

World Religions & Global Issues

Week 3 Lecture | RELS 332

Professor Chris Crews

Week 3 Readings

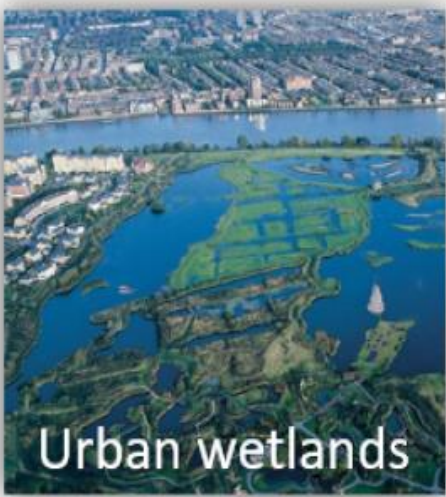
- *The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions* - Iyad Abumoghli and Euan McCartney
- *Adapting to Climate Change in Shifting Landscapes of Belief* – Conor Murphy, Mavuto Tembo, Adrian Phiri, Olusegun Yerokun, Bernie Grummell
- *Laudato Si' Encyclical* – Pope Francis

The Big Picture

In our readings this week we turn to another aspect of how religion impacts global issues, looking into questions of the environment and climate change. Our readings focus on some of the more positive aspects of religion and how religious sentiments can be mobilized to help us address the global climate crisis and related environmental challenges, from promoting nature-based solutions to environmental problems to using the moral power of religion to encourage nature stewardship.

We will also look at how African communities are adapting to the impacts of Christianity and Western science, focusing on rural communities in Malawi (Bolero) and Zambia (Monze). We will consider how Christianity and traditional beliefs and ecological practices, often referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), both co-exist and come into conflict. Such examples are important in a world where TEK offers important alternative perspectives on human-nature relations not grounded in Western logics of growth and consumption.

As our final reading from Pope Francis suggests, the world needs a cultural and spiritual awakening in order to seriously address our unsustainable lifestyle and create new, more healthy relationships with each other and planet Earth. Pope Francis argues this shift is one religions can help us accomplish.



The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature-Based Solutions

Iyad Abumoghli and
Euan McCartney

Nature Based Solutions – Abumoghli & McCartney

As Abumoghli and McCartney argue, “We are currently **facing unprecedented multiple crises** of climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, zoonotic diseases amongst many others.”

