

Speech to COMECE Plenary Assembly

Cardinal Parolin

In a speech to the plenary assembly of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, known as COMECE, the Vatican secretary of state said that in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, "the church in Europe is called to carry out her mission more zealously and to make her contribution by offering a message of faith, unity, solidarity and hope to this 'old' continent of ours that we love so much." As a second wave of the pandemic hit Europe in the fall, the commission held its assembly virtually. Cardinal Pietro Parolin spoke to the commission Oct. 28 as it celebrated its 40th anniversary. The previous day the Vatican released a letter by Pope Francis to Cardinal Parolin on the commission's anniversary and

"The virus forces us to rediscover that there is no such thing as a 'solitary' life."

the 50th anniversaries of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the EU, and of the presence of the Holy See as a permanent observer at the Council of Europe (see Origins, Vol. 50, No. 24). Cardinal Parolin discussed the pope's letter, noting that "the church's closeness to Europe has become even more intense with Pope Francis, the first non-European pope in more than a thousand years." The cardinal discussed the role of COMECE as well as that of the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE): "CCEE and COMECE are called, each in its own way — the former with a more pastoral profile, the second more interested in the political and legislative processes of the EU — to work closely and in full harmony for the good of the church and the whole of Europe." Cardinal Parolin's speech follows.

I am delighted that I can take part in your plenary assembly, which is taking place on the special occasion of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE). I am particularly grateful to the president, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, for his cordial invitation which, despite the pandemic, has at last been able to come to fruition, even if only virtually.

I also greet every one of you and the bishops' conferences you represent, as well as the secretary general, Father Manuel Barrios Prieto, and the whole COMECE secretariat, whom I thank for the valued work you do.

continued on page 422



contents

- 421 Speech to COMECE Plenary Assembly
by Cardinal Pietro Parolin
- 427 How *Laudato Si'* Moves Interreligious Dialogue Forward
by Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot
- 429 Response to Cardinal Ayuso at Conference on Interreligious Responses to *Laudato Si'*
by Mary Evelyn Tucker
- 431 Response to Cardinal Ayuso at Conference on Interreligious Responses to *Laudato Si'*
by John Grim
- 433 Speech at Conference on Interreligious Responses to *Laudato Si'*
by Rabbi Ellen Bernstein
- 436 Datebook
- 436 On File

November 12, 2020
Volume 50
Number 25

The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union released the following statement Oct. 20 on Pope Francis' encyclical letter "Fratelli Tutti":

Social-Economic Affairs

While renewing his appeal against a "throwaway culture" (No. 188) announced five years earlier in "Laudato Si," the new encyclical invites all Christians and people of goodwill to "recognize that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone" (No. 180). This call for fraternity is proposed also in political terms.

Each person should be considered "not only as individuals or private persons, but also in the social dimension that unites them" (No. 182). This implies that politicians must overcome any individualistic mentality in order to serve the common good and "put human dignity back at the center" (No. 168). Pope Francis also insists that "politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy" (No. 177).

External Action

In the light of the many regional conflicts and instabilities, we need to overcome this "world war fought piecemeal" (No. 25), the pope says, by moving away from "a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust" (No. 26).

The true path to a lasting peace will only be possible "on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family" (No. 127).

In this regard, Pope Francis calls for a reform of international organizations and economic institutions by better integrating the needs and initiatives of local communities into their actions in view of developing a genuine

continued from page 421

I bring all of you greetings from and the blessing of the Holy Father, which he clearly expressed in the letter he wrote to me a few days ago, along with his gratitude and appreciation for your important service to the church.

We are certainly living in uncertain and difficult times when, as Pope Francis pointed out, a "thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities"¹ and, sadly, it has continued to thicken. An unexpected storm has suddenly struck us, and we all find ourselves in the same boat, fragile and disoriented.

Unfortunately, the situation does not seem to be improving. Many countries have been and continue to be hit hard by the pandemic, and it is not yet possible to see a way out of this health care, economic and social crisis. In this situation, the church in Europe is called to carry out her mission more zealously and to make her contribution by offering a message of faith, unity, solidarity and hope to this "old" continent of ours that we love so much.

As we know, the process of European unity took its first steps on May 9, 1950, with the declaration made by Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, whose cause for beatification is currently going forward. Schuman, in his role as French minister for foreign affairs, set out an idea that was both innovative and courageous: the creation of a European coal and steel community whose members would pool the production of these two highly essential commodities in times of peace and of war and thus reduce the possibility of a future conflict like the one that had just come to an end.

This was the start of something totally new, a plan for supranational unity that would guarantee peace and overcome the forms of nationalism that had torn Europe apart so terribly. Right from the start, the church welcomed this process. It is enough to recall what Pope Pius XII said on June 15, 1957, at the congress promoted by the

European Movement:

"You have some idea how closely we have followed the progress of the European idea and how we have watched the concrete efforts being made to make the idea penetrate more deeply into men's minds and, under the proper circumstances, to bring about its realization."²

In subsequent years, the church has continued to follow the process of European integration closely and to make her own contribution. It is enough to mention, for example, the proclamation by St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II of the patron saints of Europe, St. John Paul II's visit to the European Parliament on Oct. 11, 1988, and Pope Francis' on Nov. 25, 2014.

Something that is still clear in our memory — so much so that Pope Francis mentioned it in the letter he sent me just before our gathering was due to take place — is the speech St. John Paul gave at Santiago de Compostela on Nov. 9, 1982, at the tomb of the apostle James, when he almost pleaded: "I, the bishop of Rome and pastor of the universal church, cry out with love from Santiago to you, ancient Europe: 'Rediscover yourself. Be yourself.' Rediscover your beginnings. Let your roots live again."³

The church's closeness to Europe has become even more intense with Pope Francis, the first non-European pope in more than a thousand years. The pope has addressed numerous speeches and messages to the Old Continent, including the *urbi et orbi* message last Easter, when he recalled that "the European Union is presently facing an epochal challenge on which will depend not only its future but that of the whole world."⁴

It is also significant that his most recent encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, begins with references to the European Union, which he describes as an example of integration, and to his own words to the European Parliament, when he mentioned "the firm conviction of the founders of the European Union, who envisioned a future based on the capacity to work together in bridging divisions and in

ISSN 0093-609X, Origins, CNS Documentary Service, is published weekly (except biweekly during July, August and December's last week) by Catholic News Service, 3211 4th Street N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100. Copyright © 2020 by Catholic News Service/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Periodical-class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Editor, Edmond Brosnan; Associate Editor, Mary Esslinger; Director and Editor-in-Chief of CNS, Greg Erlandson. Editorial: (202) 541-3284. Circulation: (202) 541-3290. Email: cns@catholicnews.com. Web: www.catholicnews.com/origins.

Subscriptions: One year, \$119; foreign postage additional. Single copy: \$8. Back issues: Inquire for availability and rates. Attach mailing label to change of address requests and subscription correspondence. Postmaster: Send address changes to Origins, CNS Documentary Service, 3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100.

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fostering peace and fellowship between all the peoples of this continent.”⁵

The institution of COMECE, on March 3, 1980, was a tangible sign of the increased relevance of the European Community in the lives of the citizens of member states and of the importance the Holy See attributed to the activities it promoted, especially following the introduction of direct voting for members of the European Parliament, which had been approved the previous year.

COMECE was born exactly 10 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the European Union, and it acknowledged the need for reciprocal openness and fraternal cooperation between the churches of Europe among themselves and with the European institutions to “promote and protect the common good, in the light of the joy of the Gospel of Christ.”⁶

It is clearly helpful to recall that the Holy See’s approach to the European institutions is purely diplomatic and aims to encourage the growth of bilateral relationships and dialogue on themes of common concern in the context of the international scene.

The work COMECE does has a different perspective, in the context of what is foreseen in Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and aims, among other things, to follow the political process in the European Union in areas of interest to the church and to communicate to the European institutions the opinions and views of the bishops’ conferences relating to the process of European integration.⁷ Its work is broad in scope, complex and extremely valuable to the church in Europe, which in its interaction with civil authorities faces numerous challenges, particularly in the field of legislation with the social consequences they entail.

In this context, I feel bound to mention another important continental episcopal organism: the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE), composed of the presidents of all the episcopal conferences of Europe and represented here by its secretary general, Father Martin Michalick. CCEE and COMECE are called, each in its own way — the former with a more pastoral profile, the second more interested in the political and legislative processes of the EU — to work closely and in full harmony for the good of the church and the whole of Europe.

