Hevra as a whole and as an important theme in much (not all) of the work of the member organizations.

We identified two special times for lifting up this work and reaching out to involve more people at the grass-roots of Jewish life:

§ Shabbat B’Har (May 4-5, 2013), when Jews read the Torah portion of Leviticus 25 about the *shmitah* (or “sabbatical”) seventh year of restfulness for society and the Earth;

§ and Tu B’Shvat, the Festival of Rebirthing Trees (January 14-15, 2014). Here there will be a special emphasis on involving decision makers (national, state, local, and corporate) in living and literally eating the fruits of Jewish wisdom about moving to a sustainable climate..

There was a strong sense that while the broad movement to address the onrush of climate change must include both “the against” and “the for,” the work of the Green Hevra would lean toward the “for.”

What does this mean? Facing climate crisis demands both opposition to the present structures of fossil-fuel dependency and the alternative shapes our society and culture would have to take in shaping a “sustainable climate.” The Green Hevra decided that our own best offering will be leaning toward creating and supporting alternatives.

The Hevra is especially interested in exploring the ancient sacred rhythms of work-and-rest, sowing/harvesting food and celebrating the harvest, Doing and Being that are deeply embedded In Biblical teaching and in Jewish practice. How do we apply this wisdom to a post-industrial cybernetic society?

Why should Jews and other religious communities be doing this work of social change to address the climate crisis? Right now, American society is paralyzed about this issue. Even though the scientists are increasingly worried – even frightened; even though we have just lived through a year of unprecedented droughts, fires, and floods that are rooted in the climate crisis — the issue was not even mentioned in four Presidential debates.

The silence in debates echoes paralysis in government. Paralysis in government echoes the paralysis of the American majority that gives verbal support to government action, but has not organized itself strongly enough to make change happen.

It will take the engagement of the grass-roots religious communities to move past the present stalemate on climate policy.

The religious communities bring two treasures as an offering to heal our planet and protect our children:

Numbers. Many religious leaders – Evangelical Christian, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist – have addressed the climate crisis, but grass-roots communities have been far less

forthright. Yet the numbers are there, and they need to become as activist as they were in the civil-rights crisis 50 years ago.

Depth: The climate crisis is the poisonous fruit of a distorted tree – a culture, society, economy, and politics suffused with domination and greed, not with caring and the knowledge that all life is intertwined. In that future, we will know — and in the present, we must learn — that “YHWH” does not stand for Lord, Boss, Judge, King – but (just as it sounds when you say it without vowels) the Interbreathing of all life.

That vision of an alternative society is what the Green Hevra has in mind when it seeks a “sustainable climate.”

Whether we succeed or not depends a great deal on whether the varied rainbow of our different organizations, our different skills and souls, can like the Rainbow cohere to light up into action the latent strength and vision of grass-roots Jewish communities.

May we all be blessed with the commitment to act to save our children and grandchildren, by saving and healing the Earth.

Shalom, salaam; Good shabbos, Eid Mubarak! — Arthur

<https://theshalomcenter.org/content/green-festival-green-hevra-green-earth>

November 1, 2012

Climate debate is based on religion

By Anne Ringgaard
ScienceNordic

Religion plays a major part in the climate debate, for instance in our fight to preserve endangered species that have no practical use to humans, argues theologian in a new book.

There may not be any obvious point in trying to preserve annoying insects and slimy maggots. Yet most people believe we should try to save them from extinction.

Our love of biodiversity and our inclination to preserve threatened species comes from religion, argues Jacob Wolf, a theologian at Copenhagen University in a new book in which he has collected a number of essays on phenomenology, science, ecology and theology.

Nature conservation is religious and universal

People all over the world are fighting to save threatened animal and plant species. But not all species have any practical use, and their survival has no bearing on human survival.

So when we're fighting to preserve the Earth's biodiversity, we're not doing it because we fear our lives will get any worse if threatened species become extinct. We want to preserve the species, despite their lack of practical value to us, because we have an ethical mindset that's rooted in religions, Wolf writes in a [press release](#) [10] from Copenhagen University.

Thus, he argues, the climate debate is rooted in a religious ethic that spans cultures and religions:

"Some people would claim the modern climate debate is rooted in our desire to survive. But when it comes to the diversity of species, this argument simply doesn't hold water," he says.

"An orchid from the Cayman Islands, a blue-black pheasant from Vietnam or a Javan rhinoceros has no impact on the world economy or the global ecosystem. We only become emotionally caught up in their fight for survival because of a reverence for life rooted in our perception of the world as a work of creation and life as sacred and inviolable."

International report based on religion

The modern view of nature and the debate about climate issues and sustainability are based largely on a scientific approach to the world.

However, ethical and emotional approaches to nature also colour these discussions. Documentaries about ice melting at the poles, for example, appeal to our emotions by showing polar bears having trouble finding food for their young.

The International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUNC) report '[Priceless or Worthless](#) [11]' from September 2012 describes the 100 most threatened animal and plant species. It stresses the our duty to safeguard these species of the world even if they serve no function.

"The desire to safeguard species of animals and plants that we don't have any apparent need for is an aspect of the modern climate debate that is based on a religious ethic," says Wolf.

In the introduction to the IUNC report, Professor Jonathan Bailie, of Oxford University, highlights that these species are of no utilitarian value to us and do nothing but represent what he calls "existence value". According to Wolf, the concept of nature and species of wildlife being intrinsically valuable reflects an ethical approach to nature that differs distinctly from a scientific perspective.

"Science describes how the world is but it doesn't tell us how it should be. The concept of existence value clearly expresses a view that prescribes a certain course of action – a duty to protect endangered species," Wolf writes. "Whereas a scientist observes a flower in the garden and sees photosynthesis, those of us with an ethical view of the world see an irreplaceable work of art that appeals to our admiration and respect. The concept of the world as being something other than, and more than, the sum of matter is largely metaphysical or religious."

Jakob Wolf's book, titled 'Det ubevæbnede øje – essays om fænomenologi, videnskab, økologi og teologi' ('The unarmed eye – essays about phenomenology, science, ecology and theology')

was published last week and is currently only available in Danish.

<http://sciencenordic.com/climate-debate-based-religion>

November 1, 2012

A Wild Love For the World, with Joanna Macy

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<http://www.onbeing.org/program/wild-love-world/61>

November 9, 2012

‘Earth Sabbath’ emphasizes care for the planet

By Yonat Shimron

Religion News Service

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Rev. Steve Halsted lit a candle, led a breathing meditation on the four elements (earth, fire, water and air), and passed around a conch shell, inviting participants to listen for a message inside.

One woman said the sound of a rushing ocean encouraged her to “keep going on.”

Another lowered the shell from her ear and said she’d heard: “We’re not there yet.”

The eight men and women sitting in a semi-circle at Raleigh’s Community United Church of Christ fellowship hall paused for a 90-minute “Earth Sabbath” on a recent Tuesday.

The service was conceived by Halsted, who leads this congregation with a long history of fighting for the rights of African-Americans, women and gays. Lately, many of his members had become environmental activists, so he crafted a celebration that would allow them to pause and renew their spiritual connections to the earth.

Now the Earth Sabbath format has found a sponsor with the North Carolina chapter of Interfaith Power and Light, an organization that works with faith communities across the state to address the causes and consequences of climate change.

Earth Sabbath celebrations are now held in a handful of cities. Their purpose is to “salve and energize” the spiritual lives of environmental activists and others who grieve for the damage to the earth and its resources.

“I need it for the grounding, or I’d be crying all the time,” said Karen Bearden of Raleigh, N.C., a volunteer with 350.org, the climate change campaign founded by environmentalist Bill McKibben.

The destruction left in the wake of Hurricane Sandy might awaken more religious congregations to the realities and dangers of climate change. But while many are already swapping incandescent light bulbs for compact fluorescents, eliminating foam and plastic coffee cups, planting gardens and installing solar panels, few have paid attention to the spiritual dimensions of this work.

“More and more religious congregations are asking, “Why are we doing this? Is it just to save money?” said John Grim, co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University. “Suddenly, it opens up a deeper contemplative and spiritual vision about our relationships with the planet.”

From many faith traditions

Earth Sabbaths are not entirely new; the United Nations started an “Environmental Sabbath Service” in 1990, with a declaration that read: “We need to rest and allow the earth to rest.”

The North Carolina version shares many common elements. It includes prayers, chants and devotional readings. But there are few, if any, Bible readings. And Jesus is rarely mentioned. Partly, that’s because the ceremony is intentionally interfaith. Partly, it’s because the language of environmental activism eschews the emphasis on individual salvation in favor of an ethic of interdependence and oneness.

For example, celebrations may feature Buddhist meditation, Tai Chi exercises, or prayers to the four elements or directions, an element of Native American spirituality.

And though these rituals often take place in church fellowship halls or classrooms, special attention is paid to the surroundings. At a recent Earth Sabbath celebration in Chapel Hill, N.C., participants sat on a shiny, concrete floor and prayed in a room illuminated only by the slowly ebbing late afternoon light.

Halstead said he developed a template for the Earth Sabbath when he realized revival is impossible unless people recognize the sacred in nature.

“We’ve lost touch with the sacredness of the Earth,” Halsted said. “We take too much for granted. We need to reconnect. It’s only when we reconnect that we appreciate it more deeply.”

Linda Rodriguez, an environmental activist at a Baptist church and an Earth Sabbath enthusiast, said she’s learning to cultivate gratitude.

“Our earth, our water, our air — if we didn’t have any of those we wouldn’t survive,” she said. “If we would understand it’s a gift we’re given every single day, we might realize how precious it all is.”

These activists acknowledge religious congregations don’t always march at the forefront of social movements. Bound by tradition, faith communities are often the Johnny-come-latelies of change. Many still cling to a biblical vision from Genesis that calls human beings to “fill the earth and subdue it.”

But that shouldn’t prevent more progressive congregations from embracing a cause and spurring others to action, said Dianne Small, a Baha’i participant at the recent Earth Sabbath in Raleigh.

“It’s vitally important that faith communities embrace the science and not live in a fantasy that we can use and abuse the Earth without serious consequences for our children and children’s children,” said Small, who lives in suburban Cary, N.C.

“There’s an ethical and moral dimension to this. The more we can protect the environment, the more we can create a peaceful world.”

http://www.sj-r.com/features/x2053819898/-Earth-Sabbath-emphasizes-care-for-the-planet?zc_p=0

November 13, 2012

Sacred Natural Sites are critical sanctuaries for African biodiversity, culture and spirituality New report reveals

By Henry Neondo
Africa Science News Service

Kenya is home to many Sacred Natural Sites, including forests, mountains and rivers. Indigenous communities have upheld their role and responsibilities, passed down over centuries by their ancestors as custodians of these places. A new report, “Recognising Sacred Natural Sites and Territories in Kenya”, published by the Institute for Culture and Ecology, African Biodiversity Network and the Gaia Foundation, reveals however that many of Africa’s Sacred Natural Sites and communities are under threat from mining, tourism and other developments.

Adam Hussein Adam, author of the report explains, “Laws and policies urgently need to recognise and support the rights of communities to their traditional and customary land tenure and governance systems.”

The report, commissioned in 2011 following the enactment of Kenya’s new Constitution in 2010, examines how the Constitution, national and international laws can support the recognition of Sacred Natural Sites and their community governance systems.

It makes a number of key recommendations for communities, civil society and Government to strengthen the recognition of, and support for, local Custodians of Sacred Natural Sites and their customary governance systems which protect these areas. It also explores some of the issues which need to be addressed in the pending Community Land Act.

Gathuru Mburu, Coordinator of the African Biodiversity Network based in Kenya, comments, “This report is an important contribution to understanding the role and implications of the Constitution of Kenya and other national laws, in strengthening the recognition and support for community protection of Sacred Natural Sites according to their customary governance systems. It shows the progressive development of Kenya's legal system towards recognising Sacred Natural Sites as places of critical ecological, cultural and spiritual significance.”

The report also explores grassroots initiatives in other countries which are establishing precedents to protect sacred lands. Recently community Custodians of Sacred Natural Sites from across Africa came together and shared their voices in a film – Sacred Voices - made by the African Biodiversity Network & The Gaia Foundation. Custodian Vhomakhadzi Joyce from Venda, South Africa explains, “Inside our Sacred spaces, the soil is very important. Beneath the soil, and below – it is sacred too. As Custodians we believe this should be left untouched.” Affirming this, M'rimberia Mwongo from Meru, Kenya states, “We ask that people respect our rituals and prayers as they would religion, and respect our Sacred Sites as they would a Church. We ask for a system of mutual respect.”

Liz Hosken, Director of the Gaia Foundation in the UK, comments, “This Report urges us all to recognise and support the calls of communities to respect their Sacred Natural Sites as No-Go areas for development, and to recognise indigenous and local communities as the Custodians who protect these sacred places, through their ecological governance systems, for present and future generations.”

The report serves as a timely training and advocacy tool for all those seeking to preserve these sanctuaries of bio-cultural diversity from growing threats, and to secure recognition of communities' rights and responsibilities to govern and protect Sacred Natural Sites and Territories.

http://www.africasciencenews.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=682:sacred-natural-sites-are-critical-sanctuaries-for-african-biodiversity-culture-and-spirituality-new-report-reveals-&catid=52:environment&Itemid=115

November 2012

Bolivia: Earth-worshippers in power, sort of

By Eileen Lydia Haley
Pagaian.org

This is a written, and slightly adapted, version of a workshop presented at the GAIA Conference (Transformation), Southport, Queensland, Australia on 20 October 2012.

In December 2010 the Bolivian Parliament passed the Rights of Mother Earth Act (La Ley de Derechos de la Madre Tierra).

The Act gives Mother Earth a legal personality, and recognises that She has rights that the Bolivian State, society and individuals have obligations and duties in relation to.

This was the first law in the world that gave legal personhood to Mother Earth, and invested Her with rights.

This is a story of how the Rights of Mother Earth Act came to be, and what has come of it. A story, I say; because there may be, there are, others.

But this is the tale I wish to tell, here, at this time, in this place, with the Nerang River to the south of us; the magnificent Cloud-Catcher caldera to the south-west; Tamborine Mountain—Wild Lime Mountain—to the west; to the north Coombabah Lake and the island Minjerribah, whose colonial name is Stradbroke; and to the east the great Pacific Ocean.

For full article, visit:

<http://pagaian.org/essays/bolivia-earth-worshippers-in-power-sort-of>

November 2012

World View of Global Warming

The Photographic Documentation of Climate Change, by Gary Braasch

Portfolio of images [here](#).

The sacred Ganges River, essential to northern Indian life and source of much of Hindu religious practice, flows from a broad region in the Indian and Nepal Himalaya. The major stem of "Ganga" is the Bhagirathi River, which emerges as a large mountain stream from beneath the 28.5 km long Gangotri Glacier in the state of Uttarakhand, India, north of New Delhi. The glacier has been retreating for more than a century, recently at slightly more slowly than before, but still at a rate of 18 meters per year.

The Gangotri is the second largest glacier in India, a mountain glacier with six major and many minor tributary glaciers. Some of these side glaciers no longer connect with the central glacier. This source of the Ganges has been a holy place for more than a thousand years, the place where the Goddess Ganga touched down to earth, and thus has been the goal and destination of devout pilgrims and holy men to view and be blessed by the pure glacier water.

The photographs presented here are a preliminary report on our own World View of Global Warming journey to the Gangotri, part of our reports on climate change and water in the Himalayas. More images and information will follow.

At one time, nearly 4,000 years ago, the glacier was about 18 km longer with a terminus at a waterfall over carved granite at what is now Gangotri village. The rock carved by the flow of the river and ice had the appearance of water emerging from a cow's mouth -- thus giving it the name Gaumukh in Sanskrit. Through time, as the glacier receded up the valley, the terminus of the glacier featured a cave or arch out of which the river flowed, and Gaumukh has remained the name of the place from which the sacred Ganga emerges from the Himalaya Mountains regardless of its exact position as the glacier has changed. The face of the glacier and river source at about 4000 m are now more than an 18 km hike from Gangotri village, which is at 3000 m elevation. Thousands of pilgrims, the devout, tourists and mountaineers make this journey each year, following the Bhagirathi River.

With studies of Himalaya glaciers increasing as a way to monitor climate change, scientists have also motored the cliff-hanging road to Gangotri and trekked the well-trodden trail to the place where the great Ganges appears from under the ice. Others have measured the glacier changes using satellite pictures and sensors. The infamous mistake in the 2007 United Nations IPCC report, which erroneously claimed Himalayan glaciers would mostly disappear by 2035, and the importance of mountain water to more than a billion people, have brought increased scrutiny to glacier changes and the importance of the meltwater.