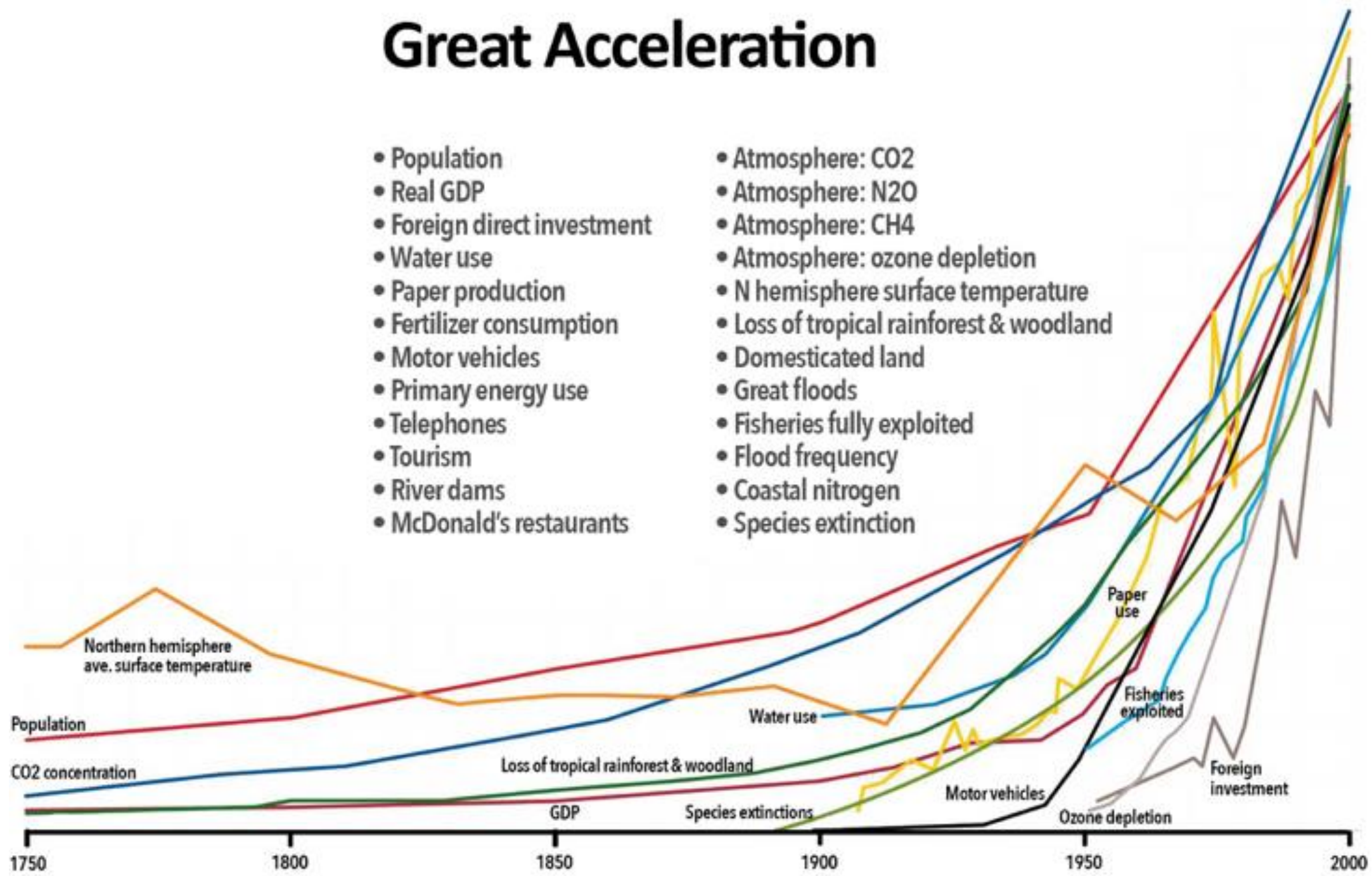
These global changes, which are connected to a range of new planetary impacts, are linked to the idea of the **Anthropocene**, or a proposed new geologic epoch that is dominated by human impacts, and the post-1950 global jump in industrial resource usage, also known as the **Great Acceleration**.

One set of solutions to these interconnected global problems people are exploring are known as “**nature-based solutions**,” which our authors describe as “an umbrella term for various approaches that share common features and are designed to protect the natural environment while addressing societal challenges. These approaches are inspired and supported to work with nature itself and its capacity to self-heal.”

As our authors suggest, nature-based solutions (NBS) offer numerous strategies for addressing global environmental challenges that can be used and supported by any global religious tradition as well as local, state, and international bodies and institutions.

Great Acceleration

- Population
- Real GDP
- Foreign direct investment
- Water use
- Paper production
- Fertilizer consumption
- Motor vehicles
- Primary energy use
- Telephones
- Tourism
- River dams
- McDonald's restaurants
- Atmosphere: CO2
- Atmosphere: N2O
- Atmosphere: CH4
- Atmosphere: ozone depletion
- N hemisphere surface temperature
- Loss of tropical rainforest & woodland
- Domesticated land
- Great floods
- Fisheries fully exploited
- Flood frequency
- Coastal nitrogen
- Species extinction



Nature Based Solutions – Abumoghli & McCartney

Abumoghli and McCartney point out that since “the climate crisis is rooted in a complex web of economic, social and cultural factors, as well as belief systems, social attitudes and perceptions, it is worth considering how these ethics impact our ability to address it. **The unsustainable socio-economic systems, and consumption and production patterns that dominate much of the world today, arguably reflect belief systems and social attitudes.**”

As they also note, most people’s belief systems and attitudes are grounded in religious beliefs and related ethics. Therefore, if we want to address the global climate crisis, we must deal with the role of religious ethics in contributing to these problems and think about how religious and spiritual ethics can help us address these global challenges.