The voice of pastors is actually needed more than ever, according to the prudent warning of St. Gregory the Great: “The ruler should be discreet in keeping silence, prof-

itable in speech; lest he either utter what ought to be suppressed or suppress what he ought to utter. For, as incautious speaking leads into error, so indiscreet silence leaves in error those who might have been instructed.”⁸

The plenary assembly is therefore an important way of letting the whole of Europe hear her pastors responding with care and concern to the challenges of the present time. Today in addition to their voices there is the authoritative word of the Holy Father Francis, who, as supreme pastor of the universal church, offers his own positive contribution to our reflection on Europe, on her face today and tomorrow.

So this is the right context to focus on what is in the letter the Holy Father sent me a few days ago and which was published yesterday. I think the intention behind the pope’s letter is, first and foremost, to pursue a reflection on the future Europe, a continent close to his heart, “not only because of my family’s origins but also because of the central role that it has had and, I believe, must continue to have, albeit with different accents, in the history of humanity.”⁹

As always, Pope Francis’ reflection is not an attempt — to use language dear to him — to “occupy spaces,” in other words to give precise indications about steps or initiatives it would be opportune to take — this is more the task of individual bishops and episcopal conferences — but rather to “open processes,” to suggest an ideal trajectory and the basic elements on which to reflect for those responsible for governance to undertake the necessary actions.

As has often been pointed out, there are no abstract concepts in Pope Francis’ outlook. There are always people, with their hopes, dramas, difficulties and the positive contributions they can make. In this light, it is understandable that the pope’s way of looking at things is always one that puts persons and communities at the center of the debate on Europe.

If it were to lose sight of the centrality of the person and his or her links, in other words the awareness that every human being is part of a social fabric, a community, Europe would be nothing more than a set of sterile bureaucratic processes. At this time above all, when we have all been forced to face up to a common “enemy” — COVID-19 — which we could not have imagined and which we are struggling to control because it takes no account of borders or procedures, we are called back to the urgent need to look at the person, not in the abstract, simply as

“universal fraternity” (No. 9) and allowing a “renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society” (No. 233).

Fundamental Rights

The text underlines that human rights are still “insufficiently universal” and “not equal for all,” wondering whether “the equal dignity of all human beings, solemnly proclaimed 70 years ago, is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every situation” (No. 22). COMECE strongly supports the universal, inviolable, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, interrelated nature of human rights. For the pope, without cultivation of fraternity, “liberty becomes nothing more than a condition for living as we will, completely free to choose to whom or what we will belong” (No. 103) and equality cannot be achieved through mere abstract proclamations (No. 104). In its actions, COMECE promotes protection from discrimination for all, including on grounds of religion, regardless of belonging to “majority” or “minority” denominations.

Education and Culture

Pope Francis states that solidarity is the fruit of the commitment of families, teachers and communicators, whose responsibility extends to the moral, social and spiritual aspects of life, and whose actions foster openness to the world and a healthy universal integration (No. 114). The encyclical letter calls for a “culture of encounter” and action toward inclusive and constructive dialogue among all cultural components of society (Nos. 216-217).

In the same spirit of the encyclical, the European project should focus on solidarity, encounter and dialogue among all peoples and generations through education and cultural exchange.

Ethics

While calling for “an ethics

of international relations” (No. 126) to tackle inequalities between individuals and countries, Pope Francis also rejects the idea of a “throw-away world” (No. 18), where “persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ — like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ — like the elderly.”

In the new encyclical, Pope Francis also refers (No. 19) to topics on which COMECE is working, demography and the elderly people, stating that “a decline in the birth-rate, which leads to the aging of the population, together with the relegation of the elderly to a sad and lonely existence, is a subtle way of stating that it is all about us, that our individual concerns are the only thing that matters [that] what is thrown away are not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves.”

Ecology and Sustainability

If the encyclical letter “*Laudato Si*” is a general description of the common house, the Earth, and its inhabitants, its limits, its difficulties and the challenges it faces, the encyclical letter “*Fratelli Tutti*” is the house rules attempting to shape the coexistence of all inhabitants and the relations between them.

Pope Francis proposes a series of attitudes and virtues that should be used also at the political level. Acknowledging the difficulties politicians face, Pope Francis goes so far as to speak of “political love”: “If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity” (No. 186).

The encyclical distinguishes between politics that only serves “as a quest for power” and politics that connects love with hope. “Authentic political life, built upon respect for law and frank dialogue between individuals, is constantly renewed whenever

the subject of multiple individual rights, but in his or her real characteristics, a person made up of hopes, joys, pains and — above all — connections.

The virus forces us to rediscover that there is no such thing as a “solitary” life. The pope recalled this in the moving moment of prayer that took place in a deserted Piazza San Pietro: “Nobody reaches salvation by himself or herself,” because “we are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: We need the Lord, as ancient navigators needed the stars.”¹⁰ It is a principle dear to Pope Francis and one he has often emphasized.

Just three years ago today, at the dialogue “(Re)Thinking Europe,” organized by COMECE in the Vatican, he said: “Community is the greatest antidote to the forms of individualism typical of our times, to that widespread tendency in the West to see oneself and one’s life in isolation from others. The concept of freedom is misunderstood and seen as if it were a *right to be left alone*, free from all bonds. As a result, a deracinated society has grown up, lacking a sense of belonging and of its own past.”¹¹

The pandemic invites us, therefore, to change lifestyle and to rediscover an identity on which to build an identity that cannot but be communitarian, one that is capable of overcoming divisions and contradictions.

In this sense, neither COMECE nor CCEE is just a privileged place to live and affirm the ecclesial communion that links bishops to each other, but a sign — we could almost say a prophetic one — of the sense of belonging to a single community that ought to be a distinctive sign of the common feeling of the peoples of Europe.

Consequently, the bishops’ conferences have an important role in ensuring that the obvious differences between our peoples, which have roots deep in the past, become not a pretext for increasing divergencies but a way of recognizing the richness of our continent, a rich variety of histories, languages and sensitivities, but united by a shared feeling and destiny.

The first duty of bishops is to bear witness to the unity that flows from faith, where differences still have a legitimate place. Even today, Christian witness is Europe’s “connective tissue” and is always required to show itself — according to Paul’s way of putting it in the Letter to the Ephesians — “if we live by the truth and in love” (Eph 4:15).

In his letter, Pope Francis traces some guidelines for Christian witness and commitment in Europe today through his four “dreams.” “I dream,” he says, “of a Europe

that is a friend to each and all ... that is a family and a community ..., that is inclusive and generous ..., marked by a healthy secularism.”¹²

A Europe that is a friend to each and all is first and foremost a Europe that loves the person in his truth, the whole person, and above all respects transcendent dignity. Here we need to recall some basic principles of Catholic social teaching that are also at the heart of the European project. These principles can help people interpret and evaluate proposed laws as they are being worked out and at the same time offer valuable orientations to people with political responsibilities.

One of these principles and values that is particularly important is the recognition of the sacred and inviolable dignity of every human life from conception until its natural end, and to this should be linked the defense and promotion of the family, the true cell of society, based on the stable union of a man and a woman.

It is actually clear that in recent decades there has been a constant evolution in the idea European legislators have of a person at a continental level and in particular states. It has become more and more the bearer of individual subjective rights, which are limited exclusively by the interests of the state, most of all in questions of security like the fight against terrorism and money laundering.

We see a particularly clear example of it in legislation on protection of personal data that, while useful, presupposes a conception of the human person as the almost absolute holder of rights understood individualistically.

The prevailing concept of person here, as in other more worrying recent developments in state legislation like, for example, those linked to euthanasia or those which put marriage on the same level as other types of unions, is a solitary or monadic one,¹³ detached from the idea of belonging to a community, composed of a plurality of subjects who do, indeed, have rights but also duties.

Pope Francis, in contrast, reminds us that “person and community are ... the foundations of the Europe that we as Christians want and can contribute to building.”¹⁴

In the present moment in history, the church is indeed called to repeat doctrines but above all to make the most of the life experiences that flow from the Gospel and show a different way of being human. The people of our time, to paraphrase St. Paul VI, look more readily for witnesses than for

teachers.¹⁵

What happens then is a love for the person, especially one living through the drama of an unwanted pregnancy, one who is sick and can no longer bear the burden of suffering, the migrant who arrives, lost on our shores and often the victim of unscrupulous traffickers. Such love for the person necessarily becomes real in gestures of charity and solidarity, and we know how Europe is bubbling over with acts done by people who really are close to people on the margins and those who are suffering.

In giving comfort, Christians cannot confine themselves to merely charitable actions. They are called to show a different understanding of man and of life: not someone left to himself or herself but someone who is wanted, loved and aware that fatigue, pain, suffering, sickness and death are realities that have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus, not simply meaningless trials.