The Gangotri's rapid retreat up its valley has concerned devout Hindus as well as scientists for years. As documented in these nearly-matching views, the ice has melted away from sacred shrines and extended the trek to the holy Gaumukh where the river springs from the glacier. Current studies, such as the one entitled "Himalayan glaciers: The big picture is a montage," by scientist Jeffrey [Kargel](#) and colleagues, find that "although it will not disappear anytime soon, [Gangotri Glacier] and probably most other large Himalayan glaciers will likely shrink dramatically this century" with thinning of debris covered tongues and growth of moraine-blocked lakes. This study, published in 2011, agrees with satellite image measurements and [Indian Government studies](#) that the rapid retreat of the Gangotri of about a mile in the 20th C has slowed recently, but says that is probably due to very heavy debris and dirt cover on the glacier. Satellite measurements by [Jennifer Ding](#) show an average retreat of about 18 m per year from 1990 to 2009. Across the Indian Himalaya, satellite measurements show that 2184 glaciers of a total of 2767 are retreating, 435 advancing, and 148 show little change.

Slowing of retreat does not mean the glacier is stabilizing nor does it prove that global warming is tapering off. The Kargel study says that "many debris-laden glaciers are thinning in place without much terminus retreat." The lower Gangotri appears to have thinned by about 5 meters in as many recent years. Indian government studies also say that snow cover in the glacier basin has been diminishing since the 1980s, which means that less snow is feeding the river. This may be an effect of rising temperatures and effects of climate change on monsoons and storms. But the 2500 mile long Ganges is not dependent on snow or glacier flow for most of its water, according to scientists like Kargel and his Indian colleagues. After the Ganga proper is formed at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Alaknanda Rivers, less than 30 percent of the water is from glaciers. The rest is from rainwater and groundwater -- which of course are also under great threat from climate changes as well as intense population pressure and staggering pollution.

During our visit to Gangotri, we were privileged and honored to meet Swami Sundarananda, the 86 year old sadhu, mountaineer, photographer and environmental leader. He has been photographing the Himalaya and the source of the Ganges since the 1950s with great skill and perception. He graciously has allowed us to publish here a copy of one of his prints of the glacier from 1972 to help show changes over 40 years. The Swami's intense emotions about and knowledge of the destructive growth of development in the Himalaya are a model of environmental communication.

More comparison photography, with the cooperation of Swami Sundarananda, scientists and others will be featured later on this website.

Swami Sundarananda's great book "Himalaya: Through the Lens of a Sadhu" can be ordered from the author at: Tapovan Kuti, Gangotri, District Uttarkashi - 249 193, Uttarakhand, India. Telephone (91) 013 772 22 31. Or order from the distributor: Systems Vision, A-199, Okhla Phase-1, New Delhi 110 020, India. Telephone (91) 681 1195, fax (91) 681 2018, e-mail: svision@vsnl.com.

Funding for our Himalaya reporting is graciously provided by the Karuna Foundation - US, and other generous donors.

To see photos posted with this article, visit:

<http://www.worldviewofglobalwarming.org/>

November 14, 2012

Faith Leaders Call for Statewide Fracking Ban at Spiritual Vigil at Grand Army Plaza Tonight

By Will Yakowicz
ParkSlopePatch

Join more than 200 religious leaders to rally against fracking in New York state.

A coalition of diverse organizations that support a fracking ban throughout the state, [New Yorkers Against Fracking](#), is joining together to tell Governor Andrew Cuomo, and other leaders in Albany, to stand up for New Yorkers to keep the “water and our state safe by banning hydrofracking,” on Wednesday night.

At Grand Army Plaza, starting at 6 p.m., a group of Brooklyn religious leaders, representing a variety of religions, denominations and spiritual organizations, will gather tonight and rally together to call an end to the practice of fracking.

The event, A Spiritual Call to Ban Fracking - Vigil to Protect our Sacred Land & Water, is only one of nearly a dozen other similar events taking place across the New York state that will highlight more than 200 faith leaders statewide who have come out in opposition to fracking.

The religious leaders will host community members in a program of quiet reflection and song devoted to environmental protection, care for the Earth and a ban on fracking in New York.

For more information on the founding members of [New Yorkers Against Fracking](http://www.nyagainstfracking.org/members), which include statewide and national organizations like *Citizen Action of New York*, *New York State Breast Cancer Network*, *Food & Water Watch*, *Catskill Mountainkeeper*, *Frack Action*, *Water Defense*, *United for Action* and the *Working Families Party*, click here, <http://www.nyagainstfracking.org/members>.

<http://parkslope.patch.com/articles/faith-leaders-call-for-statewide-fracking-ban-at-spiritual-vigil-at-grand-army-plaza-tonight>

November 15, 2012

Visiting professors bridge religion, environmentalism

By Ella Cheng

The Daily Princetonian

The offices of visiting religion professors Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim lie next to exhibits of dinosaur skeletons and Darwin's finches in Guyot Hall, the home of the ecology and evolutionary biology department.

In the national global warming debate, religion is often associated with the side of skeptics, who argue that human activity cannot change the climate. But Tucker and Grim — who are married and co-teaching [ENV 337: Religion, Ecology and Cosmology](#) — said they think religion can provide reasons to value the environment and take action against global warming.

Tucker and Grim, members of Yale's faculty, are pioneers in the nascent field of "[Religion and Ecology](#)," which was established around 15 years ago through a series of conferences they organized at Harvard. The field strives to establish a dialogue between religion and science to find effective solutions to the world's environmental problems.

"This becomes very important when you think about the recent climate science and issues involved with the larger public not clearly understanding the climate science and resisting it," Grim said.

Tucker was not available to comment because she spent the week in Toronto receiving an honorary degree from the University of Toronto, according to Grim.

Grim noted that scientists have had trouble communicating the accuracy and seriousness of environmental problems to skeptics and that he thinks religion can help spread the message effectively.

"There's this new opening and effort to try to understand what's the scientific narrative, what does it mean to talk about our world," Grim said.

The idea of bridging religion and ecology first came to Grim and Tucker when they were traveling throughout Asia in the 1970s and witnessed the environmental deterioration of urban areas. Tucker studied the relationship between Asian religions and environmental crises in Asia, while Grim has focused on ties between indigenous religious rituals and concern for the natural world.

Their initial work on the subject prompted them to organize 10 conferences on world religions and ecology at Harvard between 1995 and 1998. In 1998, they co-founded the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale together.

Because the field bridges both the sciences and the humanities, it has created controversy and attracted criticism.

"Sometimes it's very helpful, and sometimes it's misunderstanding what our project is about," Grim said of the criticism. "But the questions of subjectivity and what's the appropriate role of emotional intelligence in scientific investigation ... are open questions, and they're good questions."

At the Princeton Environmental Institute, Grim said they have received only a warm welcome, despite working alongside a largely science-based faculty.

They are on campus this fall semester as PEI's Currie C. and Thomas A. Barron Visiting Professors in the Environment and the Humanities. The fellowship is an effort to sponsor professors in the humanities to bring a new perspective to PEI.

"The effort here is to join our science faculty here at PEI and to help bridge to humanities faculty here at Princeton," said Grim.

This spring, Grim said, Tucker and Grim will return to Yale, where they are senior lecturers and research scholars in Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and Divinity School.

In March 2012, they released a film, "[*Journey of the Universe*](#)," that they had been working on for 10 years. The film, which links scientific discoveries with humanistic and religious reflections on the nature of the universe, won the Emmy Award for Best Documentary from the Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and was shown on PBS. PEI hosted a screening and presentation of the film on Oct 3., and the department has also held more general talks on the emerging field and their work.

Eighteen students from a variety of disciplines are enrolled in ENV 337. The first part of the course focuses on three religions — Confucianism, Christianity and indigenous religions — and their interactions with ecosystems. The second part focuses on environmental ethics, including a study of bioethics professor Peter Singer's book "One World." The final part of the course focuses on Tucker and Grim's documentary.

Christina Healy '14, an EEB major pursuing an ENV certificate, initially chose the course because it counted for the certificate and fulfilled the ethics and morality requirement.

"I was very confused as to how the two subjects were going to go together because the normal thought is that religion and science are at odds with each other," Healy said. "Now I think it's a really, really smart way to go about trying to build an environmental ethic in people because, obviously, telling people that global warming is happening and this is science and it's true is not really working."

<http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/2012/11/15/31841/>

November 18, 2012

Religion, science must unite to save environment

By Michael Swan

The Catholic Register

TORONTO - The difference between right and wrong could be the difference between life and extinction as Earth's climate continues to spiral out of control, a Yale University professor of forestry and religious studies told a Toronto audience Nov. 9.

Mary Evelyn Tucker is the director of Yale's Forum on Religion and Ecology and was a frequent collaborator with the late Passionist father of ecotheology Fr. Thomas Berry. Speaking on "Future Generations and the Ethics of Climate Change" at the invitation of the University of St. Michael's College's Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology, Tucker made the case for an alliance between the worlds of religion and science.

While science is more comfortable with descriptive than prescriptive words about nature and cautious scientists have been reluctant to tell politicians what to do, religion has only very recently begun to address the environmental crisis and ecotheology is still rarely spoken of in seminaries. However, the state of the world's natural systems demands the best thinking of both religion and science, said Tucker.

"We have to say continually that religion is necessary but not sufficient. We have to develop partners in science, in law, in policy," she said.

"We need humility. We don't have all the answers because we were late in coming to this."

Even if there has been a widening gap between science and religion in the modern era, the world now needs the "deep spiritual resources" of world religions that have dedicated millennia to thinking about right, wrong and the common good. Religion has the ability to teach humanity to value nature as the source of life, rather than a collection of resources to be fed into the gross domestic product of nations, she said.

"We have to see environmental degradation as an ethical issue," she said. "Until now degradation has been seen as the inevitable cost of economic growth."

The beginnings of an ethics that addresses climate change would be a serious look at distributive justice, according to Tucker. There are already winners and losers around the globe as sea levels

rise, droughts devastate farm land and more violent storms create climate refugees from New Jersey to Bangladesh. But distributive justice should also mean extending the reach of human rights to future generations who will have to live in the environment this generation leaves them.

While an ethic of rights might set minimum standards, drawing lines which must not be crossed, a true environmental ethic would concern itself with much more than the minimum. As nature always seeks flourishing, so should our ethics.

Our ethics should be based on a clear-eyed view of human beings as a “small but indispensable part of a 14-billion-year evolution,” she said. “We need an ethic that is culturally aware but also universally compelling.”

<http://www.catholicregister.org/news/toronto-gta/item/15416-religion-science-must-unite-to-save-environment>

November 21, 2012

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Gap Widening as Nations Head to Crucial Climate Talks in Doha

United Nations Environment Programme

Keeping Average Global Temperature Rise to Below 2°C Still Achievable, with Potentially Big Cuts Possible from Buildings, Transportation and Avoided Deforestation--But Time Running Out

Current Pledges by Governments Indicate a 3-5° C Temperature Rise this Century without Fast Action

LONDON/NAIROBI -- Action on climate change needs to be scaled-up and accelerated without delay if the world is to have a running chance of keeping a global average temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius this century.

The Emissions Gap Report, coordinated by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the European Climate Foundation, and released days before the convening of the Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Doha, shows that greenhouse gas emissions levels are now around 14 per cent above where they need to be in 2020.

Instead of declining, concentration of warming gases like carbon dioxide (CO₂) are actually increasing in the atmosphere—up around 20 per cent since 2000.

If no swift action is taken by nations, emissions are likely to be at 58 gigatonnes (Gt) in eight years' time, says the report which has involved 55 scientists from more than 20 countries.

This will leave a gap that is now bigger than it was in earlier UNEP assessments of 2010 and 2011 and is, in part, as a result of projected economic growth in key developing economies and a phenomenon known as “double counting” of emission offsets.

Previous assessment reports have underlined that emissions need to be on average at around 44 Gt or less in 2020 to lay the path for the even bigger reductions needed at a cost that is manageable.

The Emissions Gap Report 2012 points out that even if the most ambitious level of pledges and commitments were implemented by all countries—and under the strictest set of rules—there will now be a gap of 8 Gt of CO₂ equivalent by 2020.

This is 2 Gt higher than last year's assessment with yet another year passing by.

Preliminary economic assessments, highlighted in the new report, estimate that inaction will trigger costs likely to be at least 10 to 15 per cent higher after 2020 if the needed emission reductions are delayed into the following decades.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said: “There are two realities encapsulated in this report—that bridging the gap remains doable with existing technologies and policies; that there are many inspiring actions taking place at the national level on energy efficiency in buildings, investing in forests to avoid emissions linked with deforestation and new vehicle emissions standards alongside a remarkable growth in investment in new renewable energies worldwide, which in 2011 totaled close to \$260 billion.”

“Yet the sobering fact remains that a transition to a low-carbon, inclusive Green Economy is happening far too slowly and the opportunity for meeting the 44 Gt target is narrowing annually,” he added.

“While Governments work to negotiate a new international climate agreement to come into effect in 2020, they urgently need to put their foot firmly on the action pedal by fulfilling financial, technology transfer and other commitments under the UN Climate Convention treaties. There are also a wide range of complementary voluntary measures that can bridge the gap between ambition and reality now rather than later,” said Mr. Steiner.

The report estimates that there are potentially large emissions reductions possible—in a mid-range of 17 Gt of CO₂ equivalents—from sectors such as buildings, power generation and transport that can more than bridge the gap by 2020.

Meanwhile, there are abundant examples of actions at the national level in areas ranging from improved building codes to fuel standards for vehicles which, if scaled up and replicated, can also assist.

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, said: “This report is a reminder that time is running out, but that the technical means and the policy tools to allow the world to stay below a maximum 2 degrees Celsius are still available to Governments and societies”.

“Governments meeting in Doha for COP18 now need to urgently implement existing decisions

which will allow for a swifter transition towards a low-carbon and resilient world. This notably means amending the Kyoto Protocol, developing a clear vision of how greenhouse gases can be curbed globally before and after 2020, and completing the institutions required to help developing countries green their economies and adapt, along with defining how the long-term climate finance that developing countries need can be mobilized. In addition, governments need to urgently identify how ambition can be raised," added Ms. Figueres.

Bridging the Gap

The report looked at sectors where the necessary emissions reductions may be possible by 2020.

Improved energy efficiency in industry could deliver cuts of between 1.5 to 4.6 Gt of CO₂ equivalent; followed by agriculture, 1.1 to 4.3 Gt; forestry 1.3 to 4.2 Gt; the power sector, 2.2 to 3.9 Gt; buildings 1.4 to 2.9 Gt; transportation including shipping and aviation 1.7 to 2.5 Gt and the waste sector around 0.8 Gt.

Buildings

The report points out that some sectors have even bigger potential over the long term—boosting the energy efficiency of buildings, for example, could deliver average reductions of around 2.1 Gt by 2020 but cuts of over 9Gt CO₂ equivalent by 2050.

“This implies that by 2050 the building sector could consume 30 per cent less electricity compared to 2005 despite a close to 130 per cent projected increase in built floor area over the same period,” it says.

The report concludes that if this is to happen, “state of the art building codes may need to become mandatory in the next 10 years in all of the major economies such as the United States, India, China and the European Union”.

Further emission reductions are possible from more energy efficient appliances and lighting systems. The report cites Japan’s Top Runner Programme and the Ecodesign Directive of the European Union which have triggered household electricity consumption savings of 11 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively.

It also cites Ghana’s standards and labelling programme for air conditioners which is set to save consumers and businesses an estimated \$64 million annually in reduced energy bills and around 2.8 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent over 30 years.

Sustainable Transportation

Potential emissions reductions from the transportation sector are assessed at 2 Gt of CO₂ equivalent by 2020.

The report notes that there is already a shift with the eight biggest multilateral development banks at the recent Rio+20 Summit pledging \$175 billion over the next decade for measures such as bus rapid transport systems.

The report recommends the “Avoid, Shift and Improve” policies and measures that encourage

improved land planning and alternative mobility options such as buses, cycling and walking above the private car alongside better use of rail freight and inland waterways.