As the authors note, “religions arose at a time when people were much more intimately connected to the natural world, gaining their livelihoods directly from it. **With technological progress, the impacts of globalisation, ever-growing urbanisation and increasing mechanisation of agriculture and food production, people today, particularly in mega and big cities, are more detached from nature than ever before,**” and this has created “a disconnect between what is contained within religious texts and teachings, and the current practices of the adherents of those religions.”

Nature Based Solutions – Abumoghli & McCartney

Given this disconnect between the agrarian roots of religion and our fixation on urbanization and industrial technologies, how do we reconnect agrarian religious ethics with the modern world?

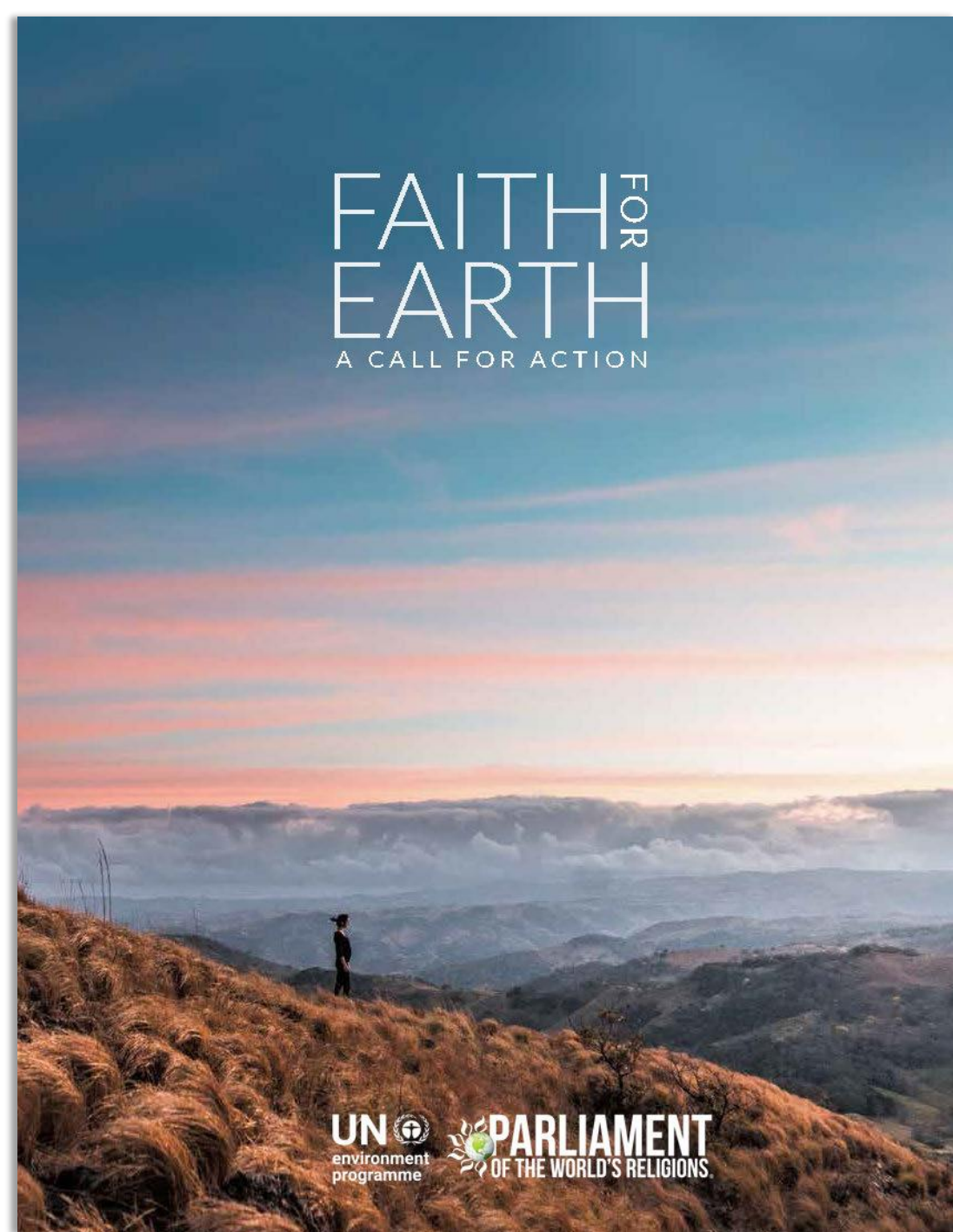
“In this time of unprecedented global environmental degradation, **a new environmental ethic based on universally shared values is required, one that places a greater value on nature and connects to spiritual beliefs...**This means re-evaluating the irrationality of valuing economic growth and material wealth over the health of the natural ecosystems, upon which all life relies...it entails embracing diversity and **creating a common notion of a moral duty to protect the environment that can serve to bridge religious divides** whilst incorporating the expertise, knowledge and practices that different faiths provide. The ultimate aim should be that **humans learn to live in harmony with nature and with one another.**”