So the witness of charity irradiated by the Gospel is called also to be a witness of truth. St. Paul VI himself said that “the good news proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life.”¹⁶

Furthermore, it is as well to remember that “the church ‘has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities.’ She works for ‘the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity.’”¹⁷

For this reason, the church, “while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the contrary, ‘she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines’ in the building of a better world or fail to ‘reawaken the spiritual energy’ that can contribute to the betterment of society.”¹⁸

In this way we can understand Pope Francis’ invitation to Europe to exercise a “healthy secularism” and to be a place “where God and Caesar remain distinct but not opposed,”¹⁹ where it is possible to profess one’s faith publicly and make one’s contribution to the good of society as a Christian.

Now I should like briefly to mention some of the current priorities concerning the European Union that in light of the aforementioned Article 17 could be a focus for COMECE’s work with the European institutions.

A first question, one that is particular close to the Holy Father’s heart and one that Europe will have to deal with this year and in coming years, is picking up the health care, social, economic and human consequences of the pandemic. It will be a long and dif-

ficult process, where the church will have to be in the front line.

In this context, it is worth noting the great interest there has been even among individual European commissars in the Vatican COVID-19 Commission, which the Holy Father wanted to deal with the consequences of the health-care emergency.

For him, the pandemic is “a kind of watershed, forcing us to take a stand. We can either continue to pursue the path we have taken in the past decade, yielding to the temptation to autonomy and thus to ever greater misunderstanding, disagreement and conflict, or we can rediscover the path of fraternity that inspired and guided the founders of modern Europe, beginning precisely with Robert Schuman.”²⁰

The period we are living through is, therefore, a chance not to be missed for building a more just and inclusive Europe. First of all, as the pope observes, it is necessary to share scientific research and investments for producing vaccines in a way that gives priority to those who need it most,²¹ reaching the weakest sectors of society. It is also important to make appropriate and intelligent use of the tools with which it is hoped to overcome the consequences of the pandemic.

Among innovative and interesting proposals that have been made, I wish to mention the Next Generation EU recovery fund, which even if it is still to be sorted out in detail and in its practical implications seems to be a move in the right direction for making solidarity between member states a reality. Such solidarity needs to touch the basic fabric of society, the family, by means of suitable support policies. It is a question of enhancing the most important resource civil society has and, above all, putting an end to the now excessively long demographic winter, which is eating away at the base of Europe’s future.

The second question I should like to mention concerns a real tragedy of our time, made up of all those people who have been forced to leave their homeland to look for a better future or to escape wars and persecutions: migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who are knocking on Europe’s doors and asking for a welcome, understanding and solidarity.

Pope Francis has spoken often and with great clarity on this situation, which is of great concern to Europe and particularly the European Union, and has asked people to welcome, protect, look out for and integrate these people. Obviously, we are well aware of the problems and the distinctions that need to be made, and that sometimes the strain on

there is a realization that every woman and man, and every new generation, brings the promise of new relational, intellectual, cultural and spiritual energies” (No. 196).

In recent years COMECE has made the principles of “integral ecology” — which is based on the encyclical letter “Laudato Si” — and links the social with the ecological dimension, and the “ecological conversion” necessary to transform our economic and political system — the starting point and criterion for the evaluation of political measures in the fields of sustainability, ecology, climate protection and other areas.

The publication of the new encyclical further spells out this “conversion” in its various dimensions and marks the appropriate moment to analyze and assess in more detail the proposals for a European Green Deal presented by the European Commission.

Migration and Asylum/ Freedom of Religion

In the new document, Pope Francis reiterates the primary right of persons and families to remain in their home country in safety and dignity. When this is not possible, people should be granted the right to migrate to a country where they can live and prosper.

In view of the recently adopted EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, COMECE will continue encouraging the EU and its member states to act in concrete solidarity and responsibility toward migrants and refugees.

Regarding freedom of religion, the Holy Father emphasizes that “a journey of peace is possible between religions,” violence has “no basis in our fundamental religious convictions, but only in their distortion.” Moreover, “religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood,” but on the contrary to be instrumental for fraternal love and peace.

the population in receiving or transit countries can be almost unbearable.

In this sense, we believe the Dublin Convention needs to be reviewed. The new Pact on Migration and Asylum presented last Sept. 23 by the European Commission is trying to point a way forward in this direction, even if it gives rise to a few doubts, concerning both its basic approach, which seems to focus on the security of borders and containment of waves of migrants rather than on making them welcome, and on particular proposals like, for example, the possibility of financing repatriation of people who are not going to be accepted or time limits on evaluation requests for asylum.

Some Catholic bodies, like Caritas Europa, have already expressed their perplexity on these and other aspects of the European Commission's proposal.

A third question of particular importance is the question of climate and the environment. In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis sought commitment from everybody in favor of our common home, inviting us to real ecological conversion. The care we are called to give as custodians of creation is closely linked to our commitment to justice and in defense of the poorest and most vulnerable peoples, as well as future generations.

The Green Deal project, which has set a goal of making Europe the first continent with a zero climatic impact by the year 2050, is undoubtedly an interesting and significant project that could bring enormous benefits to Europe and the whole world.

Another priority for the current commission, which at first sight may not seem to have any bearing on the church, is the constantly accelerating process of digitalization. It is a process with many positive aspects, some of which we have experienced during the months of pandemic and lockdown, but it also brings risks linked to equal and universal access to new technologies, the handling of data and privacy, the loss of employment and the use of artificial intelligence and robotization.

We need to be vigilant about the current and inevitable digital transformation, in which the European Union wants to be a leader, so that it does not happen in a way that harms respect for human dignity but moves in the direc-

tion of greater integral development of every person and of all peoples.

An important aspect of European policies concerns its external activity and its presence in the world. One of the pillars of this activity is the promotion of human dignity and fundamental rights, solidarity, fraternity, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. It is vital for the European Union to consider its relationships with neighboring countries, both those which aspire to membership of the union itself and those with strong geographical, historical and cultural links.

In this context, partnership with Africa is of special interest and deserves particular attention from the church. Interest in Africa should not, therefore, be limited to solving migratory waves but could be a unique chance for Europe to contribute to a genuinely organic development of the African continent. The church needs to pay particular attention to this, so that the word *development* is not misunderstood in facile ways, from simply thinking that it is enough to invest money and build infrastructure, to the aim to engage in what Pope Francis calls real ideological colonization.

I should like to make one final point. The European elections in May 2019 show new interest on the part of European citizens, proved by the high voter turnout, which was more than half those who were entitled to vote, the highest since 1994.

Another positive fact was the high number of young people who voted, many of whom voted for the first time. These facts encourage hope in the future of the European Union, but they also demand commitment from elected political representatives and from the institutions, which are called to respond to the trust citizens have placed in them.

On this point, the Conference on the Future of Europe being organized by the parliament, the council and the commission to "re-think the European Union" in the light of new internal and external challenges 10 years after the Lisbon Treaty came into effect, could have an important role to play. It ought to operate with the intention of listening to the voices of citizens, representatives of civil society and interested parties at all levels. It should have begun

last May, but because of the pandemic it is still not clear when and how it will happen.

In any case, it is a matter of a significant opportunity for rethinking Europe's identity and values as well as drawing the European institutions closer to citizens and making them more responsive to the union's present needs and challenges. It is to be hoped that the church will be involved in this conference not only as an essential part of civil society but above all as a partner of that "open, transparent and regular dialogue with the churches" to which Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union refers.

Your Eminence, dear brothers and friends, in coming to the end of these considerations and in order to leave space for discussion, allow me to say once again how grateful I am to each of you and, especially, to those who work in COMECE, in its various commissions and in the secretariat.

COMECE follows a hefty body of dossiers with attention and diligence and gives indispensable help not only to the local churches, but also to the apostolic nunciature and the Holy See in a spirit of sincere collaboration, which has been growing in recent years and for which I want to express my sincere gratitude. The merits of this fruitful collaboration could be ascribed to several people. But this evening allow me to mention one person in particular: the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Alain Paul Lebeauin.

In a few days, Your Excellency, you will conclude your service of the European Union to enjoy a well-deserved rest after many years spent in this mission and previously as apostolic nuncio in Ecuador and in Kenya. When you came here in 2012, in reality it was a matter of coming back here, since it was you who in the 1990s set up the current form of the pontifical representation. Your long diplomatic experience and your love for Europe have played a part in giving life to the structured dialogue between the Holy See and the European Union and in strengthening relations with the civil authorities and with COMECE. For this we are all very grateful and we wish you well for the future.