Combinations of improved vehicle standards and scrappage schemes for old vehicles can also assist. The report says approved and proposed new standards in seven countries ranging from Australia and China to the European Union, the Republic of Korea and the United States are expected to reduce fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions of new light-duty vehicles by over 50 per cent by 2025 from 2000 levels.

Forestry

“Although it remained under-utilized, “avoided deforestation” is considered a low-cost greenhouse gas emissions reductions option,” says the report.

Policies to assist in reducing deforestation and, thus, greenhouse gas emissions, include establishing protected areas such as national parks to economic instruments such as taxes, subsidies and payments for ecosystem services.

The report cites Brazil where a combination of conservation policies allied to falls in agricultural commodity prices has led to a decrease in deforestation by three quarters since 2004 avoiding 2.8 Gt of CO₂ equivalent between 2006 and 2011.

Protected areas in Costa Rica now represent over a fifth of its territory, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and triggering a rise in tourists from just under 390,000 in 1988 to 2.5 million in 2008: tourism now accounts for around 15 per cent of GDP.

These actions by Brazil and Costa Rica predate Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD or REDD+) policies under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The report indicates that scaled-up action under, for example, the UN-REDD initiative which is working with over 40 countries, can provide even larger emission reductions while generating additional benefits such as jobs in natural resource management.

Notes to Editors

* The Third Emissions Gap Report 2012 is available at:

<http://www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/emissionsgap2012>

* More information on the first and second assessments of the Emissions Gap is available at

www.unep.org

* UNEP’s Climate Change portal: <http://www.unep.org/climatechange/>

* The European Climate Foundation: <http://www.europeanclimate.org/>

* UNFCCC: www.unfccc.int

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<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2698&ArticleID=9335>

November 2012

Walk Humbly and Live Joyfully on This Earth!

Conference of Religious India (CRI)

“Earth-People” a National Consultation by Conference of Religious India (CRI)

Preamble: A representative group of 50 Major Superiors and specialists from the 12 Regions of India met for a three days National Consultation on “Earth-People” in Tarumitra, an ecological center in Patna. Fr. Robert S.J., the visionary Director, led us into a serious reflection on the wonder of earth, wealth of diversity, web of relationship and welfare of humankind nurtured by the sacred earth. Proper integration to earth and environment is foundational to holistic spirituality of persons, sustainable life of all living forms and salvific destiny of humankind. But the concerns of environmental changes, ecological degradation and exploitation of earth are matters of grave consequences for our future generations and us. Seeing from the eyes of the Creator and hearing the voice of His messengers, the Religious of India and all men and women of good will are called to wake up to act on behalf of earth and all that is sustained by this nurturing mother. Our commitment to gender justice, social equity and balanced relationship impels us further to this larger reality of a birthing, caring, nurturing, and fulfilling earth.

1. The Critical Time.

1.1 Humankind is at a critical point in history. The global warming and the consequent ecological crisis are threatening the very existence of the earth. We live in a web of life where the entire globe is inter-dependent and inter-related. We live together or we perish together. The earth cries out, and the earth counts on us.

1.2. The decreasing and polluted supply of water has reached a crisis point today, as one third of world’s population suffers from water shortage; it will reach the even more distressing rate of two thirds by 2025. Four fifth of the earth’s forests have already been cleared away. While on an average a country needs 33% of its land under forest cover, India has only about 11% of forest cover. The contamination of the soil through non-degradable plastic and pesticides is spreading on at an alarming rate. The global temperature has risen due to the emission of green house gases causing drastic climatic changes like frequent floods in one part of the globe and droughts

in another, and even graver calamities for the future. Air pollution is causing serious health hazards to millions of people in the metropolises, especially of the developing countries. Consequent to deforestation several species of flora and fauna are threatened while many have become extinct. (Ref. "Down to Earth" (Ed) Agarwal; Cf. Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi)

1.3. The poor, especially the women and the children, are the first and worst victims of environmental de-gradation. When the environment is degraded, the access of the poor to the natural resources is limited or denied. Their dependence on the environment also makes the poor very vulnerable to degradation, disasters and natural calamities. This is so very real and true in our neighborhoods and in our country as a whole. The poor are 'the most threatened species' on earth. The cry of the earth is also the cry of the poor.

1.4. Scientists across the world agree that an anthropocentric development and consumerist life-style, based on human greed, are at the root of this crisis. We need a paradigm shift in our relationship with the earth and environment. We seem to be like the cold blooded frog adjusting to the heating water being unaware of the impending disaster at a higher temperature. The humans who have contributed to the situation can remedy the same. They need political will, spiritual outlook and global commitment to act.

1.5. The impact of environmental degradation is universal and all pervading. We may arrive at a point of no more clean water to drink; no more land to cultivate; no more forests to preserve the bio-diversity and no more clean air to breathe. All of us, rich and the poor, socially and culturally diverse, share the same predicament. It is time to act and act together. "Man did not weave the web of life. He is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does it to himself". (Chief Seattle 1854). We discover a new identity as members of the earth community, as earth citizens. We are in a new world asking for a new kind of relationship other than 'consuming'. It is time to learn to walk humbly and joyfully on this earth, with respect due to a mother.

2. The Earth-Attitudes. (The E-Attitudes)

The present crisis calls for a shift in our mental categories and a change in our way of relating to one another, nature and the Lord of creation. We enlist the following points for a new way.

2.1. As Indians, we are steeped in a sense of the sacred, a sense of wonder and awe, openness and surrender before the mystery of creation. The reverence for nature and the interdependence of the secular and the sacred are familiar to us. We invite all to make enough time for silence and wonder towards the mystery of the Earth.

2.2. We sense a cosmic world view in the holistic approach to life of our people, in their relatedness to the earth and the world of spirits. We invite you to nurture and savour the sensory and the contemplative approach to Mother Earth- the womb of life. "*The earth is at the same time mother; she is the mother of all that is natural, mother of all that is human; she is the mother of all; for contained in her are the seeds of all*" (Hildegard of Bingen).

2.3. God has covenanted the earth to him/herself. The earth and every part of this earth are sacred and connected. We invite all to appreciate the web of life and learn to dwell on this earth.

2.4. We resonate with our people in celebrating life at significant moments in the seasonal cycles. We invite everyone to develop a taste for the bio-diversity of this beautiful earth and to pray with the changing moods of the birds, the trees, the mountains and the rivers.

2.5. As consecrated people, we appreciate the beautiful narratives of creation in our own scriptures and in that of our peoples and traditions and resolve to take our place in the cosmic web of life, one that mother earth can count on.

2.6.”The Lord dwells in the heart of everything that is. Let us, therefore enjoy everything with detachment. Do not covet the wealth of anyone”. (Isa Upanishad.1.). We strive to develop a spirituality of ‘enjoyment with detachment’.

2.7. With the Church Fathers and Mothers (Ireneus, Hildegard of Bingen) we believe that the creation is the outpouring of God’s goodness and beauty and that it is God’s body. As a sacrament of God, we learn to accept and revere the creation.

2.8. This beautiful sacrament of God is entrusted to us humans, to tend and to take care of it (Gen 2:15) because earth belongs to the Lord (Lev.25:23). It is fragile and vulnerable in our hands. Hence let us learn to receive this gift, befriend it and sustain its beauty and vulnerability in bio-diversity.

2.9. Each one of us is part of a long journey of life and we carry within us a history of 13.7 billion years. More than ever, today we need to be awakened to the interrelatedness of life. We are cousins to one another genetically and spiritually; we are part of a cosmic act of growing into a culture of inter-relatedness. We are part of an ever-evolving history enlivened and guided by the Spirit of God who renews the face of the Earth every moment.

2.9. We live our religious vows with an ecological understanding, loving actively many rather than one, relishing diverse things rather than stimulating greed, and being faithful to ‘creation’ rather than to our egos.

2.10. As Religious in India, we want to be rooted in the indigenous systems of our people, creatively and courageously pursuing alternate models of sustainable living and relevant interventions that respect the earth.

2.11 We resolve to labour with God to save our beleaguered planet, our beautiful, vulnerable Mother Earth. Together with the divine Spirit, let us replenish and renew the face of the earth in striving to realize a new heaven and new earth.

2.12. We pray with Teilhard de Chardin: *“Blessed be you, universal matter, immeasurable time, boundless ether, triple abyss of stars, atoms and generations; you who by overflowing and dissolving our narrow standards of measurement reveal to us the dimensions of God.”* (Hymn to Matter)

2.13. To bring this to life we:

‘Walk and touch peace every moment

Walk and touch happiness every moment

Each step brings a fresh breeze

Each step makes a flower bloom under our feet

Kiss the earth with your feet

Print on earth your love and happiness’ (Thich Nhat Hanh)

2.14. With Francis of Assisi, we sing the hymn of the nature and live a joyous life in love with brother sun and sister moon.

3. The Acts of CRI.

We propose the following action-plan to be implemented at different levels of our engagements as and when appropriate.

3.1. Personal Level.

- Live simply and close to nature
- Stress eco-balanced food habits
- Eco-friendly gifts to friends and benefactors
- Wear eco-friendly clothing
- Make conscious effort to reduce the use of electricity, fuel, water
- Introduce nature walks and nature meditations
- Use bicycles for local travel
- Prefer natural lemonades and drinks to varieties of expensive Colas

3.2. Community and Institution Level.

- Introduce environmental education in our educational institutions
- Develop Herbal Gardens
- Ensure green cover of at least 40% of land area
- Use CFL Lamps or LED lights as much as possible
- Avoid the use plastic bags, cups, wrappers and reuse them to reduce the waste
- Segregate and compost the waste materials as much as possible
- Network with recycling people for waste management
- Do not burn materials in the campus
- Introduce solar heaters, lights and cookers
- Avoid using electrical lights wherever natural lights can be effectively
- Display posters on the roads and institutions for awareness building
- More “Franciscan forests” – natural growth - in our campuses
- Organize awareness programmes regularly
- Promote vegetarian food system
- Develop organic vegetable gardens and get the students involved

- Ensure biodiversity by planting varieties of trees and plants and maintain a register
- Name the plants and trees to promote nature education
- Collect the seeds of local trees and distribute them widely
- Provide environmental “thoughts for the day”
- Encourage eco-friendly clothing
- Use nature savvy decorations
- Maintain green grass lawns in open spaces
- Avoid ‘use and throw’ materials
- Harvest rain water effectively
- Encourage natural health care like ayurveda system
- Reduce the use of concrete and coal tar in the campus
- Celebrate environment day-melas in schools
- Organize competitions for children
- Eco-tours are a good way of nature education
- Organize ongoing reflection on eco-spirituality
- Write in the media on issues related to ecology
- Organize special eco-liturgies
- Rakshabandhan day could be celebrated by tying Rakhi on trees
- Form Eco-cells/clubs in our institutions, neighbourhoods, parishes, and dioceses.
- Promote simple living, eco-friendly consumption habits and healthy waste management
- Make conscious effort to reduce the use of electricity, fuel, water and certain food items

3.3. Province/Congregation Level.

- Make use of the IGNOU correspondence diploma course on environmental sciences
- Make ecology an important component in our formation programme
- Promote study in formation centres on the teachings of the Church, of modern Indian thinkers like Gandhi/ Aurobindo / Tagore regarding ‘ways of living’ in tune with the nature
- Encourage studies of scriptures, including Indian scriptures with regard to the eco-friendly living.
- Join hands with groups who fight for ecological protection
- Organize farmers co-operatives for organic farming /marketing
- Participate in movements to safe-guard creation and to fight against environment pollution
- Collaborate with Government for providing toilette facilities to the poor
- Train personnel for ecological ministry and leadership
- Introduce rituals of eco-friendliness in our daily life and celebration and promote ecological sensitivity in our pastoral ministry
- Promote alternate use of natural resources such as solar and wind energy
- Encourage movements to safeguard, document and research on indigenous knowledge as lived out by tribals and other indigenous groups who live closer to nature.
- Call upon our theologians to evolve a theology of ecology based on our scriptures and Indian Philosophical heritage
- Liaison and network with other churches, NGOs and peoples’ movements in conservation and greening efforts

- Study Government policies on SEZ and keep vigilance on the developmental plans of the industry that often impoverish mother earth and intervene wherever needed
- Environmental research can unfold the mysteries of life for humankind.

Conclusion.

Let the Religious of India, be ever engaged in a search which is a stance for life against death and destruction, for conservation against consumerism, for need against greed, for enabling power against dominating and exploiting power, for enough against craving for more and more, for the spirit of 'leavers' against 'takers', for integrity of creation against exploiting nature. We need to reinvent new space and structures, adopt new life styles to nurture such values that will preserve integrity of humanity and creation. Let our eco-consciousness and eco-sensitivity lead to a firm and sincere eco-commitment an integrated spirituality of love and compassion that embrace all God's creation.

http://www.cridelhi.org/current_articles/walk_humbly_and_live_joyfully.html

November 26, 2012

Stand Still for the Apocalypse

By Chris Hedges
Truthdig

Humans must immediately implement a series of radical measures to halt carbon emissions or prepare for the collapse of entire ecosystems and the displacement, suffering and death of hundreds of millions of the globe's inhabitants, according to a report commissioned by the World Bank. The continued failure to respond aggressively to climate change, the report warns, will mean that the planet will inevitably warm by at least 4 degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century, ushering in an apocalypse.

[The 84-page document](#), "Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must Be Avoided," was written for the World Bank by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Climate Analytics and published last week. The picture it paints of a world convulsed by rising temperatures is a mixture of mass chaos, systems collapse and medical suffering like that of the worst of the Black Plague, which in the 14th century killed 30 to 60 percent of Europe's population. The report comes as the annual United Nations Conference on Climate Change begins this Monday [Nov. 26] in Doha, Qatar.

A planetwide temperature rise of 4 degrees C—and the report notes that the tepidness of the emission pledges and commitments of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will make such an increase almost inevitable—will cause a precipitous drop in crop yields, along with the loss of many fish species, resulting in widespread hunger and starvation. Hundreds of millions of people will be forced to abandon their homes in coastal areas and on islands that will be submerged as the sea rises. There will be an explosion in diseases such as malaria, cholera and dengue fever. Devastating heat waves and droughts, as well as floods,

especially in the tropics, will render parts of the Earth uninhabitable. The rain forest covering the Amazon basin will disappear. Coral reefs will vanish. Numerous animal and plant species, many of which are vital to sustaining human populations, will become extinct. Monstrous storms will eradicate biodiversity, along with whole cities and communities. And as these extreme events begin to occur simultaneously in different regions of the world, the report finds, there will be “unprecedented stresses on human systems.” Global agricultural production will eventually not be able to compensate. Health and emergency systems, as well as institutions designed to maintain social cohesion and law and order, will crumble. The world’s poor, at first, will suffer the most. But we all will succumb in the end to the folly and hubris of the Industrial Age. And yet, we do nothing.

“It is useful to recall that a global mean temperature increase of 4°C approaches the difference between temperatures today and those of the last ice age, when much of central Europe and the northern United States were covered with kilometers of ice and global mean temperatures were about 4.5°C to 7°C lower,” the report reads. “And this magnitude of climate change—human induced—is occurring over a century, not millennia.”

The political and corporate elites in the industrialized world continue, in spite of overwhelming scientific data, to place short-term corporate profit and expediency before the protection of human life and the ecosystem. The fossil fuel industry is permitted to determine our relationship to the natural world, dooming future generations. Carbon dioxide (CO₂), the main greenhouse gas, increased from its pre-industrial concentration of about 278 parts per million (ppm) to more than 391 ppm in September 2012, with the rate of rise now at 1.8 ppm per year. We have already passed [the tipping point](#) of 350 ppm; above that level, life as we have known it cannot be sustained. The CO₂ concentration is higher now than at any time in the last 15 million years. The emissions of CO₂, currently about 35 billion metric tons per year, are projected to climb to 41 billion metric tons per year by 2020.

Because about 90 percent of the excess heat trapped by the greenhouse effect since 1955 is momentarily in the oceans, we have begun a process that, even if we halted all carbon emissions today, will ensure rising sea levels and major climate disruptions, including the continued melting of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets as well as the acidification of the oceans. The report estimates that if warming accelerates toward 4 degrees Celsius, sea levels will rise 0.5 to 1 meter, possibly more, by 2100. Sea levels will increase several meters more in the coming centuries. If warming can be kept to 2 degrees or below, sea levels will still rise, by about 20 centimeters by 2100, and probably will continue to rise between 1.5 and 4 meters above present-day levels by the year 2300. Sea-level rise, the report concludes, is likely to be below 2 meters only if warming is kept to well below 1.5 degrees. The rise in sea levels will not be uniform. Coastal areas in tropical regions will be inundated by sea-level rises that are up to 20 percent higher than those in higher latitudes.