Our authors suggest that nature-based solutions are one way that religious communities can draw upon their ethical traditions to promote ecological solutions, and they point to ideas like the Abrahamic concept of stewardship or beliefs in interdependence among Buddhists and Hindus.

As examples of what has already been done along these lines our authors point to a number of global examples:

- World Charter for Nature (1982)
- UNEP Seoul Declaration on Environmental Ethics (1997)
- UN Millennium Declaration (2000)
- Tehran Declaration on Environment, Religion and Culture (2001)
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2016)

They also discuss global collaborations, such as the partnership between the UNEP, Parliament of World Religions, and Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, which produced the “Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action” in 2000, which has now been update as “Faith for Earth: A Call for Action” (2020). Other examples include the **UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration** (2021-2030) and efforts to support the 2015 Paris Agreement.



Nature Based Solutions – Abumoghli & McCartney

As the authors suggest, “**Nature-Based Solutions should be flexible, locally adapted, systemic and grounded in the best environmental science and knowledge** to ensure they are properly implemented to create the most benefits, for people and planet.”

There are thousands of nature-based solutions we can draw upon for ideas, which might include:

- Reforestation and green infrastructure projects (rural reforestation and urban green spaces)
- Implementing coastal shoreline restoration projects (mangroves, wetlands, marshes)
- Removing dams and restoring natural waterways/riparian corridors
- Installing green roofs and promoting wastewater recycling and composting
- Encouraging the use of more permaculture and organic agriculture
- Promoting alternative energy systems (solar, wind, geothermal, micro hydropower/run of river)
- Reef recovery projects and marine habitat creation/restoration projects

Nature-Based Solutions & Climate Change



Nature Based Solutions – Abumoghli & McCartney

Nature-Based Solutions include ideas which can be implemented by religious organizations, national governments, international agencies, and even individual communities and cities. Unfortunately, **two of the biggest stumbling blocks to the more effective use of NBS are 1) a lack of funding, and 2) weak support from national governments and private investors.**

As our authors argue, NBS offers “numerous opportunities to forge a new sustainable future, one that still accounts for the **four dimensions (social, economic, environmental and cultural) of sustainable development.**”

Fortunately, we don’t need to wait on governments or international agencies to promote NBS. As our authors argue, existing religious institutions can use their resources to begin implementing NBS today—in religious schools, places of worship, religious property and lands, and other resources held by religious groups. Equally important, **religious groups can use their influence to help encourage and promote environmental efforts** among their own followers.

Our authors also remind us that many conservation movements also included ties to religious organizations and were inspired by religious teachings. **“There is a clear history of environmental consideration within religions and folk traditions,** reflected in scriptures and practices, some which pre-date contemporary religions.” These can be drawn on today to help in this work.