For all of us, I think the warning Pope

Francis left us three years ago stands: As Christians, we are called to be “the soul of Europe.” Through the intercession of the holy patrons of Europe, let us ask the Lord to help us really be that, in order to offer our contribution to the construction of this continent in which is found the see of Peter and which is so important for the church and the whole world. Thank you.

Notes

- ¹ Francis, extraordinary moment of prayer and *urbi et orbi* blessing (March 27, 2020).
- ² Pius XII, address to participants at the Congress of Europe (June 13, 1957).
- ³ John Paul II, celebration of Europe in Santiago de Compostela (Nov. 9, 1982), No. 4.
- ⁴ Francis, Easter *urbi et orbi* message (April 12, 2020).
- ⁵ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, Oct. 3, 2020, No. 10, and address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg (Nov. 25, 2014).
- ⁶ COMECE Statute, Preamble (text available only in Italian).
- ⁷ Cf. *ibid.* [Translator’s note — cf. also www.comece.eu/site/en/ourmission under “Communicate”].
- ⁸ Gregory the Great, Pastoral Rule, Part 2, Chap 4 [*Patrologia Latina* 77, 30-31].
- ⁹ Francis, Letter on Europe (Oct. 22, 2020).
- ¹⁰ Extraordinary moment of prayer and *urbi et orbi* blessing.
- ¹¹ Francis, audience with participants in the “Dialogue (Re)Thinking Europe: A Christian Contribution to the Future of the European Project” (Oct. 28, 2017). Letter on Europe.
- ¹² Address to the European Parliament.
- ¹³ Audience with “Dialogue (Re)Thinking Europe.”
- ¹⁴ Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Dec. 8, 1975), No. 41.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ¹⁶ *Fratelli Tutti*, 276.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Letter on Europe.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Cf. Francis, general audience (Aug. 19, 2020). ■

How *Laudato Si’* Moves Interreligious Dialogue Forward

Cardinal Ayuso

The head of the Vatican’s interreligious dialogue efforts said all people, “irrespective of whichever religion we profess, have a moral and religious responsibility to shape an ethic of care for the earth, which is our shared home.” Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, spoke Oct. 29

at a virtual conference on interreligious responses to Pope Francis’ encyclical letter “Laudato Si’.” “A common commitment to creation by people of different religious traditions can offer real hope for the future of life on earth,” the cardinal said during the keynote speech at the conference hosted by Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. The conference was one of many events in a yearlong celebration of the pope’s 2015 encyclical. Cardinal Ayuso said, “Environmental matters are becoming and should increasingly become an interreligious concern so as to bring about an ecologically responsible social order based on shared values.” He listed statements that various religious groups have released on the subject of climate change and said the pope’s encyclical “has generated hundreds, if not thousands, of interreligious initiatives and projects all over the world to enhance awareness among the people about the urgent need of doing something together and in concrete to save Mother Earth.” Cardinal Ayuso’s keynote follows.

It gives me great joy to join you all in this virtual conference on “How *Laudato Si’* Moves Interreligious Dialogue Forward,” organized by Georgetown University to mark the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si’*, the much-celebrated encyclical letter of Pope Francis.

My sincere appreciation to the organizers for this initiative, which is among the many events and projects across the globe to celebrate the immense good that the document has done to the world over the last five years and to encourage multiplying of efforts for converting them into “a peoples’ movement” for the protection and care of the earth, our common home. The COVID-19 pandemic, I am sure all of you would agree, has only hastened the urgency of attending to this dire need.

The year May 24, 2020, to May 24, 2021, as you would know, has been declared as a special *Laudato Si’* anniversary year by the Vatican. I am happy that this event is taking place during this special anniversary year and particularly so within a few days after the release of *Fratelli Tutti*, the latest encyclical letter of Pope Francis, and the International Meeting of Prayer for

Peace where leaders of different religious traditions, led by Pope Francis, in the “spirit of Assisi” expressed the ardent desire that “there may no longer be ‘others,’ but rather, a great *we*, rich in diversity” (Appeal for Peace, Piazza del Campidoglio, Oct. 20, 2020).

The source of inspiration for both *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*, as the Holy Father acknowledges, is one and the same person and that is St. Francis of Assisi, who “felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh” (*Fratelli Tutti* (FT), No. 2). It is only inevitable therefore that there is a connecting thread between the two encyclicals.

Some commentators have pointed out that *Laudato Si’* taught us that everything is connected whereas *Fratelli Tutti* teaches us that everyone is connected as brothers and sisters, and as such “we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home” (FT, 17). There is thus an inseparable link between the two encyclicals; both are complementary to each other.

Our reflections on *Laudato Si’* henceforth cannot but be in close reference to *Fratelli Tutti*. May all our efforts — individual and collective — during this year and in the years to come, therefore, be geared to creating universal consciousness, duly supported by concrete actions on the ground, for the protection and well-being of our planet and of one another.

All of us, irrespective of whichever religion we profess, have a moral and religious responsibility to shape an ethic of care for the earth, which is our shared home. A common commitment to creation by people of different religious traditions can offer real hope for the future of life on earth.

Role of Religions, Religious Leaders, Religious Communities

It is needless to say that religions play a paramount role in nurturing respect for creation and in safeguarding the legitimate diversity and the value systems as resources for harmony with one another and harmony with nature. They possess much wisdom to help us bring about the needed changes in our life, surroundings and in the society to overcome the deterioration of the con-

ditions of our planet.

The leaders of religious communities likewise play a vital role in shaping attitudes, opinions and behaviors among their followers for the judicious management and equitable use of the natural resources and for the sustainable development of all. In addition, they have a moral duty as well, as the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” signed by Pope Francis and the grand imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al Tayyeb, in Abu Dhabi on Feb. 4, 2019, says, to spread “the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence.”

And, no doubt, religious communities can and do make a significant contribution to addressing the issues of climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem loss, pollution, deforestation, desertification and unsustainable land and water use and other urgent issues.

Many of you would agree, I am sure, that the ecological crisis and the safeguard of the environment in respect to people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership are central to all faiths and that they are all inseparably linked to one another.

***Laudato Si'* and Interreligious Relations**

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis underlines the urgency and importance of dialogue with all religions for the care of our common home (cf. Nos. 7, 14, 63, 64, 111, 216, 222), arguing that the ecological crisis is basically a spiritual problem and therefore interreligious dialogue is fundamental to solving it.

Environmental matters are becoming and should increasingly become an interreligious concern so as to bring about an ecologically responsible social order based on shared values for, as the document on human fraternity notes: “We human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth”(No. 92).

The interconnection and interdependence among us and with nature invite each of us to go beyond differences of class, creed, race or culture and to collaborate as one human family

in protecting the integrity of our home, now and for future generations.

We believers need to take the first collective step in this direction, for “given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it” (LS, 63).

Many religious people today seem to think that the environmental crisis at the base is human caused and thus choose to leave it at that, unconcerned. It is time for them to rethink how they consider the crisis. According to Pope Francis, the ecological crisis is ultimately linked to a crisis of values, a spiritual void that pervades the society of our times. There is the need therefore to offer alternative models based on values and spiritual paths to arrest the crisis.

While this should be the case, there must also be an ongoing dialogue among the different fields of knowledge, including science, “in the service of a more integral and integrating vision” (LS, 141) and for the common good (cf. LS, 201). In this connection it is pertinent to remember what Pope Benedict XVI said regarding the misconception about the relation between religion and science. He said, “There is no ‘opposition between faith and science’”; instead, “there is friendship between science and faith” and that scientists “through their vocation to the study of nature ... can take an authentic and fascinating path of holiness” (March 24, 2010, general audience).

One of the most essential and effective models has been ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. I would like to focus on the latter. The good news is that concern for environment has now become a major interreligious preoccupation. Besides, the adherents of various religions also have begun to formulate their own religious perspectives on ecological issues. For example:

“The Time to Act Is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change” (May 14, 2015); Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders (Oct. 29, 2015); Islamic Declaration on Climate Change (Aug. 18, 2015) and Hindu Declaration on Climate Change, (Nov. 23, 2015).

For its part, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has highlighted the importance and contribution of interreligious dialogue in combating the ecological crisis. It has done so through its messages on the occasion of the most important feasts of other major religions and organizing of conferences.

Speaking of *Laudato Si'*, it must be underscored that it has made a great impact on society from an interreligious point of view:

—It has created greater awareness among people of different religious traditions about climate change and expanded, deepened and accelerated the ongoing dialogue on climate change and climate justice. It has brought about positive changes in the lives of people in respect for and protection of nature.

—It has caused increased understanding of how everything in the world — human beings and nature — is interconnected (Nos. 117, 138).