“In particular, the melting of the ice sheets will reduce the gravitational pull on the ocean toward the ice sheets and, as a consequence, ocean water will tend to gravitate toward the Equator,” the report reads. “Changes in wind and ocean currents due to global warming and other factors will also affect regional sea-level rise, as will patterns of ocean heat uptake and warming. Sea-level rise impacts are projected to be asymmetrical even within regions and countries. Of the impacts

projected for 31 developing countries, only 10 cities account for two-thirds of the total exposure to extreme floods. Highly vulnerable cities are to be found in Mozambique, Madagascar, Mexico, Venezuela, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. For small island states and river delta regions, rising sea levels are likely to have far ranging adverse consequences, especially when combined with the projected increased intensity of tropical cyclones in many tropical regions, other extreme weather events, and climate change-induced effects on oceanic ecosystems (for example, loss of protective reefs due to temperature increases and ocean acidification)."

"By the time the concentration reaches around 550 ppm (corresponding to a warming of about 2.4°C in the 2060s), it is likely that coral reefs in many areas would start to dissolve," the report reads. "The combination of thermally induced [bleaching events](#), ocean acidification, and sea-level rise threatens large fractions of coral reefs even at 1.5°C global warming. The regional extinction of entire coral reef eco-systems, which could occur well before 4°C is reached, would have profound consequences for their dependent species and for the people who depend on them for food, income, tourism, and shoreline protection." The report projects that the rates of change in ocean acidity over the next century will be "unparalleled in Earth's history."

The global production of maize and wheat has, because of rising temperatures, been in steady decline since the 1980s. But these crop declines will be vastly accelerated in the coming years, with rising temperatures resulting in widespread malnutrition and starvation. It will mean that the poor, and especially children, will endure chronic hunger and malnutrition. There will be an increase in a variety of deadly epidemic diseases. Persistent flooding will contaminate drinking water, spreading diarrheal and respiratory illnesses. The 2012 drought, which affected 80 percent of the agricultural land in the United States, will become the norm. Tropical South America, Central Africa and all tropical islands in the Pacific are, the report says, likely to regularly experience heat waves of unprecedented magnitude, making human life in these areas difficult if not impossible to sustain.

"In this new high-temperature climate regime, the coolest months are likely to be substantially warmer than the warmest months at the end of the 20th century," the report reads. "In regions such as the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Tibetan plateau, almost all summer months are likely to be warmer than the most extreme heat waves presently experienced. For example, the warmest July in the Mediterranean region could be 9°C warmer than today's warmest July." It notes that these changes "potentially exceed the adaptive capacities of many societies and natural systems."

The stress and insecurity caused by the breakdown in the climate will, the report says, "have negative effects on psychological and mental health." It will lead to an increase in "levels of conflict and violence." These changes "will have ramifications for national identification and alter the dynamics of traditional cultures."

The report calls on the leaders of the industrial world to immediately institute radical steps—including a halt to the dependence on fossil fuels—to keep the global temperature rise below 2 degrees C, although the report concedes that even an increase of less than 2 degrees would result in serious damage to the environment and human populations. Without a massive investment in

green infrastructure that can adapt to the heat and other new extreme weather, and in the building of efficient public transportation networks and renewable energy systems to minimize carbon emissions, we will succumb to our own stupidity.

A failure to respond will assure an ecological nightmare that will most probably be accompanied by an economic, social and political breakdown. The human species, the report says, will cross “critical social system thresholds,” and “existing institutions that would have supported adaptation actions would likely become much less effective or even collapse.” The “stresses on human health, such as heat waves, malnutrition, and decreasing quality of drinking water due to seawater intrusion, have the potential to overburden health-care systems to a point where adaptation is no longer possible, and dislocation is forced.”

“There is also no certainty that adaptation to a 4°C world is possible,” it goes on. “A 4°C world is likely to be one in which communities, cities and countries would experience severe disruptions, damage, and dislocation, with many of these risks spread unequally. It is likely that the poor will suffer most and the global community could become more fractured, and unequal than today. The projected 4°C warming simply must not be allowed to occur—the heat must be turned down.”

In much of the world, including China and the United States, dirty energy remains cheap and plentiful, with disastrous consequences.

http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/stand_still_for_the_apocalypse_20121126/

November 28, 2012

Quakers Oppose Hydrofracking in New York State and Beyond

Urge political representatives to prohibit the practice

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Press Release

New York, NY -- New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (commonly called Quakers) formally opposed the practice of High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing (HVHF, hydrofracking, or fracking) at its Fall Sessions in Old Chatham, New York, on November 11, 2012. New York Yearly Meeting is the denominational organization of Quakers in New York State, northern New Jersey, and southwestern Connecticut.

The organization called upon political representatives to prohibit fracking in New York State, stating that the practice is “inconsistent with our faith and practices, which include a commitment to integrity, community, equality, and care of God’s creation.” It expressed its support for legislation and incentives that support renewable and sustainable energy, protect people and the environment, and foster a positive economy. The Yearly Meeting directed its clerk (presiding officer) and general secretary (staff executive) to communicate its stand to elected officials, other Quaker organizations and other faith communities, relevant environmental organizations, and the press. Finally, it asked its members to examine their own lives to find

ways to reduce their need for fossil fuel energy and to consider joining in non-violent protest actions against fracking.

Full text of New York Yearly Meeting's minute (formal statement of conscience) on fracking:

New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) has considered the potential consequences of High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing (also known as HVHF, horizontal hydrofracking, or fracking) in New York State. We oppose hydrofracking in New York State and beyond. We urge our political representatives to prohibit the practice of HVHF in New York State. As Quakers, we experience the Divine through loving and truthful relationships with all people and all creation. After extensive efforts to inform ourselves about fracking we have concluded that it is inconsistent with our faith and practices, which include a commitment to integrity, community, equality, and care of God's creation. We observe that the natural gas industry and government agencies have placed financial gain over the health of our communities and the environment. We see no legitimate reason to exempt hydrofracking from existing laws protecting water, air, land, and health, as is currently the case. In other states where horizontal hydrofracking has been performed, it has resulted in the loss of vast amounts of fresh water, the release of toxins into the environment, damage to communities, and cost to the taxpayers.

We support legislation and incentives that promote research, development, and use of renewable and sustainable energy; support local farms and farmers; protect the air and water; enforce accountability for industries that risk environmental harm; and create economic policies that promote work for New York State residents that they can do in good conscience. We urge all citizens to thoughtfully consider the long-term effects of hydrofracking on the water, land, local economy, infrastructure, services, and the community as a whole. We are encouraged by the many communities coming together to seek a way forward based on truth and respect. We are called to stand against fracking, and invite others to join us in opposition to this practice.

We, the task group of Witness Coordinating Committee charged with creating this minute, suggest the following actions:

- We ask that the NYYM clerk and general secretary disseminate this minute widely through press releases, letters to our elected officials, to other yearly meetings and other Quaker organizations.
- We charge our representatives to the New York and New Jersey Council of Churches to bring this concern to those bodies, and to advocate for those bodies getting under the weight of this concern.
- We urge Friends to examine our own lives to discern the seeds that might inadvertently support the practice of fracking, and, to the degree possible, do what we can to limit or eliminate those seeds.
- We ask Friends to prayerfully consider adding their names to the list of people, started in part by Friends, who have made a public commitment to join with others to engage in

non-violent acts of protest, as their conscience leads them. The link to this list is as follows: <http://www.dontfrackny.org/pledge/>.

About New York Yearly Meeting

New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is the denominational organization comprised of the Quaker meetings (congregations) in New York State, northern New Jersey, and southwestern Connecticut. It was first established in 1695 and has met every year since 1696 to consider the work laid upon it by God's Holy Spirit. For more information about the Yearly Meeting, visit the [New York Yearly Meeting website](http://nnyym.org), nnyym.org.

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<http://fore.research.yale.edu/news/item/quakers-oppose-hydrofracking-in-new-york-state-and-beyond/>

November 30, 2012

Emerging Force on Climate Change: Religion, Ecology, Ethics, and Morality

By Lisa Palmer

The Yale Forum on Climate Change & The Media

Scholars in the 1990s played a hunch and gave rise to a new field of ecology and religion, some focusing on climate change as a moral issue.

No significant academic field of ecology and religion existed in 1995.

Today, more than 260 scholars in the U.S., and a network of 8,000 people around the world, are examining these converging perspectives. For them, understanding exactly how religious traditions revere and respect the natural world may prove key to helping individuals alter their behavior to help address climate challenges and other environmental problems as moral issues.

Efforts to chronicle lessons on religious ecology began when Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim met in 1975 when they were both graduate students in the history of religions program at Fordham University, studying under Thomas Berry.

Over the years, Tucker and Grim, married, gathered with other scholars for seminars and discussions on the banks of the Hudson River at Fordham's Riverdale Center for Religious Research. They've traveled extensively, much of it in East Asia and American Indian communities. Tucker's early expertise began with religious traditions in Asia while Grim's studies first focused on Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and then on Asian and indigenous religious traditions.

In the early 1990s, while teaching Asian religions at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, Tucker wondered how she, as a religious historian and neither a scientist nor policy maker, could best contribute to discussions on the environment. By then she had lived and traveled throughout Asia and had developed concerns for environmental degradation and impacts on humans around the world. "I realized that the world's religions might be an entryway," she said in a recent interview.

Spirit, Science, and Sustainability

What will make people better global citizens? In "Journey of the Universe," evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme explores the human connection to Earth and the cosmos, leading viewers on a journey of the origins of the universe, the emergence of life, and the rise of humans. The film, written by Swimme and historian of religions Mary Evelyn Tucker, chronicles the findings of modern science with cultural traditions of the West, China, Africa, India, and indigenous peoples. It offers lessons on how to work toward a more sustainable future.

The "[Journey of the Universe](#)" and companion book are the result of the collective inspiration of a 30-year collaboration between evolutionary philosopher Swimme, Tucker, John Grim, and the late Thomas Berry, a historian of world religions and leading environmental thinker.

Between 1996 and 1999, Tucker and Grim convened a series of 10 conferences at Harvard, culminating in 10 edited volumes offering serious reflection on the views of nature and environmental ethics from the different world religions. The volumes are generally considered the genesis of the newly emerging religion/ecology field.

Tucker is a senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale University, where she and Grim, also a senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale, direct the [Forum on Religion and Ecology](#). They teach a joint master's program in religion and ecology at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and the Yale Divinity School. (Tucker and Grim are serving as visiting professors at Princeton University for the 2012 fall semester.)

At the Forum on Religion and Ecology, Tucker and Grim have built on the legacy of their teachers — Berry, William Theodore de Bary at Columbia, and Tu Weiming at Harvard — and they lead a comprehensive effort at Yale to bring world religions into environmental issues with a broad sweep. Their work provides ample religious focus on a wide range of environmental issues such as climate change, ecosystems, loss of species, biodiversity, toxicity, water issues, and deforestation, to name a few.

A Moral Issue and Not Solely Scientific, Legal, or Economic

By studying religious ecology, the context for thinking about the environment is not just a scientific issue, or a legal issue, or an economic issue, but a moral issue, Tucker says.

Environmental studies programs are introducing moral and ethical studies into their curricula for the first time. The focus on religion and ecology has become an academic field and a force, one in which religions are involving their congregations.

“We are trying to create a large tent for the various world religions to enter and make their contributions to a variety of issues that are challenging us in the environmental crises we are facing. A great deal of this has to do with climate change, but it also has to do with soil depletion, loss of water, loss of fisheries, and so on,” Tucker says.

Rethink Scriptures ... With Realistic Expectations

Tucker and Grim see the need for religious traditions to rethink their scriptures and retrieve, reevaluate, and reconstruct their theologies with consideration of the very challenging environmental problems now facing society. For starters, for example, religious leaders are reflecting on just what it means to have dominion over nature (Genesis 1:26). Religious traditions must be brought into the dialog involving environmental science to help solve these modern problems, Tucker says. But even theologians modifying their definitions of dominion, stewardship, and the natural world may not on their own be sufficient to inspire adequate action.

Strong religious leadership could close the gap, according to ethicist Donald Brown, whose work has focused extensively on climate change.

“They have access to the politicians in a way that the environmental community does not get,” said Brown, who teaches at Widener University School of Law in Harrisburg, Pa. “We are only going to make progress if we can make people see the ethical unacceptability of some of the players in this civilization dialogue.”

Brown says religious leaders have a duty to explain that greenhouse gas emissions in their states and regions are harming people across the world. He says spiritual traditions hold tremendous potential to evoke big social changes.

“Historical studies of smoking cessation, the civil rights movement, and women’s rights show that social change happens when a group says, the rules of your clan are morally unacceptable. Religion can bring that voice to the debates. They could be the tip of the spear. We desperately need a social movement that sees things, especially things that are wasteful, that are generating greenhouse gases, are morally unacceptable,” Brown says. “It is probably the most important thing we could be working on.” (See [related Q&A with Don Brown](#).)

Brown says he is optimistic about change, but he also feels theologians and religious leaders are not sufficiently engaged and not adequately communicating the issues broadly to their congregations.

Christopher Key Chapple, a professor on the religions of India and comparative theology at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, recalls first meeting Tucker and Grim in 1976 when he too was a Fordham University graduate student studying under Berry. Chapple says he is encouraged that scholarly writing and popular literature on religious ecology have become more of a societal force over the past 15 years.

(Chapple is editor of [*Worldviews*](#), one of two specialized journals that focuses solely on religion and ecology. The other is [*The Journal of Religion, Nature and Culture*](#). In addition to major publications, such as the 2005 two-volume [*Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*](#) edited by Bron Taylor, a group on religion and ecology was established within the American Academy of Religion.)

Religious traditions have been the traditional resource for wisdom throughout world history, Chapple explains. “As people turn to religious leaders for guidance, religious leaders are going to task parishioners and temple goers to ask questions of themselves like, Is there anything that I can do to be part of the solution and not continue to be part of the problem? Those are very important and real developments in the last few years,” he said.

Chapple believes religious interests can constructively lobby and influence legislation and that religious conscience can move people to take direct action. But change won’t happen unless clear messages come from the active influence of religious leaders. Right now, he says, ideas on taking those steps are still forming.

“All change in the world starts with ideas,” said Chapple. “Ideas are sometimes not very tidy. They can be a bit messy. As we educate new generations of students and suggest pathways for really responding once they have all the information, the change will eventually prove effective.”

As illustrated by the full series of faith-based features (see listing below) that have comprised this *Yale Forum* series, faith-based interests and their religions increasingly are awakening to the size, scale, complexity, and challenge posed by human-caused climate change. Some may feel they have been late in coming to the issues, but they increasingly are a force yet to be reckoned with.

Yale Forum *Series on faith-based groups:*

[Nationwide Climate ‘Preach-In’ To Target Broad Faith-Group Congregations](#)

[The Catholic Church and Climate Change](#)

[Judaism and Climate Change](#)

[Episcopalians Confronting Climate Change](#)

[Baptists and Climate Change](#)

[The United Church of Christ and Climate Change](#)

[‘Green Muslims,’ Eco-Islam and Evolving Climate Change Consciousness](#)

[Presbyterians and Climate Change](#)

[Preachable Moments: Evangelical Christians and Climate Change](#)

[Mormon Silence on Climate Change: Why, and What Might It Mean?](#)

December 2012

A Spirit Earthly Enough: Toward a Philosophy for the Emerging Franciscan Earth Corps to Engage Youth in Climate Change Adaptation

By Brother Coyote (Gary Paul Nabhan, OEF, PhD.)

It sometimes seems odd to me that we as Christians embrace the notion that Jesus came down from heaven to do healing on earth, but that we as contemporary Christians do not take seriously the need for healing *of* the earth as one of the highest expressions of our faith. If God so loved this Earth that he/she gave us his/her only son to live here among us, then how in this world can we ignore that this Earth itself is blessed, that the very soil which was touched by the feet of Jesus is sacred?

And yet, many of those who have wished to walk in the path of Jesus do so by defining their vocation as service to the poor, sick and downtrodden of humanity, as if Adam (humankind) was not of the earth, as reflected in the core meaning of *adama*. Ultimately, working for social justice and human healing and working for environmental justice and ecological restoration are one in the same; they restore us to right relationship with all of Creation, and through that process, to right relationship with the Creator. If we need such an impulse explicitly sanctioned by the many gospels or versions of the Good News, we need only remember the passage in the Gospel of Thomas in which Jesus encourages his followers to “go out to preach/to care for all of creation.”