Nature Based Solutions & Religious Resources

Our authors further discuss how the environment has been central to all religions, pointing to the importance of nature in most religious texts. A few of the examples they discuss include:

- Ancient Sanskrit texts emphasizing ethical relations between humans and nature.
- Belief in non-violence towards sentient being (*ahimsa*) found in Buddhism and Jainism.
- Muslim beliefs in humans as trustees of Allah (*khalifa*) and obligations to care for the world.
- Islamic practices of reserve systems (*hima*) that set aside areas as sacred and protected.
- Ethiopian Orthodox churches creating protected sacred forest groves around rural churches.
- Japanese Shinto beliefs in spirits (*kami*) that inhabit special areas and promote forest protection.
- Maronite Church of Lebanon practices that protected the Harisa cedar forests in Lebanon.
- Eco-Sikh's Guru Nanak Sacred Forest project that takes a holistic view of human-nature relations.
- Jewish celebration of *Tu BiShvat* (New Year of Trees) and religious tree planting rituals.

THE GOLDEN TEMPLE VEGETARIAN COOKBOOK

Uncommon uses for common natural foods, with recipes for salads, snacks, and sandwiches; breads, pies, cakes, cookies, and brownies; plus vegetable, legume, rice, grains and pasta main dishes and soups—all selected from Indian, Chinese, Italian, Mexican, Middle Eastern, and American cuisines.



by Yogi Bhanjan

FEAST!

Real Food, Reflections, and Simple Living
for the Christian Year



DANIEL AND HALEY STEWART

THE ROAD TO THE TASTE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

WOOKWAN'S KOREAN TEMPLE FOOD



WOOKWAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DUKGWAN MOON

Nature Based Solutions & Religious Resources

As our authors note, **there are especially rich religious traditions around caring for and protecting trees and forests**, and in many parts of the world important religious shrines or pilgrimage sites are near ancient forests that have been protected as sacred spaces.

Examples of how these beliefs can be put into action include the **Interfaith Rainforest Initiative**, which seeks to protect tropical rainforests from destruction, and the **Living Chapel**, an effort to creating Living Sacred Spaces around the world rooted in interfaith religious practices that can promote sustainability and peace-building between different religious communities.

Some other important examples our authors discuss where religion and nature connect include:

- **Food consumption** (from vegetarian and temple food to food security and food waste)
- **Sustainable Living** (from China “ecological civilization” to reducing waste at religious gatherings)
- **Greening places of worship** (from adding solar panels to promoting recycling and gardening)

These examples can be thought about as part of the “**greening of religion**,” or the idea that religious traditions and practices can help us live a more ecologically responsible life.



Church forests in Ethiopia



Nature Based Solutions & Indigenous Knowledge

Most of these practices have been used for millennia by Indigenous communities, who not only live in ways that show respect for nature, but which have also led to the protection of some of the most biodiverse spots on the planet. **Although Indigenous people occupy or use less than 20% of the Earth, they safeguard and protect more than 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity.**

As our authors argue, “Overall there is close correlation between areas of biological and cultural diversity with most indigenous populations found in areas of megadiversity. These species-diverse environments in which indigenous peoples live **are deeply tied to productive activities and spiritual values.** From that perspective, **all creation is sacred and the sacred and secular are inseparable with belief systems preventing the overexploitation of resources.**”

This **traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)** is an important aspect of NBS and central to thinking more creatively about how to develop resilient and adaptive systems in the face of growing climate uncertainties. TEK can also show us how to live more in harmony with the natural world around us, rather than trying to force nature to fit with human goals. **Such shifts in thinking are also key to TEK.**