—Through its call for integral development and integral ecology, it has brought “inclusivism” into greater focus.

—It has generated hundreds, if not thousands, of interreligious initiatives and projects all over the world to enhance awareness among the people about the urgent need of doing something together and in concrete to save Mother Earth.

—It has also made people revert to the teachings of their respective religious traditions to understand better how the relationships between God, human beings and nature are intertwined.

—The interreligious conversations on the encyclical and the activities prompted by the document also gave the opportunity of knowing the perspectives of other religions on the subject.

—Inspired by the messages of the encyclical, organizations belonging to other religious traditions brought out

their own versions of declarations on “care for nature.”

Interreligious dialogue, as has been demonstrated by *Laudato Si'*, can play a monumental role in bringing about the much-needed solidarity toward finding lasting solutions to environmental issues and fostering of sustainable development. There remains however a lot more to be done to ensure an ecologically responsible social order based on shared values. The COVID-19 pandemic beckons us to do the same without any further delay, accelerating and augmenting interreligious solidarity and cooperation.

***Laudato Si'*, COVID-19 Pandemic and Pope Francis**

Laudato Si' was in a way a prophetic document that predicted a looming crisis (social, climatic etc.) on the horizon of the Earth if corrective measures were not taken urgently. None perhaps expected that the prophecy would come to pass anytime soon and the result is that we were caught off guard when the catastrophe struck.

—We have been witnesses, directly or indirectly, to the devastating impact of the pandemic on humanity. While thousands and thousands of lives have been lost and the livelihoods of millions destroyed, the pandemic brought to the fore the scandalous inequality, discrimination and indifference on the basis of creed and race existing in society.

—The worst affected due to the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns have naturally been the poor, the migrants and the most vulnerable of the society.

—The overwhelming sense of helplessness and vulnerability we felt and continue to feel still has made us realize that we all are equal before the coronavirus (it doesn't see religion, race, class etc.).

—The pandemic has also made us recognize, as the Holy Father says, that “when we mistreat nature, we also mistreat human beings” (First World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation message, Sept. 1, 2016).

—The health crisis and the lockdowns have had positive changes in our thinking and living. They have presumably made us become less individualistic, less consumerist and less

self-centered!

—Most important, the pandemic has brought about human and interreligious solidarity as never seen before in the recent known human history. This is, in many ways, a promising sign of hope amid the doom and gloom caused by the virus.

Pope Francis, through his various gestures and pronouncements, has demonstrated his spiritual closeness to all those who are suffering due to COVID-19 as well as to all the front-line warriors of the pandemic. They are great motivators for all, most especially for suffering humanity. The extraordinary moment of prayer on March 27, 2020, and his endorsement of the global day of fasting, prayers and good deeds for the good of all humanity on May 14, 2020, an initiative of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity are among the most notable moments when he united himself with the suffering and appealed to everyone to pray for and to reach out to the suffering.

Following in his example, we believers and, in particular, religious leaders are called upon to spread what he delights in calling the “contagion of hope” (*urbi et orbi* message, April 12, 2020) among the masses. He calls us rather to become “sowers of hope” (Sept. 18, 2020, speech to the Tertio editorial board) for a better tomorrow.

Post-COVID-19 From an Interreligious Viewpoint

Laudato Si' decried our broken relationships with God, with neighbors and with the earth (cf. LS, 66). It called for repairing and restoring of those relationships to live in harmony with one another and with nature. The present crisis must be understood as an opportunity and a grace to restore those relationships and to adapt to a new way of living based on fraternal love, equality, justice, harmony and peace.

The re-realization of our shared humanity, shared destiny and shared responsibility for one another and for the world (cf. LS, 229) must spur us on to further build on the robust interreligious solidarity existent at the moment for the welfare of human family not just during the pandemic period but beyond. May this lead us in this special year of the anniversary to generously cooperate with one another “as instru-

ments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvement and talents” (LS, 14)!

Our fragility as human beings and our interdependence on one another, as has been eloquently exposed by the pandemic, is more than enough reason for us to be united and committed not just to ward off the coronavirus but also to work together for the betterment of humanity.

May we promote unity, solidarity and brotherhood among all so that we are able to unitedly and courageously face the current challenges as well as those of the immediate future. It is my hope that we will emerge from the present crisis better and stronger and help our societies to become more humane, where people care for one another and care for creation.

Thanks for your kind attention. ■

Response to Cardinal Ayuso at Conference on Interreligious Responses to *Laudato Si'*

Mary Evelyn Tucker

“Because we now recognize that the ecological crisis is basically a spiritual problem, we can see more than ever that interreligious dialogue is fundamental to solving it,” an expert on religion and climate said. Mary Evelyn Tucker, a senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale University and co-founder and co-director of the university's Forum on Religion and Ecology, responded to a keynote speech by Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot at a virtual conference hosted by Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. The Oct. 29-30 conference looked at interreligious responses to Pope Francis' encyclical letter “Laudato Si'” five years after its release. Tucker noted that the encyclical “is a document

of immense importance to people inside and outside the Catholic Church, from other world religions but also from the secular world of academia and the environment." After listing some of the praise for the encyclical, she asked, "Why is this response so widespread from many environmentalists? Because 'Laudato Si' holds up an inspiring vision of integral ecology where people and planet are seen as one indivisible entity." She said that "the ecological crisis is ultimately linked to a crisis of values, a spiritual void that pervades the society of our times" and that "responding to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor and realizing a genuine environmental justice will require an ecological conversion." Tucker's response follows.

We are grateful to Cardinal Ayuso for his succinct and insightful speech, to President John DeGioia for his warm welcoming remarks and to our friend John Borelli for organizing this conference with assistance from Sam Wagner.

My husband, John Grim, and I want to thank Georgetown University and the Berkley Center for hosting this conference. It is wonderful for the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology to collaborate with them in celebrating the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'* and the recent publication of the new encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Both are deeply inspired by the spirit of Francis of Assisi, who elevated kinship with humans and nature as central to his message of reform. May his spirit live on with these encyclicals in ever-deepening care of the Earth and ever broadening compassion for all life.

Let me raise a few points in response to Cardinal Ayuso's fine speech:

As the cardinal notes, *Laudato Si'* is a document of immense importance to people inside and outside the Catholic Church, from other world religions but also from the secular world of academia and the environment.

Even as a younger person working within the social justice movements of the church I would say to my mother, "If we have an encyclical on the environment from a pope who is beloved, we will have a chance for the future of our planet." This is because Thomas Berry, our teacher, had a profound foreboding of ecological unraveling such as we are seeing now, from the time I

first met him in 1975, 45 years ago. He was one of the forerunners of the religion and ecology movement that has been emerging for several decades and growing rapidly since *Laudato Si'* was published.

Others in the scientific and policy communities who have been following the environmental and climate crisis for many years also agree on the importance of *Laudato Si'*.

Our former dean at the Yale School of the Environment, the eminent scientist Sir Peter Crane, wanted us to organize a panel discussion at Yale on *Laudato Si'* even before it came out because the semester would be over in May when it was to be released. And so we did have a panel discussion in April for a standing room-only audience. This included professors from the School of the Environment, as well as the Law School and Divinity School. This is almost unprecedented in our highly secular university.

After the Paris conference in December 2015, we held a panel at our School of the Environment at Yale. The first speaker, Dan Esty, an environmental policy and law professor, held up a copy of *Laudato Si'* and said this is why we got a climate agreement in Paris. Most of the audience was in agreement.

We invited the environmental author and activist Bill McKibben to speak at Yale to over 1,000 people. The next morning at breakfast with students he said that he regards the encyclical as "the most important document of the 21st century." That is quite a statement from Bill, considering how many books he has read, written and endorsed!

And finally Amitav Ghose, a leading Indian intellectual, concluded his book *The Great Derangement* and his talk at Yale with singular praise for *Laudato Si'*.

Why is this response so widespread from many environmentalists? Because *Laudato Si'* holds up an inspiring vision of integral ecology where people and planet are seen as one indivisible entity.

Until recently there has been a longstanding division between environmentalists who have focused on saving nature and theologians who have focused on saving humans. John and I have seen this sharp divide in over 40 years of teaching between schools or departments of the environment and

schools of theology or departments of religion at Yale, Harvard, Berkeley and Columbia.

The encyclical draws these together in a powerful and compelling way as Pope Francis calls on science and religion to work together. He writes: "If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it" (LS, 63).

Let me share a story that illustrates one way this conjunction began to occur. Some 25 years ago Thomas Berry was also trying to overcome the division between valuing nature and caring for humans. He encouraged the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff to see that there is no liberation possible for the human community without including the health and well-being of the Earth community. Berry said, "You can't have healthy people on a sick planet." We see this clearly now during the pandemic.