And yet, we must daily confront the oddest of paradoxes: in the countries with the highest percentages of their populations calling themselves Christians (in the sense of believing in Jesus and attending church), we must bear witness to the highest percentages of the lands and waters being broken from their original nature, that is fragmented, degraded, contaminated or sickened. It is hard to be healthy Christians if the land on which we live is sickened, or if the waters in which we swim or drink can sicken humans as well as other-than-human lives.

Of course, this degradation of Creation is not new; in fact its prevalence as well as its antiquity may be why we are often numbed by it, or oblivious to it. But few of us would ever claim aloud that such degradation is a tolerable and Christian-ly way to live here on this blessed Earth. In fact, diligent care for Creation may be one of the major disconnects between Christian belief and Christian practice over the last five hundred years. The loss of species and degradation of their (our) habitats may well be—in the words of Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson—“the thing for which future generations will be most likely to forgive us.”

Perhaps that is why, more than ever before in human (and Christian) history, we need to reflect on the special calling which a privileged youth named Francesco di Bernardone was

given, a calling which transformed him into Saint Francis of Assisi, now known as the Patron Saint of Ecology.

At a time in his life when young Francesco was adrift, wandering about outside of the walls of the city-state of Assisi, and disenfranchised from both his own family and faith, he stumbled upon the ruins of San Damiano on the lower and more degraded slopes of Monte Subasio. There, he heard the Holy Spirit say,

“Francesco, restore my church (my dwelling place).”

The young man took up this calling, and restored the physical structure of the chapel of San Damiano, but more importantly, he built a truly Christian community—the precursor of the Franciscan Order—*while initiating the physical, collective labor of restoration.*

But that is not all. I have always supposed that when Francesco and his friends had finally restored the walls and beams and roof to San Damiano, the Spirit called him once again.

“Francesco, good job, my son, but when I asked you to restore the church, I did not mean San Damiano in isolation. Francesco, restore *the Church.*”

And so, St. Francis began that task, a task which will never end. Before his time, the religious were cloistered away from society (and nature) at large; he let the religious speak in the vernacular to and live with the poor, the sick, the landless, and the salt of the earth. He even preached and sang his praise of the Creator to other creatures. He extended (if he did not explicitly initiate) the practice of conscientious objection to warring between city-states, nations, faiths and species. And above all, he took a vow of poverty—that of doing no harm by the accumulation of capital and the widening of his ecological footprint—so that he could walk in the path of Jesus “with no fixed abode in which to lay his head.”

Now, nearly a thousand years later, we must again let the Holy Spirit call us to a task even larger than the one which Francis was commissioned to do: to restore the ever-Emerging Church through restoring the Earth, that dwelling place which we have had the blessing to have shared and to share with Jesus himself. In the twenty-first century, restoring the church will ultimately be done by reopening its walls to embrace all of Creation, and spiritual healing will ultimately be done by halting the environmental degradation which differentially affects the poor and disenfranchised populations, cultures and species struggling to remain on this planet.

For that reason, Saint Francis should truly be called the Patron Saint of Restoration Ecology, for he took rebuilding the church both literally and figuratively. We must do so as well, and we can do so over the few next decades by recruiting and mentoring a Franciscan Earth Corps at the *Fourth Order* in the Franciscan family, one which cares for the rest of Creation as much as it does our own species, for our species will be left further impoverished and sickened if we do not fully care for all of Creation.

The very act of being engaged in ecological restoration—particularly where it builds environmental justice for the poor and disenfranchised---is a physical, corporeal means of expressing our love for the Creator through our care for Creation. Particularly for youth, walking the talk is what it is all about, for they can smoke out our own hypocrisy, contradictions, and failure to practice what we preach as quickly as anyone can. To give youth the chance to be physically, socially, intellectually and spiritually engaged in ecological restoration in service to environmental justice means that they can have the opportunity to see their values and practice integrated.

But just where and how should we target the quest for and practice of Franciscan restoration for the twenty-first century? Obviously, adapting to climate change must be a driver, and healing lands after climatic disasters is a must. Over 3000 counties in the U.S. suffered from climate-related disasters in 2012, more than ever before in American history; in addition, six Mexican states suffered the worst drought in their history between 2010 and 2012. Here are a few guideposts that we should seek out along the way:

1. We should situate our restoration sites in landscapes and communities where it will build environmental justice, and reduce or even halt and reverse further damage to the health and access to live-able wages of the poor and marginalized in those places.
2. We should practice Franciscan restoration in the context of building multi-ethnic and interfaith understanding, so that youth of many backgrounds and faiths are welcomed to participate in the process as a tangible expression of their own spirituality put into practice.
3. We should seek out sites which benefit both migratory and resident species, and include youth from both immigrant and long-term resident families in this practice.
4. The youth should not simply be engaged in the physical labor of restoration, but be exposed through open-ended discussions about the root causes and social consequences of the climate change and environmental damage they are attempting to undo, and the potential benefits of long-term restoration to the human and other-than-human community.
5. They should be advised through tangible lessons that restoration efforts will not take root and heal unless the destructive processes which preceded them are abated.
6. They should be given ample opportunities to express their own emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth, doubts and misgivings as the collective work proceeds, so that their personal growth is validated and encouraged.
7. They should be reminded that the emerging church and the evolving universe are not in opposition to one another-- nor are science and religion--- when both are in service to Creation.

On my own last pilgrimage to Assisi, I had set out to do silent walking meditation from my lodging in the town center to the sacred site of San Damiano, when I was rudely awakened by a cacophony of jackhammers. In the wake of a terrible earthquake, the structure

of San Damiano had been weakened, and the walls as well as the tile roof had suffered considerable damage. But funds rolled in from all parts of the world to repair the damage, and once again the ancient chapel was being restored, or at least, given a face lift.

And yet, knowledge of that did not initially ease my sense of sadness that I could only visit San Damiano if I accepted the noise and the chaos that went with its restoration! I circled around it, but did not enter, until the jackhammers were set down while the workers ate their lunches. I entered the chapel and went to the back pew to pray, trying to overcome a headache from all the noise, and a deep sense of disorientation, if not spiritual dryness.

As I kneeled and prayed, occasionally weeping in grief for my own dryness, my thoughts began to drift, even as I tried to center my prayer on the Christ crucified on the San Damiano cross. But then, something shifted. I gradually realized that I was being spoken to-- in Italian, no less-- and that I was being asked to pay attention to what was immediately before me. As I redirected my eyes to the San Damiano cross, and noticed that the feet of Jesus appeared to be moving ever so slightly. I wondered if another earthquake was beginning, or if the previous one and all the jackhammering had weakened the wall behind the cross. In any case, the toes of Jesus seemed to be wiggling, and once I realized what I was seeing, I began to laugh as if I was being tickled.

“Take little steps,” I heard the voice of Francesco say to me, in medieval Italian.

I strained to understand what he was saying. “Slow steps? No, no, are you saying for me to take *little*... little steps?”

“*Little* steps... they accumulate slowly, it seems, but they will get you there on time. *Little steps.*”

I began to laugh aloud, uproariously, until a German man who had come into the chapel to take photos and perhaps pray gave me a harsh look. But then, the jackhammers began once more, so that my laughter was drowned out by the larger chaos around us. I took leave from the chapel, and continued on my way, without speaking, but it didn't seem as if I was intruded upon by the noise of the reconstruction work anymore. In fact, I welcomed it. It reminded me of how every church, every faith, every place inhabited on earth needs renewal. We can all be part of such restoration if we patiently, diligently take little steps toward our larger goal.

http://fore.research.yale.edu/files/Nabhan-A_Spirit_Earthly_Enough.pdf

December 2012

Worldviews on Fire: Understanding the Inspiration for Congregational Religious
Environmentalism

By Erin Lothes Biviano

CrossCurrents 62.4 (2012): 495-511

Addressing participants at an Alliance of Religions and Conservation conference in Nairobi during the fall of 2012, Mr. Mounkaila Goumandakoye, the African Regional Director of the United Nations' Environment Programme's Office for Africa, acknowledged that the commitment of faith groups to heal the earth is one of the "driving forces for positive change as humanity is grappling with challenges of colossal consequences." Mr. Goumandakoye is not the first global leader to place hope in faith groups. Ban Ki Moon, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, made a similar plea before the Copenhagen climate summit of 2009, noting that religious groups "can have the largest, widest and deepest reach" on the summit's impact.

For the full article, visit:

http://fore.research.yale.edu/files/Lothes_Biviano-Worldviews_on_Fire.pdf

December 2012

December Newsletter of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

<http://safcei.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Newsletter-December-2012.pdf>

December 1, 2012

Some wish Islam would inform climate debate

By Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — At Friday prayers in Qatar's most popular mosque, the imam discussed the civil war in Syria, the unrest in Egypt and the U.N. endorsement of an independent state of Palestine.

Not a word about climate change, even though the Middle Eastern nation of Qatar is hosting a U.N. conference where nearly 200 countries are trying to forge a joint plan to fight global warming, which climate activists say is the greatest modern challenge to mankind.

"Unfortunately the Arab and Islamic countries have political and economic problems," said Adham Hassan, a worshipper from Jordan streaming out of the al-Khatabb mosque in Doha. "Islam calls for the protection of the environment, but the Muslim countries are mostly poor and they didn't cause pollution and aren't affected by climate change."

Of six mosques contacted by The Associated Press in the Qatari capital, only one included an environmental message in the Friday prayers, telling those in attendance to plant trees, shun extravagance and conserve water and electricity.

The Quran, Islam's holy book, is filled with more than 1,500 verses to nature and Earth. Yet the voice of Islamic leaders is missing from the global dialogue on warming.

That disappoints Muslim environmental activists, who believe the powerful pull of Islam could be the ideal way to change behavior in both poor countries, where many people's main source of information is the mosque, and in some wealthy countries like Qatar where Islam remains important even as rapid growth has made it the world's top per capita emitter of carbon dioxide.

"It's absolutely frustrating," said Fazlun Khalid, founder of the U.K.-based Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, which oversees projects around the world that use Islamic teachings to combat problems ranging from deforestation to overfishing.

"We get very little support from Muslims," he said. "They don't connect. We have to wake them up to the fact their existence is threatened by their own behavior. Modernity and the economic development paradigm is about dominating nature. Islam, as you are aware, is submission to the will of the creator. We need to remind ourselves that we have to submit."

As the annual U.N. climate conference neared its halfway point in Doha, the usual splits opened up between rich and poor nations over how to divide the burden — and financial cost — of protecting the world from overheating.

U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres lamented that she didn't see "much public interest, support, for governments to take on more ambitious and more courageous decisions."

"Each one of us needs to assume responsibility. It's not just about domestic governments," she said.

The talks are aimed at limiting the level of warming to 3.6 F, compared to temperatures before the industrial revolution. So the main focus is to cut the emissions of greenhouse gases that a vast majority of climate scientists say is to blame for the rising temperatures.

That goal gets more difficult to reach every year. Temperatures have already risen about 1.4 degrees F, according to the latest report by the U.N.'s scientific panel on climate change. And a series of reports before and during the conference warned that global emissions are still increasing, primarily driven by the rapid growth of emerging economies such as China and India.

World religions are seeking a more active role in climate change and sustainability issues. The Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change project — endorsed by Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism — was a regular presence at the U.N. climate talks in Copenhagen in 2009, while the Dalai Lama has repeatedly called on governments to take climate change more seriously. Religious leaders in the United States have launched a movement known as "green religion" or "eco-theology, with groups like the Evangelical Environmental Network endorsing clean energy and calling on people to consume less.

Muslims are also slowly heeding the call.

Egypt's government-appointed Muslim Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa, also known as the green mufti, has been outspoken on pollution and climate change, calling them greater threats than war, according to the consultancy Green Compass Research. The holy month of Ramadan has taken on a greener theme, with Muslims across the Middle East and the United States using it to touch on food waste and sustainability. Small-scale campaigns using Islam including one aimed at turtle conservation in Malaysia and illegal mining in Indonesia have been rolled out.

"It's becoming a more important part of Islamic discourse, a more holistic approach to what it means to be a responsible Muslim in the world today," said Tamara Sonn, a humanities professor at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. "There are greater levels of education and overall global awareness of the importance of environmental concerns facilitated by advances in communication, the Internet."

But Muslim environmental activists say more could be done.

Too often, they complain, discussions of the role of Islam and the environment are limited to conferences. They say religious leaders could issue fatwas on the environment, and governments could introduce curriculums in schools highlighting themes found in the Quran such as the importance of nature, treating animals compassionately and the prohibition on wastefulness.

"The majority of Muslim scholars, leaders, and activists whose major concerns are ritualistic and the legalistic aspects of Islam, themselves have not seen the environmental issues and problems as their immediate concern," Muhammad Ali, assistant professor Islamic Studies University of California, Riverside, said in an email. "While they focus on the purity and validity of a ritual act, they lack understanding and awareness of the immediacy and cruciality of the environment crisis as a common problem. Besides, like other monotheists in general, they see human beings as superior over the natural world."

Khalid has seen firsthand how Islam can persuade Muslims to change their ways on sustainability issues. He once went to Zanzibar after conservation groups failed to persuade fishermen to stop using dynamite on coral reefs. After leading several workshops that leaned heavily on Quranic teachings, he said the fishermen never again used destructive practices.

"They stopped dynamiting coral reefs in 24 hours," said Khalid, who has similar successes in Nigeria and Pakistan with forest protection. "It had a profound impact on the local fishermen. One of the fishermen told me that we can disobey the laws of the government but we can't disobey the laws of the creator."

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2012/12/01/muslims-islam-climate-environment/1738835/>

December 3, 2012

For 8 days of Hanukkah, my True Love said to me: "Help save My Earth!"

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow
The Shalom Center

Hanukkah's Light beyond Doha's Darkness

In Doha, Qatar, yet another conference of all the world's governments has just ended — once again failing to take crucial steps to prevent world-wide climate disaster.

So once again this year, in our second letter about the Hanukkah that will begin this Saturday night, The Shalom Center is urging us all to take action to heal and rededicate the Earth, as the Universal Temple of all humanity and all life-forms.

The failure is the result of enormous pressure from Big Coal and Big Oil, preventing actions to reduce CO2 emissions that large majorities of Americans and the citizens of other countries support.

How can the 99% of us respond to this lethal failure by the powerful 1%?

The 99% are not helpless. Public pressure stopped the earth-threatening Tar Sands Pipeline and preserved the moratorium on water-threatening fracking in the Delaware River basin. The Occupy movement has alerted many of us to the dangers of corporate domination. Now what?

We can treat this dark season's Festivals of Light as profound moments for sacred action on behalf of Life and YHWH/ Yahhh, the Breath of Life.

In this letter we are focusing on Hanukkah and its celebration of sacred Light in the Menorah. We are sharing with you The Shalom Center's graphic symbol of the Temple Menorah as a Tree of Light, blossoming with light-filled life.

This year, the first night of Hanukkah comes on Saturday evening, December 5. As always, it comes when the moon is dark and the Earth is close to the winter solstice when (in the Northern Hemisphere) the night is as long as it gets, the sun is as dark as it gets.

In this time of darkness, we kindle a gathering bank of lights. If we are feeling depressed or despairing about our country, our world, our planet — now is the time to kindle new light.

Let us remember that a community of "the powerless" can overcome a great empire, giving us courage to face our modern corporate empires of Oil and Coal when they defile our most sacred Temple: Earth itself. And the reminder (again from Zechariah) that we triumph "Not by might and not by power but by My Spirit [b'ruchi — or, "My breath," "My wind!"]", says YHWH, the Infinite Breath of Life."

We are taught not only to light the Hanukkah menorah, but to publicize the miracle, to turn our individual actions outward for the rest of the world to see and to be inspired.

So we invite you to join, this Hanukkah, in The Shalom Center's Green Menorah Commitment for taking action -- personal, communal, and political -- to heal the earth from the global climate crisis. Above is the symbol for the Green Menorah Covenant. (To expand it, click on it.)

And here is how we can encode these teachings of Hanukkah into actions we take to heal the earth, one action for each of the eight days. We begin at home and enlarge the circle of action step by step, to the national level:

After lighting your menorah each evening, dedicate yourself to making the changes in your life that will allow our limited sources of energy to last for as long as they're needed, and with minimal impact on our climate.

No single action will solve the global climate crisis, just as no one of us alone can make enough of a difference. Yet, if we act on as many of the areas below as possible, and act together, a seemingly small group of people can overcome a seemingly intractable crisis. We can, as in days of old, turn this time of darkness into one of light.

Day 1: Personal/Household: Call your electric-power utility to switch to wind-powered electricity. (For each home, 100% wind-power reduces CO2 emissions the same as not driving 20,000 miles in one year.)

Day 2: Congregation, Hillel, JCC, retirement home, etc: Urge your congregation or community building to do an energy/insulation audit. Urge switching to wind-powered rather than coal-powered electricity. Call your utility company to learn how.

Day 3. Your network of friends, Twitter buddies, Facebookers, and the members of civic or professional groups you belong to: If you have friends like newspaper editors, labor union or professional association leaders, real-estate developers, architects, bankers, etc. urge them to strengthen the green factor in all their decisions and actions.

Day 4: Workplace or College: Urge the top officials to arrange an energy audit. Check with utility company about getting one free or at low-cost.

Day 5: Town/City: Urge town/city officials to require greening of buildings through persuasion of businesses, ordinances, tax policy, and executive orders. Creating change is often easier on the local level!

Day 6: State: Urge state legislators to reduce subsidies for highways, increase them for mass transit. In states (like Pennsylvania, NY) where high-profit oil/ gas companies are trying to "frack" Oil Shale deposits, demand a moratorium until we can get full information on what poisonous chemicals are being poured into the water table and our drinking water.

Day 7. (which this year is Shabbat). Automobile: If possible, choose today or one other day every week to not use your car at all. Every day, lessen driving: use public transit, bike, walk. Shop on-line. Cluster errands. Carpool. Don't idle engine beyond 20 seconds.

Day 8: National: Some Senators and Congressmembers are seeking to cripple EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), mostly to protect Big Coal. Oppose them! Urge your Congressman and Senators to strengthen EPA to regulate CO2 emissions from coal-burning plants, autos, oil refineries, etc. — for the sake of our planet's climate, and to lessen asthma outbreaks among our children.

Please remember to include The Shalom Center in your Hanukkah gifts by clicking on the "Donate" line just below my signature. Thanks!

Happy Hanukkah for Planet Earth — and you!

Blessings of light in a month of dark, hope in a time of doubt. — Arthur

<https://theshalomcenter.org/8-days-hanukkah-my-true-love-said-me-help-save-my-earth>

December 3, 2012

Orthodox Leader Deepens Progressive Stance on Environment

By Marlise Simons
New York Times

At a conference near Istanbul last June, the chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall spoke about the endangered habitat of what she called "our closest relatives." Underlining the evolutionary link, she described her encounter with a senior male ape who had a "beautiful white beard."

With a smile, she turned to the 72-year-old man in the front row and added, "Very much like yours."

The man with the long white beard was Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians. Fortunately, he is known for his easy, affable manner, and he joined the laughter that followed.

But his commitment to environmental activism is deeply serious, earning him the nickname the Green Patriarch. He has preached that caring for the environment is a religious imperative, and for more than a decade, he has made a point of bringing together theologians and scientists like Dr. Goodall for debates and briefings.

This year's reports of record melting of the earth's ice sheets and extreme droughts have given a new urgency to Bartholomew's messages about the degrading natural world. While economists and politicians prescribe more growth and consumption to overcome economic crises, the patriarch insists that the real crisis is cultural and spiritual, and can be overcome only by moving away from rampant materialism.

All human beings, he has said, should draw a distinction "between what we want and what we need."

In September, he published a [strongly worded encyclical](#) calling on all Orthodox Christians to repent “for our sinfulness” in not doing enough to protect the planet. Biodiversity, “the work of divine wisdom,” was not granted to humanity to abuse it, he wrote; human dominion over the earth does not mean the right to greedily acquire and destroy its resources. He singled out “the powerful of this world,” saying they need a new mind-set to stop destroying the planet for profit or short-term interest.

Other religious leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI, the Dalai Lama and the archbishop of Canterbury, have also called for responsible stewardship of the environment. But Bartholomew has gone further than most; some theologians call his stance revolutionary.

“Traditionally in Christianity, sin was what you did to other humans,” said Kallistos Ware, a prominent Orthodox theologian based in Britain, “but Bartholomew insisted that what you do to the animals, the air, the water, the land can be sinful, not just folly, and that was quite a change.”

Aides say that Bartholomew’s embrace of environmental issues is part of his agenda to modernize a deeply conservative church that can seem distant and insular, with its focus on long Byzantine rituals and mysticism. Speaking in defense of nature as a creation of God fits church teachings, and perhaps just as crucial, his aides say, it can also transcend the rivalries and nationalist rifts of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As a federation of 15 independent national churches, it lacks the central authority of, say, the Vatican.

Still, Bartholomew’s seat, established 1,700 years ago, holds primacy among the world’s 300 million Orthodox Christians. As “first among equals” in the church, he acts as convener and can set the agenda for discussion.

Not all church prelates are inspired by his efforts to enlighten the faithful on the environment. “The patriarch is going against the current in much of Orthodoxy,” said the Rev. John Chryssavgis, an archdeacon of the church and adviser on environmental issues. “He has to preach and promote this constantly.”

Aboard a ferry steaming toward Istanbul, Father Chryssavgis pointed out a sprawling church-owned building perched atop of the island of Buyukada. A former orphanage, it was seized by the Turkish government but returned to the church recently. Now empty and in disrepair, it will become an interfaith study center for the environment if Bartholomew has his way.

“He wants a permanent institution,” Father Chryssavgis said. “When he passes on, there may not be the same concern for the environment.”

The impact of the patriarch’s many sermons and conferences is difficult to gauge. There has been wide interest in a new book, “Greening the Orthodox Parish,” said Frederick Krueger, its American editor. Subtitled “A Handbook for Christian Ecological Practice” and with a preface by Bartholomew, it covers theology, special liturgies and prayers as well as science papers and practical advice.

Numerous Orthodox monasteries and churches in Eastern Europe and the United States have switched to [solar energy](#) in recent years.

Among them is the Chrysopegi monastery on the Greek island of Crete, where the nuns use the environmental texts of the patriarch and other theologians in their teachings.

“More and more young people are coming to our courses,” Mother Theocheni, the abbess of the monastery, said at the conference at Halki, near Istanbul. “They come to find meaning. Many seem to find inspiration in ecology. It’s been growing fast for the last 10 years.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/04/science/bartholomew-i-of-constantinoples-bold-green-stance.html?emc=tnt&tntemail1=y>

December 3, 2012

Hanukkah for Healing: The Green Menorah

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow
The Shalom Center

The Green Menorah Commitment: Action to Avert Global Scorching

The first night of Hanukkah is this coming Saturday night, December 8.

This is the first of two letters urging that to the traditional understandings of Hanukkah, we add seeing it as the time for recommitment to protect, heal, and rededicate the Temple of the Earth as anciently the Temple in Jerusalem was rededicated at this time of year.

We will also (see column 1 on this page) suggest specific actions you can take on the eight days of Hanukkah, responding to the passionate message from the Breath that breathes all life: “For the eight days of Hanukkah, my True Love said to me: “Please save My Earth!”

Above we are sharing a vision of the Green Menorah from the Middle Ages. (Click on it to expand it.) Elsewhere on our page is another such from our own generation, created by The Shalom Center.

By fusing the tree and the menorah, the Green Menorah becomes the symbol of the intertwining of adamah (Earth) and adam (human earthlings).

It also symbolizes a Jewish commitment to renew the miracle of Hanukkah in our own generation: Using one day’s oil to meet eight days’ needs: doing our part so that by 2020, US oil consumption is cut by seven-eighths.

In that way, in our own generation we can rededicate the universal Temple of Planet Earth, as the Talmud describes the rededication of the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. We can hold back the devastation that global scorching is already wreaking on our lives — Hurricane Sandy, the

devastating corn-country drought in the US, unheard-of floods in Vermont, not to mention disasters in Australia, Russia, Africa, and Pakistan.

We invite you to join in this commitment to heal our planet and our human race from the climate crisis of global scorching.

There are two aspects of what we need to do:

- Hands-on action by congregations and congregants to reduce actual CO2 emissions on their own and to infuse their own celebrations of Jewish festivals, life-cycle events, prayers, and education with eco-consciousness; and
- Advocacy for change in public policy, including such possibilities as transferring subsidies for Big Oil and Big coal to renewable energy development and placement; instituting a gradually rising carbon fee, with the proceeds divided three ways: preventing hardship from the higher cost of carbon products among the poor and working families; retraining workers (like coal miners) whose jobs are undermined by the shift away from carbon; and reducing the deficit.

The SEVEN BRANCHES of the Green Menorah symbolize earthy actions in our own congregations and households. The SEVEN LIGHTS in the Green Menorah symbolize seven actions to light up change in public policy beyond our own homes.

To save our planet, crops, water supply, & coastlines from the ravages of climate crisis & global scorching, The Shalom Center urges these seven directions of PERSONAL & POLICY change at all governmental levels, corporate and labor-union decisions, and household / congregational action. To work for these policy changes, write Office@theshalomcenter.org or the Shalom Center, 6711 Lincoln Drive, Philadelphia PA 19119.

1. Making carbon pay the real costs of its effect on climate:

- Personal change: households set 5% of our annual coal, oil, & gasoline costs as tzedakah (“charitable” contributions) to support sustainable-energy activism.
- Public policy: requiring energy producers to pay for the carbon emissions their products will cause, through a carbon tax, carbon caps, or a combination.

2. Paying for low-carbon energy sources:

- For households, buying energy-conserving appliances, joining wind-energy plans, etc.
- Public policy: ending subsidies to such carbon-producing sources of energy as coal, oil, and corn-based ethanol; constantly increasing subsidies for such non-carbon-emitting sources of energy as wind, solar, switch-grass.

3. Buildings:

- Greening our own new homes and congregations, and retrogreening our present buildings.

- Public policy: enacting strong building-code regulations for new buildings and for retrogreening old ones.

4. Transportation:

- As households and congregations, car-pooling, walking, or biking to congregations, jobs, etc.
- Public policy: ending subsidies to conventional autos, highways, and airplanes; strictly limiting emissions from autos and airplanes; raising subsidies to bikes, rail, walking, and to holding long-distance meetings by teleconference.

5. Land use:

- Personal choices of urban-style high-density living (whether in actual cities or in suburbs)
- Policy: subsidize and invest in urban recreation, workplaces, etc. vs. sprawl and low-density housing.

6. Wisdom-creation:

- In Jewish life, infusing festivals, life-cycle markers (especially intergenerational markers like bar/bat mitzvah & confirmation), prayer, and Torah-study with concern for the earth and climate.
- In public policy, subsidizing scientific climate-crisis analysis; climate-centered educational projects throughout school years from pre-K through grad school; support for art, literature, music, dance, film, games, etc. that address climate crisis.

7. Shabbat and restful time:

- In our individual and congregational practice, strongly encouraging — even more than before — setting aside restful time and making minimal use of carbon-emitting energy for the time of Shabbat itself, as a wise and sacred Jewish practice.
- In public policy, requiring paid leave and holiday time for parental care and neighborhood-centered celebration.

May you and your family have a Happy Healing Hanukkah, and may your actions be a Hanukkah present of healing for the Earth.

And we at The Shalom Center hope you can also give a Hanukkah gift to our work, a gift to help us keep on teaching and acting to heal and save our planet. To give that sacred gift, please click on the “Donate” line on the left margin.

<https://theshalomcenter.org/content/hanukkah-healing-green-menorah>

December 4, 2012

To Stop Climate Change, Students Aim at College Portfolios

By Justin Gillis
New York Times

SWARTHMORE, Pa. — A group of [Swarthmore College](#) students is asking the school administration to take a seemingly simple step to combat pollution and [climate change](#): sell off the endowment's holdings in large fossil fuel companies. For months, they have been getting a simple answer: no.

As they consider how to ratchet up their campaign, the students suddenly find themselves at the vanguard of a national movement.

In recent weeks, college students on dozens of campuses have demanded that university endowment funds rid themselves of [coal](#), [oil](#) and gas stocks. The students see it as a tactic that could force climate change, barely discussed in the presidential campaign, back onto the national political agenda.

“We’ve reached this point of intense urgency that we need to act on climate change now, but the situation is bleaker than it’s ever been from a political perspective,” said William Lawrence, a Swarthmore senior from East Lansing, Mich.

Students who have signed on see it as a conscious imitation of the successful effort in the 1980s to pressure colleges and other institutions to divest themselves of the stocks of companies doing business in South Africa under apartheid.

A small institution in Maine, Unity College, has already [voted](#) to get out of fossil fuels. Another, Hampshire College in Massachusetts, has adopted a broad [investment policy](#) that is ridding its portfolio of fossil fuel stocks.

“In the near future, the political tide will turn and the public will demand action on climate change,” [Stephen Mulkey](#), the Unity College president, wrote in a [letter](#) to other college administrators. “Our students are already demanding action, and we must not ignore them.”

But at colleges with large endowments, many administrators are viewing the demand skeptically, saying it would undermine their goal of maximum returns in support of education. Fossil fuel companies represent a significant portion of the stock market, comprising nearly 10 percent of the value of the Russell 3000, a broad index of 3,000 American companies.

No school with an endowment exceeding \$1 billion has agreed to divest itself of fossil fuel stocks. At Harvard, which holds the largest endowment in the country at \$31 billion, the student body [recently voted](#) to ask the school to do so. With roughly half the undergraduates voting, 72 percent of them supported the demand.

“We always appreciate hearing from students about their viewpoints, but Harvard is not considering divesting from companies related to fossil fuels,” Kevin Galvin, a university spokesman, said by e-mail.

Several organizations have been working on some version of a divestment campaign, initially focusing on coal, for more than a year. But the recent escalation has largely been the handiwork of a grass-roots organization, 350.org, that focuses on climate change, and its leader, [Bill McKibben](#), a writer turned advocate. The group’s name is a reference to what some scientists see as a [maximum safe level](#) of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, 350 parts per million. The level is now about 390, an increase of 41 percent since before the Industrial Revolution.

Mr. McKibben is [touring the country](#) by bus, speaking at sold-out halls and urging students to begin local divestment initiatives focusing on [200 energy companies](#). Many of the students attending said they were inspired to do so by an article he wrote over the summer in Rolling Stone magazine, “[Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math](#).”

Speaking recently to an audience at the [University of Vermont](#), Mr. McKibben painted the fossil fuel industry as an enemy that must be defeated, arguing that it had used money and political influence to block climate action in Washington. “This is no different than the tobacco industry — for years, they lied about the dangers of their industry,” Mr. McKibben said.

Eric Wohlschlegel, a spokesman for the [American Petroleum Institute](#), said that continued use of fossil fuels was essential for the country’s economy, but that energy companies were investing heavily in ways to emit less carbon dioxide.

In an interview, Mr. McKibben said he recognized that a rapid transition away from fossil fuels would be exceedingly difficult. But he said strong government policies to limit emissions were long overdue, and were being blocked in part by the political power of the incumbent industry.

Mr. McKibben’s goal is to make owning the stocks of these companies disreputable, in the way that owning tobacco stocks has become disreputable in many quarters. Many colleges will not buy them, for instance.

Mr. McKibben has laid out a series of demands that would get the fuel companies off 350.org’s blacklist. He wants them to stop exploring for new fossil fuels, given that they have already booked reserves about five times as large as scientists say society can afford to burn. He wants them to stop lobbying against emission policies in Washington. And he wants them to help devise a transition plan that will leave most of their reserves in the ground while encouraging lower-carbon energy sources.

“They need more incentive to make the transition that they must know they need to make, from fossil fuel companies to energy companies,” Mr. McKibben said.

Most college administrations, at the urging of their students, have been taking global warming seriously for years, spending money on steps like cutting energy consumption and installing solar panels.

The divestment demand is so new that most administrators are just beginning to grapple with it. Several of them, in interviews, said that even though they tended to agree with students on the seriousness of the problem, they feared divisive boardroom debates on divestment.

That was certainly the case in the 1980s, when the South African divestment campaign caused bitter arguments across the nation.

The issue then was whether divestment, potentially costly, would have much real effect on companies doing business in South Africa. Even today, historians differ on whether it did. But the campaign required prominent people to grapple with the morality of apartheid, altering the politics of the issue. Economic pressure from many countries ultimately helped to force the whites-only South African government to the bargaining table.