Boff heard Berry and responded by publishing his pathbreaking book *The Cry of the Earth; the Cry of the Poor* in 1997. Two decades later, this phrase "cry of the earth, cry of the poor" became a signature passage in *Laudato Si'*.

Leonardo's book was published in the Orbis Book series on ecology and justice. In this series John and I, together with Boff and Sean McDonagh, are trying to bring together books that foster an integrated vision of the flourishing of both people and the planet.

This perspective is now one of the grounds for a growing movement for environmental justice in academia, in religious communities and in our broader world. I might note this aspiration for ecojustice is of immense concern for our students at Yale and for young people around the world. One concrete thing we can do is extend to them an intergenerational and inter-religious handshake based on a mutual commitment to ecojustice. For this will build on the awakening across generations in the U.S. to racial and environmental injustices toward native Americans, African Americans, Latinos and people of color. Such an awakening is part of "ecological conversion."

Responding to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor and realizing a gen-

uine environmental justice will require an ecological conversion, as the pope has called for in Chapter 6 in *Laudato Si'*.

This will mean a recognition that we live in a sacred universe and are part of an extraordinary unfolding story that reveals astonishing beauty and complexity. This great mystery that holds us and guides us through the travail and joys is woven into the incarnational fabric of all life.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin understood this evolutionary perspective well, and Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme brought this into an ecological context with *The Universe Story*. Brian Swimme and I did this as well in the Emmy-Award winning *Journey of the Universe* film and book project. This long-term perspective of the preciousness of all life can inspire the ecological conversion that is needed — not simply saving humans for the afterlife but restoring life here on this planet for the well-being of all future generations.

In this spirit of ecological conversion Cardinal Ayuso notes, as does Pope Francis, that the ecological crisis is ultimately linked to a crisis of values, a spiritual void that pervades the society of our times.

Consumerism run amok, market economy without constraints, distorting social media influences and mindless infotainment all block out the depth of suffering so many are enduring. We are blinded, for example, to the 90 million climate refugees around the world (including in the United States) due to the onslaught of climate-related drought, fires and floods.

Because we now recognize that the ecological crisis is basically a spiritual problem, we can see more than ever that interreligious dialogue is fundamental to solving it.

Cardinal Ayuso has noted that the “safeguarding of the environment in respect to people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership are central to all faiths.” This is precisely what we have been identifying in the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. Since the 10 Harvard conferences and books that were published on world religions and ecology from 1995-2004, a new field has emerged within academia and a new force has blossomed in societies and communities around the world.

For 25 years now statements have been emerging, along with books and articles and activism, in world religions and ecology. These statements are collected on the forum website.

In this conference we will hear responses to *Laudato Si'* from speakers on Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam. Special mention should be made of the inspiration of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the pope and to all of us. For it was he who first spoke of ecological sin and crimes against creation more than 25 years ago.

It is into this growing field and force of religion and ecology that *Laudato Si'* has landed on fertile ground. It has inspired other statements and commitments from many of the world's religions. The encyclical has become a catalyst to ignite religious leaders and laity, organizations and communities in a worldwide effort that unites us in concern for our common home.

Let me conclude with two insightful lines from Cardinal Ayuso:

“Some commentators have pointed out that *Laudato Si'* taught us that everything is connected whereas *Fratelli Tutti* teaches us that everyone is connected as brothers and sisters and as such ‘we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home’” (FT, 17).

“The re-realization of our shared humanity, shared destiny and shared responsibility for one another and for the world (cf. LS, 229) must spur us on to further build on the robust interreligious solidarity existent at the moment for the welfare of human family not just during the pandemic period but beyond.” ■

Response to Cardinal Ayuso at Conference on Interreligious Responses to *Laudato Si'*

John Grim

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot's “call for interreligious dialogue on the environment results from and calls us forward to ... deeply spiritual realizations happening everywhere around our planet,” an expert on religion and climate said. John Grim, a senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale University and co-founder and co-director of the university's Forum on Religion and Ecology, responded to a keynote speech by Cardinal Ayuso at a virtual conference hosted by Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. The Oct. 29-30 conference looked at interreligious responses to Pope Francis' encyclical letter “Laudato Si'” five years after its release. Grim said that Cardinal Ayuso discussed “religious values that may not often be seen in environmental policies, law and science. I think here, for example, of religious values such as the Christian sense of ‘care for God's creation’; in Islam the ‘trust’ doctrine in which humans accepted trust or responsibility for creation from the divine; and in Buddhism, the emphasis on the interdependence of all reality.” Grim quoted retired Pope Benedict XVI's thoughts on the relationship of faith and science and asked, “Could this ‘path of holiness’ be a bridging from science that meets the bridging from the religious traditions in pilgrimage? In their respective paths aren't we both trying to understand our contemporary knowledge and needs that cause our environmental dilemma?” Grim's response follows.

I join in thanks to Georgetown University and to President DeGioia for hosting this event, and to the organizers for their work on this multiday

webinar. I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to respond to Cardinal Ayuso's statement from the standpoint of my work in religion and ecology.

First, I am especially grateful for the religious leadership provided by Pope Francis in his recent encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, and today by the cardinal in his opening address. Cardinal Ayuso gives us a sense of how dialogue founded on ecological awareness might develop.

We should expect religious leadership to come from both hierarchy and laity bringing about new awareness of environmental issues. Along with global issues such as toxicity of soils, acidification of oceans, climate emergencies and biodiversity loss, local congregations and communities will undoubtedly take up religious leadership on regional environmental issues. These interreligious dialogues will foreground air quality, river and water pollution, development that removes green spaces from communities and voter suppression that demoralizes the possibilities of community leadership and hope.

Significantly, the guidance called for by Cardinal Ayuso will bring forward religious values that may not often be seen in environmental policies, law and science. I think here, for example, of religious values such as the Christian sense of "care for God's creation"; in Islam the "trust" doctrine in which humans accepted trust or responsibility for creation from the divine; and in Buddhism, the emphasis on the interdependence of all reality. These will be more than doctrinal concepts as they activate environmental leadership and responsibility. They bring religious values into environmental advocacy.

Second, I find this leadership that Cardinal Ayuso represents and calls for both novel and significant. By *novel* I mean that something has fundamentally changed from our ways of looking at the world. By *world* here I mean the Platonic influences on the worldviews of the Western traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. To go straight to the point, I recall in my Catholic youth being warned about the dangers of "the world, the flesh and the devil."

Each of the terms of this simple teaching are complex, but consider the novel turn in religious attitudes toward

the "world" as presented in Pope Francis' encyclicals and in the cardinal's statement. Religious leadership is bringing us into new understandings of the world, its emergence over time, its complex immensity and our deep embeddedness in the world. By *novel*, then, I want to appreciate the challenges to religious leadership in articulating how we will understand this amazing turn toward the world as a womb of creativity with a time-developmental past that nurtures us toward a future of responsibility for the health of our world.

By *significant* I want to draw out Cardinal Ayuso's emphasis on religious teachings about the environment and their implications for action. The teachings here in His Eminence's statement and in the pope's encyclicals move us to think deeply about our deep connections with the world.

—Ecological insights are increasingly framed in Christian contexts of Logos and sacramental theology.

—In Judaism covenantal and prophetic theology reevaluate the dominion teachings of Torah.

—In Buddhism attention to inter-being opens teachings regarding interdependence to significant scientific insights regarding the quantum world.

—Indigenous elders promote protection of spiritual realities in air, water and soil.

—Finally, ecological civilization is discussed in East Asian Confucianism and Daoism as viable ways of critiquing our fixation on industrial and technological relations with the material world.

I am reminded of this when His Eminence drew out specific points from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In one bullet point the cardinal emphasized: "the teachings of respective religious traditions to understand better how the relationships between God, human beings and nature are intertwined."

Through these teachings we are drawn into meaningful action. That is, in dialogue with our religious sisters and brothers as a mutual sharing in the human communities that parallels the mutual sharing we see in ecology at work in the world.

Moreover, in religious action on the ground diverse communities build flourishing human-Earth relations.

That is, lived relations that are mutually enhancing for the flourishing of people, biodiversity and planet. The cardinal's call for interreligious dialogue on the environment results from and calls us forward to these deeply spiritual realizations happening everywhere around our planet.

Two Approaches in Dialogue

In preparing higher-degree students for careers in religion and ecology, we have used two phrases that inherently relate to Cardinal Ayuso's statement. These two approaches are *religious ecology* and *religious cosmology*. *Religious ecology* refers to a "retrieval" type of approach to this field in which a researcher brings forward — or retrieves — an example of an individual or community interaction with the natural world that is transmitted in religious scriptures, rituals or commentaries.