Mr. Lawrence, the Swarthmore senior, said that many of today's students found that campaign inspirational because it "transformed what was seemingly an intractable problem."

Swarthmore, a liberal arts college southwest of Philadelphia, is a small school with a substantial endowment, about \$1.5 billion. The trustees acceded to divestment demands during that campaign, in 1986, but only after a series of confrontational tactics by students, including brief occupations of the president's office.

The board later adopted a policy stating that it would be unlikely to take such a step again.

"The college's policy is that the endowment is not to be invested for social purposes" beyond the obvious one of educating students, said Suzanne P. Welsh, vice president for finance at the school. "To use the endowment in support of other missions is not appropriate. It's not what our donors have given money for."

About a dozen Swarthmore students came up with the divestment tactic two years ago after [working against](#) the strip mining of coal atop mountains in Appalachia, asking the school to divest itself of investments in a short list of energy companies nicknamed the [Sordid 16](#).

So far, the students have avoided confrontation. The campaign has featured a petition signed by nearly half the student body, small demonstrations and quirky [art installations](#). The college president, a theologian named [Rebecca Chopp](#), has expressed support for their goals but not their means.

Matters could escalate in coming months, with Swarthmore scheduled to host a February meeting — the students call it a "convergence" — of 150 students from other colleges who are working on divestment.

Students said they were well aware that the South Africa campaign succeeded only after on-campus actions like hunger strikes, sit-ins and the seizure of buildings. Some of them are already having talks with their parents about how far to go.

“When it comes down to it, the members of the board are not the ones who are inheriting the climate problem,” said Sachie Hopkins-Hayakawa, a Swarthmore senior from Portland, Ore. “We are.”

Brent Summers contributed reporting from Burlington, Vt.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/05/business/energy-environment/to-fight-climate-change-college-students-take-aim-at-the-endowment-portfolio.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20121205&

December 5, 2012

Preparing the Ground for Fifty Great Days for the Earth

Churches Plan for UCC's Mission 4/1 Earth

By Eric Anderson

The Connecticut Conference United Church Center

WEST HARTFORD -- Over twenty-five ordained and lay church leaders took first steps on Monday night toward a bold project in which they'll engage next spring. [Mission 4/1 Earth](#), said the United Church of Christ's Minister for Environmental Justice, the Rev. Jim Deming, is a way to energize the church to begin or to deepen its commitment to the well-being of our home planet.

During the fifty days between Easter Sunday and Pentecost in 2013, the UCC hopes to achieve three significant goals:

- **Plant 100,000** trees in local communities here in the United States and around the globe,
- **Send 100,000 letters** to elected officials or media outlets advocating for environmental justice, and
- **Engage in 1 million hours** of volunteer service to the earth.

"We're trying to do this as a national church," Deming told the assembly at First Church of Christ Congregational UCC in West Hartford, "that we all do this together, that we all have this momentum and we do something with it."

Both Deming and Patricia Bjorling, the Connecticut Conference Associate Conference Minister for Generosity Ministries and staff liaison to the Environmental Ministry Team, emphasized that achieving Mission 4/1 Earth's goals is just a beginning. Deming compared the effort to prayer:

"Prayer is not just a one time deal; prayer is a way of life," he told the group. "It makes you more spiritually aware of everything that has an impact on your life. It's the same way with this... We begin to think that everything we do has an impact, that we are environmentally conscious, and we do this in a spiritual way that says everything I do has an impact on God's creation."

The participants raised ideas and suggestions for taking on projects and forming partnerships to achieve Mission 4/1 Earth's goals. Bjorling announced that the UCC has worked out an arrangement with the National Arbor Day Foundation which will facilitate low-cost tree donations once it's ready. Local plantings, observed several around the circle, should be checked ahead of time with knowledgeable people and public officials, so that trees aren't placed in poor locations for their health or the health of plants around them.

While some expressed concern around the advocacy campaign, due to the reluctance of some church members to engage in what they perceive as political activity, Deming suggested that congregations identify an issue on which there is wide agreement among members. For some, that might be risks of climate change, while for others, it could be mountaintop removal for coal mining, clean air standards, or something of local interest.

The range of activities that qualify for the service projects is very broad, said Bjorling. Several participants expressed interest in creating a coordinated effort to pick up along the state's major rivers, particularly the one from which Connecticut takes its name. Again, people named potential partner organizations that do similar work, and urged coordination between their efforts and UCC church efforts for Mission 4/1 Earth.

In addition to the West Hartford gathering, Deming and Bjorling spoke to a similar group in Darien on Tuesday night, and will meet with more church leaders in Wallingford Wednesday night, December 5th.

The Rev. Eric S. Anderson is Minister of Communications and Technology for the Connecticut Conference UCC.

http://www.ctucc.org/news/20121205_mission41earth.html

December 6, 2012

Walking Back from the Climate Cliff: "Pray-In" at the White House, January 15

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow
The Shalom Center

To put the bottom line first: Below is an invitation to join in and/or support a Multi-faith Pray-in for the Climate at the White House on January 15.

Why? For months, various politicians have been warning us of the dire effects on our grandchildren of the federal deficit and insisting that when the Fiscal Cliff arrives this winter we must drastically cut Federal spending on schools, our infrastructure of bridges and sewers and railroads, Medicaid, and renewable energy.

For me, grandchildren are not a political abstraction. I have five of them, ranging from three years old to twelve. When I imagine their futures, I am much more worried about how empty-

headed education, worsening health, a rotting infrastructure, and especially more disasters like Superstorm Sandy will affect them.

Much more dangerous than the Fiscal Cliff is the Climate Cliff we are facing, as the growing number of extreme weather events — Superstorms, fierce floods, drastic droughts — wound us and warn us.

Our religious communities should join with labor unions, small businesses, PTA's, coops, neighborhood associations, and our college faculty and students to demand a set of changes that will sow the seeds of greater change, by cutting the power of the Carbon Lords and committing the President and Congress to vigorous action. If we go over the Climate Cliff now, my grandchildren – our grandchildren – will live in misery and suffering.

What can we do, when can we take the next careful steps back from the Cliff? One time and place will be a multi-faith “Pray-in for the Climate” January 15, in front of the White House. Interfaith Moral Action on Climate (IMAC) is planning the pray-in. The Shalom Center is a member of IMAC, and I am a member of its coordinating committee. Here is IMAC's Call to the Pray-in:

A Call for Multi-faith Action on January 15, 2013, in Washington, D.C.

We are facing a Climate Cliff, and we are calling upon religious and spiritual leaders, other believers and all people of good will to join us to address its danger by participating in “A Pray-in for the Climate” in front of the White House.

Superstorm Sandy, the drastic droughts in our corn country, record-breaking Arctic ice melt, and unheard-of floods in Vermont, let alone disasters in Australia, Russia, Pakistan and Africa, all warn us: the disruption of our planet will not wait for our “normal” political paralysis to end.

If we go over the Climate Cliff now, our grandchildren will live in misery and suffering.

Fifty years ago, our country faced a crisis of racial inequality in the USA that was a basic threat to justice and democracy. Religious communities and others acted, and we made a difference.

Today's deepest crisis is the danger facing the web of life upon our planet, including the human race.

Out of our moral commitment to protect and heal God's Creation, our religious communities need to be calling for a set of first-step changes that will sow the seeds of greater change, by committing the President and Congress to vigorous action. And we should pose those demands in such a way that we are addressing not only our government, but religious communities throughout the country.

What can we do? When can we take the next careful steps back from the Cliff? One time and place will be mid-day on Tuesday, January 15, in front of the White House. Interfaith Moral Action on Climate (IMAC) is planning “A Pray-in for the Climate.”

IMAC is a collaborative initiative of religious leaders, groups and individuals that came together in 2011 in response to the pressing need for more visible, unified, prophetic action to address the climate crisis. As people of faith and spirituality, we feel compelled by our traditions and collective conscience to take action on this deeply moral challenge.

January 15 is close enough to Inauguration Day (January 21) to make the connection with what the President should be doing in his second term, and far enough away that the action won't drown in the media swamp.

And it's the actual birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The action will be carried out in the spirit of his work. We will gather at 11 am at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church a few blocks from the White House. At noon we will walk there in a religious procession and join our voices in a prayerful vigil. We will be praying that President Obama, as well as all of us, find the strength and wisdom to lead our country and world away from the Climate Cliff. Some participants may feel called to risk arrest by nonviolently disregarding the conventional regulations at the area near the White House fence.

We expect to be joined by survivors of Superstorm Sandy and their religious leaders from communities like the Rockaways and Staten Island in New York.

What will we be urging that the President do, to meet the needs of this critical hour in planetary time?

1. Permanently refuse permits for the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, because tar-oil is among the most dangerous of the planet-heating forms of carbon.
2. Call a National Summit Conference on the Climate Crisis that includes leaders of business, labor, academia, religious communities, governmental officialdom, science, and other relevant bodies.
3. Publicly support and advocate for a carbon fee that will generate hundreds of billions of dollars, with provisions to make sure that working families and the poor are not damaged by higher carbon prices; for an end to subsidies to the coal, oil and gas industries; and for substantial subsidies for research, development, and use of renewable, sustainable and jobs-creating clean energy sources.

We invite and urge you to join us on January 15 at the White House.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts about this action.

With blessings of shalom, salaam, pax, paz, peace —

The IMAC Steering Committee

Peter Adriance, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the US
Rev. Tom Carr, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Hartford, CT, co-founder of Interreligious
Eco Justice Network, CT,
Rev. Terry Ellen, Unitarian Universalist Association
Ted Glick, Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Cynthia Harris, IMAC
Rev. Mark Johnson, Fellowship of Reconciliation
Fr. Paul Mayer, Climate Crisis Coalition
Jacqueline Patterson, Director, NAACP Climate Justice Initiative
Ibrahim Ramey, Muslim American Freedom Society
Karen Scott, Center for Liberty of Conscience
Lise Van Susteren, MD, Center for Health and the Global Environment, NWF
Rabbi Arthur Waskow, The Shalom Center, Philadelphia, Pa.

Contact info: <http://interfaithactiononclimatechange.org>
<<http://interfaithactiononclimatechange.org/>> ; Cynthia Harris at
cynthiaharris4930@gmail.com, 202-288-8788

My comments and invitation:

The Carbon Lords seem determined to throw us off the Climate Cliff, to maximize their profits. IMAC is proposing careful beginner steps to start walking us back from the cliff.

We don't imagine these steps will be "enough," just as the Montgomery bus boycott and the early sit-ins were not "enough." Looking much further back in religious history, Moses' first challenges to Pharaoh, the Palm Sunday procession that Jesus led, and Mohammed's original confrontations with Abu-Jahl in Mecca were not "enough."

But change did come.

Indeed, the Passover/ Holy Week imagery and meaning — especially drawing on the ancient Exodus story to address the modern "plagues" brought on us by the modern "pharaohs" — will be the next focus of IMAC's and The Shalom Center's work. After January 15, I will write more about those plans.

Meanwhile, first steps. If you want to sign and support the IMAC Call, even if you cannot be present at the White House on January 15, please write me a note at Awaskow@theshalomcenter.org with your title, name, postal address, and phone. If you plan to take part in the action, let me know.

One last thought. Ten years ago, as the Bush Administration dragged us all into the disastrous Iraq War, The Shalom Center took part in similar peaceful, prayerful protests. Our

judgment in those days proved to be wise, and our actions to be worthy. I think we are facing now an even bigger test.

Those of us who are deciding whether to risk arrest on January 15 need your spiritual help – your prayers that we be rightly guided by the Breath of Life – and your material help. To send the former, simply pray. To send the latter, please click on the “Donate” line on the left margin.

Many thanks, and my blessings of shalom, salaam, paz, peace – Arthur

<https://theshalomcenter.org/content/walking-back-climate-cliff-pray-white-house-january-15>

December 7, 2012

"The world cannot wait - climate change is happening!"

Statement from the World Council of Churches
To the High-Level Ministerial Segment of the
18th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP18 to the UNFCCC
8th Session of the Meeting of the Parties – CMP8 to the Kyoto Protocol
Doha – Qatar

Mr President, His Excellency Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:19

As in previous statements, we reiterate that a change in paradigm appears as mandatory in the prevailing economic strategy of promoting endless growth and a seemingly insatiable level of consumption among the high-consuming sectors of our societies. Such economic and consumption patterns are leading to the depletion of critical natural resources and to extremely dangerous implications with climate change and development. We are living on a finite world with finite resources and within given planetary boundaries making obviously that infinite growth in consumption of energy and resources is impossible in a finite system.

As people of faith concerned for our sisters and brothers, we come to Doha extremely worried about food security as the severe shortages in crops face us with the prospect of horrific humanitarian crises that should be avoided. The present situation at world food markets, exemplified by sharp increases in wheat, soybean and corn prices compels leaders to act urgently to be sure that these outstanding high prices do not drive into an appalling scenario, harming tens of millions.

The above described situation that release in many variables as how we produce trade and consume food as well as millions of human beings to be fed every year, is worsened by the fact that only a handful of nations are large producers of staple food commodities. This year we realized how a disastrous drought in the USA, the worst in half a century, as well as in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, sent grain prices skyrocketing. With the menace of human-induced 2 climate change incrementing extreme weather events, increasing water scarcity and negatively impacting agro-meteorological conditions in the tropics and subtropics, the world is at high risk of see this state of affairs to devastate societies.

Time has arrived to promote more sustainable and climate resilient food production to urgently make more food available to sustain the human family especially in the most vulnerable societies, ill prepared to deal with food scarcity. Moreover, diversion of food stock for non-food purposes and financial speculation are unethical and immoral.

Our stance is not to formulate policies, a task of the Parties, but to demand urgent and achievable policies bringing to the Parties our concern about essential values and principles as well as the distress and voice of the actors that are not normally heard.

We need to call your attention that the Framework Convention focalized in ethical principles as *The Principle of Intergenerational Equity* that declares "the Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind." Let be remembered by our children and our children's children as the decision makers that responsibly addressed climate change, one of the major challenges humanity have ever faced, and avoided a major calamity for the Earth and humanity. Let be reminded, that our generation is probably the very last generation having it in our hands to still limit global warming to less than 2°C while future generations won't have this freedom of choice but will have to adapt to climate patterns we have left to them.

Parties' negotiators have not yet translated declarations on tackling climate change to a fair, ambitious and legally binding regime to all parties. From our perspective it is most crucial to achieve that outcome by 2015 at the latest. As pre-requisites, we consider (i) the ratification of the 2nd Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol by as many Parties as possible in Doha, (ii) complementary mitigation pledges of the non-signees of the 2nd CP under the Convention, (iii) the successful closure of the LCA track including the carry-over of important negotiation issues like adaptation, climate finance and loss and damage to the new ADP negotiation mandate, (iv) continuation and scaling up of climate finance for developing countries, and (v) the agreement on an ambitious negotiation mandate with roadmap, milestones and a chairmanship being empowered to give the guidance needed. We pray that you will demonstrate leadership in responding to the cry of the Earth.

The World Council of Churches believes that the whole Earth community deserves to benefit from the bounties of creation. Faith communities are addressing climate change because it is a spiritual and ethical issue of justice, equity, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability.

Climate change is happening! It is imperative to act now without more delays in view of the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of climate change.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/statement-to-cop18-un-climate-change-conference-doha.html?print=1%253Fprint%253D1>

December 12, 2012

West Bank: a concert to draw attention to the region's threatened environmental heritage

EU Neighborhood Info Center

Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) organized a concert this week in the Palestinian village of Battir to raise awareness about the route of the Separation Barrier due to be built in this area of tremendous ecological and cultural significance to all the people of the region. The event was supported by the EU's Partnership for Peace programme.

Battir, a Palestinian village of the West Bank, is an exceptional example of terraced agricultural fields dating back 4,000 years, which is trying to obtain recognition as one of UNESCO's World Heritage Site.

FoEME brought for the concert world renowned Israeli singer Noa (Ahinoam Nini) to perform and add her name to protect the site. Palestinian singers and dancers were also present. More than 300 Israelis and Palestinians, mostly local residents, attended the event.

FoEME is an NGO that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists who seek to protect their common environmental heritage.