For example, the Book of Genesis, Chapter 1:6-28, speaks of human *dominion* over nature. The retrieval approach brings that example forward to ask, What is our contemporary understanding of the biblical concept of dominion? Is it a viable religious ecology to relate to our imperiled world with a dominion ethic?

Religious cosmology is a related dimension to religious ecology, but it needs to be distinguished from religious ecology. That is, they are two ways of looking at the same thing, namely, human-Earth relations. By distinguishing them we see more clearly how religious values embedded in them shape human behavior.

Religious cosmology asks a student to explore the stories about the world that convey attitudes, values and knowledge about the world. Is the universe something of wonder or beauty, or is the world a fallen state that the human has to endure on a journey toward enlightenment or paradise? If religious ecology transmits an environmental ethic describing human-Earth relations; religious cosmology transmits the deep affections and commitments embedded in the stories of human-Earth relationships.

There is a strong religious ecology and a weaker religious cosmology in the cardinal's statement. When he cites the papal document on human frater-

nity, he notes that “we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (*Laudato Si'*, 92).

Consider the implications for religious ecology embedded in this statement manifest in the words and phrases: “humans ... united ... in fond affection with brother sun ...,” “brothers and sisters in a wonderful pilgrimage,” “woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures.” They reveal a robust religious ecology placed like a string of pearls on the world shining with unity, love and mutual travel together.

This strong reference to *pilgrimage* underscores an ancient and widespread religious concept and action in the human family. As a religious cosmology, we can connect this sense of journey to scientific understandings of the evolutionary journey of the universe as a pilgrimage of all reality. While less developed, this pilgrimage theme opens toward a robust religious cosmology that might be drawn out in interreligious dialogues. Of course, the tensions between traditional religious stories and the data of science are embedded in this type of dialogue.

In his reflections, the cardinal remembered what Pope Benedict XVI said regarding the misconceptions of relations between religion and science. The pope said, “There is no “opposition between faith and science”; instead, “there is friendship between science and faith” and that scientists, “through their vocation to the study of nature ... can take an authentic and fascinating path of holiness” (March 24, 2010, general audience).

Could this “path of holiness” be a bridging from science that meets the bridging from the religious traditions in pilgrimage? In their respective paths aren't we both trying to understand our contemporary knowledge and needs that cause our environmental dilemma?

In thinking about this “path of holiness” in scientific research, I am reminded of the views of the Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who understood his scientific focus

on material reality as a meditation of wonder and beauty. Teilhard's efforts to reconcile his views of evolution in the universe with his religious belief are furthered in the work of the Passionist priest and cultural historian Thomas Berry. It was Berry who made the strong connection of cosmology and ecology evident in his signature insight: “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects” (*The Great Work*, 1999).

For Teilhard and Berry, the cosmos was not simply a static finished event, but a cosmogenesis — an ongoing unfolding universe of increasingly complex subjects bringing about novel emergent possibilities.

Let me conclude by returning to the cardinal's recognition of the prophetic character of *Laudato Si'* in our pandemic times, during which vulnerability and insight are so tightly intertwined. Our sense of the holy dimensions of suffering alerts us to the simultaneous call to the alleviation of the distress of those who suffer most by our unreflective disturbance of environments around the world.

Now, more than ever, this prophetic “call” comes to religious communities passing over novel and significant thresholds onto paths embracing holiness in the larger Earth community.

With gratitude for your attention. ■

Speech at Conference on Interreligious Responses to *Laudato Si'*

Rabbi Bernstein

“If we want to reach our constituencies — if we actually want to engage our communities in a love for the Earth — we need to generate hope, and we need to keep hope alive for the long term,” Rabbi Ellen Bernstein said at a conference on interreligious responses to Pope Francis' encyclical letter “Laudato Si’” five years after its release. “We can do

that by developing programs that are grounded in love and joy and beauty,” she said Oct. 30 during the virtual conference hosted by Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. Rabbi Bernstein founded the first national Jewish environmental organization Shomrei Adamah (“Keepers of the Earth”) in 1988. She discussed a few environmental projects, including Ecopeace Middle East, where Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians work together. She noted that “migrating birds and animals don't perceive political borders. The Jordan River, the lifeblood of Israel, Palestine and Jordan, doesn't recognize political borders.” She also talked about Jewish farming projects in the U.S., saying, “Farming organically cultivates three fundamental Jewish values: awe and gratitude and ‘tzedek,’ or righteousness.” Rabbi Bernstein's talk follows.

I have always felt that it is the responsibility of religious institutions to offer hope, particularly in times that feel so deeply challenging and increasingly more desperate. Not Pollyannaish hope, but hope grounded in the life force, hope that rises up out of the earth like a redbud tree in the springtime or hope that is born on the wings of a great blue heron as it lifts off so gracefully in the air.

I want to briefly discuss a few different ecologically grounded projects that have arisen in the Jewish community as models for consideration as we discuss the implementation of *Laudato Si'* — all are rooted in hope, in the life force, in the God force.

I want to note at the outset that all the projects I am suggesting come from the margins of the Jewish world — not the establishment center. These projects don't necessarily identify themselves as religiously Jewish, but they arise out of a Jewish sensibility. And I think this is a point that we may want to reflect on in our discussion period.

In my opinion the most hopeful thing that has developed in the last 25 years in the Jewish community is the rise of Jewish farming — and let's define farming here as a more intensive form of gardening — since farming for some can conjure up agribusiness on the one hand or something a bit more fringe on the other.

I'm talking about small-scale farms — neighborhood farms, urban farms, schoolyard farms, church, synagogue and mosque farms — community farms. The inclination toward living simply and working in partnership with neighbors and friends on the land on which you live to grow the food that you are going to eat seems to me to be one of the most promising responses to a world that has become entirely divorced from the land; reliant on economies that extract from the land and pollute the land yet never really adequately feed the people — either literally and spiritually.

These local Jewishly rooted farms do so much more than provide healthy foods. They cultivate neighborly bonds, build community and they are a powerful defense against climate change. When farmed properly, using simple traditional methods, the soil acts as a carbon sink, sucking carbon out of the atmosphere and binding it safely in the soil.

While this movement has still not penetrated the established Jewish world, it is gaining in popularity among a certain segment of the Jewish population, especially Jews under 40.

So I want to share with you a bit of background on this movement. We have two successful farming programs, Adamah, which means land, and Urban Adamah that began around 20 years ago when some young Jews wanted to actually live the Jewish ecological values which they were encountering through their exploration of Jewish texts.

Adamah on the east and Urban Adamah on the west, bring together young people from all over the country and world each year to participate in three-monthlong intensive programs of organic farming, animal husbandry, sustainable living, Jewish learning, contemplative practice and leadership development.

Many participants who may have found little in Judaism to keep them connected to their tradition experience for the first time how Jewish living can bring meaning and joy to their own lives. These types of programs are an antidote to a Judaism which is too often characterized as an indoor, bookish tradition where those who are most learned in texts receive all the honor.

These programs level the playing field: Religiously oriented Jews have no advantage over secular ones. Everyone comes together in a new environment to learn new skills.

The success of these programs is not necessarily about farming per se, but it's about engaging in a meaningful, pleasurable, challenging and redemptive activity that is good for the soul and good for the soil and good for the neighboring community and good for the world.

The program's effectiveness is due in large part because environmental living and Jewish living go hand in hand; the deeper you delve into one, the deeper you find yourself in the other. Farming organically cultivates three fundamental Jewish values: awe and gratitude and *tzedek*, or righteousness.

Young alumni of this program end up assimilating the training into their lives and work in a variety of ways. Some go on to rabbinical school with the dream of integrating ecological living into every aspect of synagogue life: from the schools to the physical plant and the grounds, to worship services and holidays, to *tikkun olam*, or repair the world activities.

This is already a reality in a few synagogues, including the one I belong to, where the entire education of the school is integrated with the seasons of life on the farm, and all the holidays are celebrated outdoors among all the growing things, and many synagogue members volunteer on the farm, cultivating the soil, tending the plants, baking bread in the cobb oven with wheat grown at the farm.

On *Shabbat*, the Sabbath, everyone comes together and relishes time picnicking outdoors. These outdoor religious programs have been wildly successful in attracting hundreds of unaffiliated families to the synagogues — that's because so many children, and those adults who still are in touch with the child within, naturally gravitate to the outdoors where they feel a sense of freedom and aliveness or perhaps godliness that they do not associate with the indoors.