The concert was organized in the context of the Good Water Neighbours project, funded under the EU's [Partnership for Peace Programme](#), whose aim is to raise awareness of the shared water problems of Palestinians, Jordanians and Israelis. ([EU Neighbourhood Info](#))

http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id_type=1&id=31478&lang_id=450&utm_source=Oempro&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=Subscriber%23120&utm_campaign=West%20Bank%3A%20a%20concert%20to%20draw%20attention%20to%20the%20region%E2%80%99s%20threatened%20environmental%20heritage

December 13, 2012

Exploring the Intersection of Cosmology, Ecology, and Ethics

By Nick DiUlio

Princeton Environmental Institute

Environmental awareness comes in many forms. Often, it is shaped by an understanding of

science or public policy, but it also can be informed by religion. Rarely, however, do all three of these perspectives intersect at once—and that is the challenge two Yale University professors, [Mary Evelyn Tucker](#) and [John Grim](#), have been addressing for the past three decades.

During this time, Tucker and Grim have been developing an approach to environmental studies that blends cosmology, ecology, and ethics into a new field of religion and ecology. Teaching at Yale since 2006, this husband and wife team has drawn students from a wide array of disciplines including the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the Divinity School, the Department of Religious Studies, and Yale College. In the mid 1990s they organized a series of ten conferences on World Religions and Ecology at Harvard University and then founded the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.

For the past four months, these collaborating professors have brought their talents to Princeton University as two of this year's [Currie C. and Thomas A. Barron Visiting Professors](#) in the Environment and the Humanities. This is a program at the [Princeton Environmental Institute](#) (PEI) that recruits outstanding academic scholars to contribute to the Institute's research and teaching programs.

“We greatly admire the way PEI is trying to bridge the gap between science and the humanities, and this seemed like a perfect opportunity to bring the work we’ve been doing for almost 30 years now to Princeton,” said Grim.

Established in 2003, the Barron Visiting Professorship was designed to forge closer ties between the environmental sciences and the humanities and social sciences at Princeton. This is at the core of what professors Tucker and Grim do in bringing the world religions into dialogue with ecology and cosmology.

“Most environmental studies programs are primarily concerned with scientific and public policy solutions,” says Tucker. “We like to think that solutions need to be approached through human perspectives as well, appealing to the way people interact with their environments drawing on their cultural values.”

This fall, Tucker and Grim are teaching a course at Princeton called [Religion, Ecology, and Cosmology](#), to illustrate how religion, spirituality, ethics and values can make important contributions—alongside science—to address complex ecological issues.

The course involves an exploration of selected world religions with regard to their contributions to contemporary environmental ethics. The course explores how such ethics will be developed differently in various parts of the world, especially Asia. In particular, it investigates the symbolic and real expressions of these interconnections in many religious texts, ethics, and practices that arise from the relationships humans have with the natural world and the cosmos.

“Humanity’s relationship to the Earth is fascinating and paradoxical,” said Grim. “On the one hand, we see it with awe and wonder and beauty. On the other, we seem to be so historically destructive. And you see this interesting dynamic process play out in different ways through different cultures and religions.”

The course, said Tucker, is attended by a wide variety of students from various countries and from nine different majors, including anthropology, chemistry, East Asian studies, ecology and evolutionary biology, engineering, geosciences, mathematics, politics, and religion. The topics are broad and thus are enhanced by images. This is why the visiting professors are using their Emmy award-winning documentary, [*Journey of the Universe*](#), and filmed interviews as instructional aides.

Journey of the Universe, which the two professors co-produced, is a dramatic and expansive film that narrates the epic of evolution and thereby reframes the human connection to the Earth community. Filmed on the Greek island of Samos, the birthplace of Pythagoras, *Journey* is hosted by evolutionary philosopher Brian Thomas Swimme, who co-wrote the film and accompanying book with Tucker.

“The subject of this course is incredibly vast and there’s just too much material to cover through lectures alone,” said Grim. “We use the film in an effort to identify some crucial moments in the story of our evolution and then ask the students: How would this story appear to a Confucian, or a Jew, or a Christian? The students’ reactions have been exceedingly interesting.”

For instance, Emma Kurz ’14 enrolled in the course as a chemistry major with little understanding of how religion and science could potentially intersect in the world of environmental studies. She found the course dramatically changed her perspective.

“While the concepts were often abstract, the teachings allowed a hard-science-based student like myself to make intellectual and personal connections to my own religious and ecological cosmology and come to a broader understanding about world religions and their various cosmologies and ecologies,” said Kurz.

Moreover, Kurz said Tucker and Grim’s film allowed her to understand the broader narrative at play all around her, and the ways in which religious understandings of the universe may be critical to solving today’s environmental quandaries.

“I am walking away from this class with a completely different outlook on life and the role that I play in the world around me,” said Kurz. “I realize that recognizing our deep interconnectedness as humans to each other, the Earth, and the universe itself is essential to addressing our current environmental crises.”

Sophomore anthropology major Divya Farias was so inspired by Tucker and Grim’s course that she and fellow classmate Damaris Miller’15 are currently working on designing a curriculum for young children to inspire in them the idea that the elements of life originate from stars and therefore we are all connected (a concept featured prominently in *Journey of the Universe*).

“The class has impacted me most profoundly in that it has given my life a cosmological context that I hadn’t really explored before,” said Farias. “John and Mary Evelyn have woven scientific knowable truth with spiritually knowable meaning, which I can honestly say has revitalized my passion for people and nature and my hope for a better future.”

This, said Tucker, is exactly why she and her husband were enthusiastic to come to Princeton.

“It’s hard to sum up in a few sentences what we hope the students will take away from this course,” said Tucker. “But I know that they have opened themselves up to thinking in new and fresh ways. And what’s more, I think they have an appreciation for the ways in which the ancient and enduring values transmitted in the world religions can make a difference in shaping a future that’s not only sustainable but flourishing.”

Moreover, Tucker and Grim said they are equally pleased with the opportunities they have had to engage with several Princeton professors in both the sciences and the humanities.

“This has been a wonderful experience,” said Tucker. “We would like to stay even longer. The town is lovely. The University has been incredibly welcoming, And our talks with some of the University’s scientists is just the beginning of an ongoing dialogue about the broader intersection of science and religion, and the implications that has for our future. I hope we can both come back from time to time to continue these discussions.”

<http://www.princeton.edu/pei/news/archive/?id=9204>

December 21, 2012

United Nations Environment Programme Upgraded to Universal Membership Following Rio+20 Summit Fri, Dec 21, 2012

UN General Assembly Strengthens UNEP Role in Addressing Global Environmental Challenges - Renewed Focus on Improving Access to Technology and Capacity Building

United Nations Environment Programme

New York / Nairobi - Another step forward to the 'Future We Want' was put in place today with a decision by the General Assembly of the United Nations to 'strengthen and upgrade' the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and establish universal membership of its governing body.

The landmark resolution, aimed at increasing the role of UNEP as the leading environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, was adopted 40 years after UNEP was established by the General Assembly, following the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

The General Assembly resolution also provides for UNEP to receive secure, stable and increased financial resources from the regular budget of the UN, and calls for other UNEP donors to increase their voluntary funding.

The decision allows full participation of all 193 UN member states at the UNEP Governing Council in February 2013, and follows commitments by world leaders at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) last June to improve the institutional framework for sustainable development.

The provisions contained in the resolution are among the first practical steps by the UN General Assembly to implement the outcomes of Rio+20.

"The decision by the General Assembly to strengthen and upgrade UNEP is a watershed moment. Universal membership of UNEP's Governing Council establishes a new, fully-representative platform to strengthen the environmental dimension of sustainable development, and provides all governments with an equal voice on the decisions and action needed to support the global environment, and ensure a fairer share of the world's resources for all," said United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

"The resolution reaffirms UNEP's role as the UN's authority on the environment, and provides the mandate to enhance our ongoing work on bringing the latest science to policy-makers, directly supporting national and regional environmental efforts, improving access to technology, and other key areas. For UNEP and the environmental community, this is a truly historic day," added Mr. Steiner.

Improved governance for the global environment

In the forty years since UNEP was established, the environmental challenges facing communities around the world - from diminishing water resources and desertification, to climate change and hazardous chemicals - have increased in number and complexity.

Yet international responses to such challenges are often fragmented and weak.

The latest edition of UNEP's Global Environment Outlook report, released in June 2012, assessed 90 of the most important environmental goals agreed by the international community, and found that significant progress had only been made in four.

The report warns that if current trends continue, several critical thresholds may be exceeded, beyond which irreversible changes to the life-support functions of the planet could occur.

The General Assembly decision reflects the commitment of member states to improve global cooperation on the environment in order to meet such challenges, and to promote the integration of the social, economic, and environmental pillars of sustainable development, as well as improving coordination within the UN system.

Prior to the new resolution, UNEP's Governing Council consisted of 58 members only. Previous efforts to ensure wider representation in the running of UNEP resulted in the creation of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF), which brought together the world's environment ministers for high-level meetings in parallel with the Governing Council.

Member states will have the role of implementing the provisions of the General Assembly resolution - including arrangements for the future of the GMEF - at the first meeting of the newly-enlarged Governing Council at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi on 18-22 February 2013. The meeting will be held under the theme 'Rio+20: From Outcome to Implementation'.

The General Assembly also stressed the important role of UNEP in providing the international community with comprehensive, science-based, policy-relevant global environmental assessments, such as the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) series, and others.

By endorsing the Rio+20 outcome document 'The Future We Want' in July 2012, and adopting the new resolution on UNEP, the General Assembly underlined the need for UNEP to work more closely with non-governmental organizations, youth, women, indigenous peoples, local governments, business, and other interest groups, and to formalize their participation at the UNEP Governing Council and in global environmental decision-making overall.

UNEP is also tasked with further strengthening the vital link between policy-makers and the scientific community.

In a separate resolution relating to another Rio+20 outcome, the General Assembly welcomed the adoption of the ten-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns (10YFP), to which UNEP provides the secretariat.

The 10YFP is a global framework of action to enhance international cooperation on accelerating the shift towards sustainable consumption and production in developed and developing countries. The framework will support capacity building, and provide technical and financial assistance to developing countries.

The General Assembly also tasked UNEP with establishing a trust fund for sustainable consumption and production programmes in order to mobilize voluntary contributions from donors, the private sector and other sources, including foundations.

40 Years of UNEP

The General Assembly resolution marks the first major structural change to UNEP in its four-decade history.

The first UN agency to be headquartered in a developing country, UNEP is the voice of the environment in the UN system. Its mandate is to coordinate the development of environmental policy consensus by keeping the global environment under review, and bringing emerging issues to the attention of governments and the international community for action.

UNEP also administers many multilateral environmental agreements and conventions, including the Ozone Secretariat and the Montreal Protocol's Multilateral Fund, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and a growing family of chemicals-related agreements, among others.

Major UNEP landmarks and achievements over the past forty years include:

- **1979: Bonn Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) established. The agreement involves 116 member states and has overseen binding agreements and action plans to protect 120 migratory species.**

- **1987: Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer established.** One of the most successful multilateral agreements in UN history, the protocol has overseen a 98 per cent reduction of controlled ozone depleting substances, and delivered multiple health benefits, including millions of avoided cases of cancer and eye cataracts.
- **1988 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) established by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization.** The panel delivers the world's most influential, comprehensive and scientifically-reviewed reports on climate change.
- **1995: Basel Ban Amendment barring export of hazardous wastes adopted.** Ratified by 70 countries and the EU, the agreement established a regime for minimization of health and environmental impacts of waste.
- **2002: Launch of Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles.** Among other activities, the project has assisted countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to successfully phase out or begin the phase-out of leaded fuel. Associated health savings for the continent are estimated at US\$92 billion per year.
- **2012: Launch of Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants:** Voluntary initiative to reduce emissions of black carbon, methane, low-level ozone, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), and other short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs), to tackle climate change and improve human health. In less than 12 months, some 25 governments and additional partners have joined the coalition.

More UNEP milestones can be viewed at: www.unep.org/40th

Notes to Editors

Texts of all resolutions of the 67th session of the UN General Assembly are available at: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/67/resolutions.shtml>

Video: Adoption of the UNGA resolution on UNEP universal membership:

<http://webtv.un.org/live-now/watch/general-assembly:-60th-plenary-meeting/1580695591001/>

Rio+20 outcome document 'The Future We Want' (strengthening and upgrading of UNEP outlined in paragraph 88):

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20J%20une%201230pm.pdf>

More information on the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production is available at:

<http://www.unep.fr/scp/marrakech/10yfp.htm>

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Further Resources

- [Resolutions of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly](#)
- [Video: Adoption of the UNGA resolution on UNEP universal membership](#)
- [Rio+20 outcome document *The Future We Want*](#)
- [10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production](#)
- [40 Years of UNEP](#)

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=2700&ArticleID=9363&l=en>

December 22, 2012

West Bank barrier plan threatens ancient farming landscape

By Joel Greenberg
The Washington Post

BATTIR, West Bank — The old stone-walled farming terraces of this scenic Palestinian village near Jerusalem stretch along the hillsides, fed by spring water flowing through a network of irrigation channels that dates to Roman times.

Perched above a valley on the boundary with Israel, this community of 6,000 has become the focal point of a struggle pitting villagers and environmental advocates against the planners of Israel's separation barrier in the West Bank, a complex of fences and walls built to keep out Palestinian attackers.

At Battir, the planned barrier route — including 500 yards of concrete wall — would cut through the valley, scarring a rare surviving landscape of naturally irrigated terrace agriculture dating back thousands of years. It would also separate villagers from about one-third of their cultivated lands, which would fall on the other side of the barrier.

This month, in response to petitions by villagers and the environmental group Friends of the Earth Middle East, Israel's Supreme Court gave the Israeli defense ministry 90 days to come up with an alternative to the planned wall that would take into account "the unique character of the area" around Battir.

In its ruling — a rare intervention by the Supreme Court in the barrier project — the court urged security officials to reconsider "the nature of the divider and security arrangements" in the sensitive zone, which is a [candidate for designation](#) as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Israel's Nature and Parks Authority, a government body, sided with the petitioners in court, saying the barrier would create "a wound in the ancient landscape" and "cut the farmers off from their lands, leading to the destruction of the ancient farming culture."

Similar views were voiced by Israeli conservation experts, who argued that the planned barrier route would damage a unique landscape where spring-fed water canals lead to plots of vegetables and lemon trees.

"We're not against a security barrier in principle, but we're against building it in a cultural landscape site that requires protection," said Gidon Bromberg, Israeli director of [Friends of the Earth Middle East](#). "Building it in this particular location would contravene Israel's own obligations as a signatory to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention."

The defense ministry argued that completing [the barrier](#) in the Battir area would close a gap south of Jerusalem, protecting the city from possible terrorist attacks and shielding train tracks running on the Israeli side of the boundary. The ministry said steps had been taken to minimize the project's impact on the farming terraces around the village.

The court's ruling could compel defense officials to consider other means to monitor the area, such as surveillance cameras and patrols, both of which are already in use to protect the train.

Should the barrier project be suspended at Battir, it would not be the first time that a special security regime was put in place near the village.

Under the armistice agreement signed in 1949 after Israel's war of independence, the farmers of Battir, in what was then the Jordanian-controlled West Bank, were allowed to continue cultivating village land that remained on the Israeli side of the cease-fire line. In return, they committed not to harm the Israeli train route between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv that runs along the boundary by their village.

The agreement has stood for decades, marred only by isolated instances of stone-throwing, mostly during the first Palestinian uprising that erupted in the late 1980s.

Akram Bader, the mayor of Battir, said that several years ago, students at the local school, which lies next to the tracks, rode the train to Jerusalem by special arrangement with the Israeli railroad company. "We teach them that the train is a friend, not an enemy," he said.

"We take care of the border because we know we will be safe if Israel has security," Bader added. "We can do that without any physical barrier. Battir is a special case, and that's how it should be in the future, a pilot project of peace."

Aware of the tourist potential in the village, local activists are upgrading walking trails and restoring stone terraces in the surrounding hills as part of the [Battir Landscape Ecomuseum](#). Old houses in the village have been refurbished, and a guest house is set to open in the coming months.

“Our problem is the geopolitical situation,” said Hassan Muamer, a civil engineer directing the preservation work. He said he hoped the Supreme Court ruling would lead to the cancellation of plans to build any barrier, even a fence, in the valley below.

“We don’t need a new crime that would destroy the cultural heritage and peace in this area,” he said. “This was a win for us . . . for the moment.”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/west-bank-barrier-plan-threatens-roman-era-irrigation-channels/2012/12/22/43b1e804-4aef-11e2-a6a6-aabac85e8036_story.html