I'm devoting much of my short presentation to the whole topic of community farming since I believe that it actually could serve as a model for other faiths and as a model for interfaith col-

laboration, especially if we could develop more of an infrastructure and find the financial and institutional backing that these programs need to grow and have a serious impact on religious life and on the Earth.

I want to shift gears and discuss a very different model of interfaith partnerships that also is grounded in an outwardly secular vision rooted in shared religious values that is Ecopeace Middle East, a novel collaborative approach to ecological security in the Middle East, initiated about 20 years ago with three executive directors — one from Israel, one from Palestine and one from Jordan. While this program functions mostly in the Middle East, it could be replicated in other parts of the world.

Ecopeace Middle East has many different programs, but the one I want to draw your attention to is the Jordan River project. Father Josh and I had the privilege of participating in a glorious weeklong interfaith trip along the Jordan River this past February right before the pandemic set in.

Let me begin by reminding you that the Middle East is the most water-stressed region in the world and suffers from water insecurity. People in this region do not have reliable access to enough safe water at an affordable price to lead healthy, dignified and productive lives nor are the ecosystems upon which all life in the region depends able to sustain themselves.

Climate change is already contributing to even greater water stress in the region, causing sea levels to rise, extreme weather events, decreased precipitation and ultimately less surface and groundwater available. The current water situation in the Middle East is inadequate to address each country's internal agricultural and domestic needs, and there are severe environmental, economic, political and security implications.

Ecopeace has developed a series of collaborative programs to address water insecurity. The underlying philosophy of Ecopeace is that the natural world doesn't abide by political borders. Migrating birds and animals don't perceive political borders. The Jordan River, the lifeblood of Israel, Palestine and Jordan, doesn't recognize political borders.

It's all one watershed. Whatever one community does to the river if it pollutes or takes more than its share of water affects all the other communities of the watershed. Likewise, it's impossible for one community to rehabilitate the Jordan River by itself. Ecopeace's approach to restoring the Jordan River is modeled on the way that ecosystems functions — interdependently. The goal is for each partner to fulfill its own self-interest while they all enjoy mutual gain.

I haven't begun to sketch out all the good that Ecopeace is doing in the world and in particular its water/energy nexus, an inspiring partnership in the works in which Israel will provide desalinized water from the Mediterranean to a water-starved Jordan, and Jordan will provide electricity from its vast solar arrays to an energy-hungry Israel.

I recommend you to their website: <https://ecopeaceme.org>. But Ecopeace could do so much more if it had a stronger infrastructure and the kind of financial security it needs to allow for expansion in the Middle East and throughout the world. I bring it to your attention with the hopes that the interfaith community could partner with Ecopeace to expand its reach.

I want to end on a lighter note, with the discussion of another program also rooted in hope that provides an opportunity for interfaith engagement while educating people about the Earth and its ecosystems.

Many years ago, the organization I founded, *Shomrei Adamah*, Keepers of the Earth, developed an all-species parade for Earth Day for the city of Philadelphia. An all-species parade is just what it sounds like: a festive celebration of the Earth's species and ecosystems. To pull off a meaningful and memorable and educational parade that engages thousands of people and has a lasting impact requires a huge amount of logistics and organization. While the parade is not an outwardly religious event, we and many of the spiritually oriented participants understood our activity as an expression of biblical or spiritual values, the values of the goodness of all the creatures, the supreme value of biodiversity.

The all-species parade required a significant effort upfront. We spent

a year working with about 50 secular afterschool programs all over the city to teach kids an appreciation for the Earth and all its inhabitants. Each student chose a favorite species, learned everything they could about it, created costumes and props, wrote songs and designed floats and made puppets, and came on Earth Day embodied as their species.

Classes came as whole ecosystems. All materials were recyclable. All vehicles were powered by muscle. They came on bicycles, on rollerblade, on stilts; they came with baby carriages, with wheelbarrows full of seedlings. The parade began at the Philadelphia Zoo and slowly wound its way through the zoo's diverse habitats where we stopped to commune with many of our sister species.

We continued on through the streets of Philadelphia until we reached Fairmount Park. One thousand kids and their school groups participated, and 30,000 people witnessed the all-species parade. It was a deeply memorable event that opened the hearts and minds of participants and the onlookers to the creatures of the world.

As religious leaders, we know the power of holidays to inculcate a spiritual message, and we know that holidays can serve as organizing tools to motivate and engage millions of people. If we want to reach our constituencies — if we actually want to engage our communities in a love for the Earth — we need to generate hope, and we need to keep hope alive for the long term; and we can do that by developing programs that are grounded in love and joy and beauty.

This is what will attract our communities to what the theologian Thomas Berry called the “great work,” and this is what will sustain them in a lifetime of great work.

I believe that we have all that we need in terms of intellectual resources, spiritual resources and creative resources in order to mitigate the climate crisis. We need to take seriously the very effective programs that are already in place, and we need to institutionalize them and finance them and roll them out more broadly throughout the world.

If there is one thing I have learned from the COVID-19 crisis, it's that the

financial and institutional resources do exist to address the existential risk before us. I pray that our discussion here today can help us to harness the resources we need now for the future of life on Earth. ■

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, most events are being canceled, postponed or moved online.

Nov. 12-14

Online Educational Training Seminar: "Rebuilding the Global Educational Pact." Sponsors: Education Commission of the Unions of Male and Female General Superiors. For more information: comeducas@gmail.com

Nov. 16-17

Virtual Fall General Assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Livestreamed 1-5 p.m. www.usccb.org/live

Nov. 19-21

International Online Conference on the Economy of St. Francis. Theme: "Young People, a Commitment, the Future." From Assisi, Italy, with the virtual participation of Pope Francis. For livestreaming and details: www.francescoeconomy.org

Nov. 20-21

American Catholic Philosophical Association Virtual Conference 2020. Theme: "The Good, the True, the Beautiful: Through and of the Ages." Details and registration: www.acpaconference.org/registration

*Dec. 1-2

Online Zoom Webinar: "Buddhist-Christian Perspectives on Contemplative Practices and Religious Belonging." Sponsors: Society for Christian-Buddhist Studies and Georgetown University's Theology and Religious Studies Department and Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. Register: <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/buddhist-christian-perspectives-on-contemplative-practices-and-religious-belonging>

Dec. 3-4

National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry Annual Conference. Theme: "Iglesia en Salida/Sent on Mission." Will take place online instead of Puerto Rico. <https://ncchm-us.org>

*signifies new entry

On File

The Vatican Secretariat of State has sent an explanatory note to nuncios around the world insisting that when Pope Francis spoke about civil unions in a new documentary, he was not changing or challenging "the doctrine of the church, which he has reaffirmed numerous times over the years." The note, which was not signed, explained that the pope's remarks were "edited and published as a single answer without the necessary contextualization." As Catholic News Service reported Oct. 26, when Pope Francis said gay people have a right to be in a family and that gay couples needed some form of civil law to protect their rights, he was not advocating any form of "marriage" or marriage rights for gay couples. Yet, in his documentary "Francesco," director Evgeny Afineevsky presented the statements as if Pope Francis had been talking about the right of gay couples to form a family, including with children.

Bishops who want to establish a religious order in their dioceses must first obtain the written permission of the Holy See, Pope Francis said. Amending canon law, the pope said it no longer is enough for a bishop to consult the Vatican before approving the creation of a new order in his diocese. "By its nature, every institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life, even if it arose in the context of a particular church, is — as a gift to the church — not an isolated or marginal reality, but is deeply part" of the universal church, the

pope said in *Authenticum Charismatis* ("The Authenticity of a Charism"), released Nov. 4 at the Vatican. The document changes Canon 579 of the Code of Canon Law to read: "Diocesan bishops, each in his own territory, can erect institutes of consecrated life by formal decree, with prior permission in writing from the Apostolic See."

A lack of oversight and control over the Vatican Secretariat of State's investment activities may have facilitated some bad property deals, said Bishop Nunzio Galantino, president of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See. "Taking advantage of past experience and the mistakes made, we are working to get more prudent, transparent and professional management" of assets and ensure they are subjected to "adequate controls" so investments will be both ethical and profitable, he said in an interview Oct. 31 with *Avvenire*, the daily newspaper of the Italian bishops' conference. Since June 2018, Bishop Galantino has headed APSA, the office in charge of administering properties owned by the Vatican in order to provide funds for the work of the Roman Curia. The Secretariat of State, he explained, has its own funds, which it has used for various investments — most notably, a property in London's Chelsea district, which incurred major debts. APSA was not involved in that deal, which led to losses estimated at between \$85 million and \$194 million, he said.