Mukanzubo Kalinda dance group at the Lwiindi Gonde ritual, Zambia



Prophet Shepherd Bushiri's Enlightened Christian Gathering, Malawi

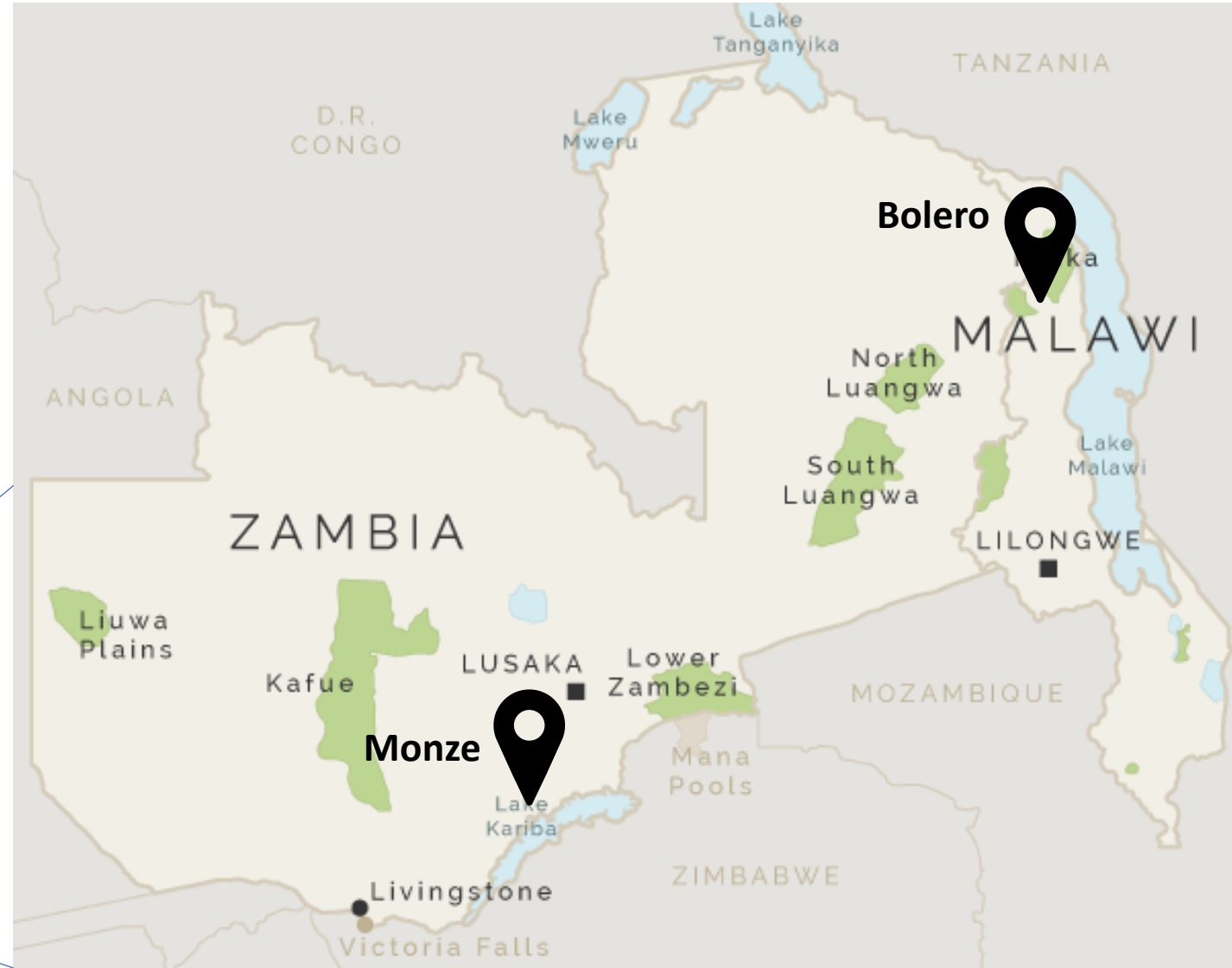


Adapting to climate change in
shifting landscapes of belief

Murphy, Tembo, Phiri,
Yerokun and Grummell

Adapting to Climate Change – Murphy et al.

The article from Murphy and co-authors on climate change adaptation in Malawi (Bolero) and Zambia (Monze) gives us some insight into the tensions that can arise when traditional religious beliefs encounter other religious traditions (in this case Christianity), drawing on field research from 26 different local villages.

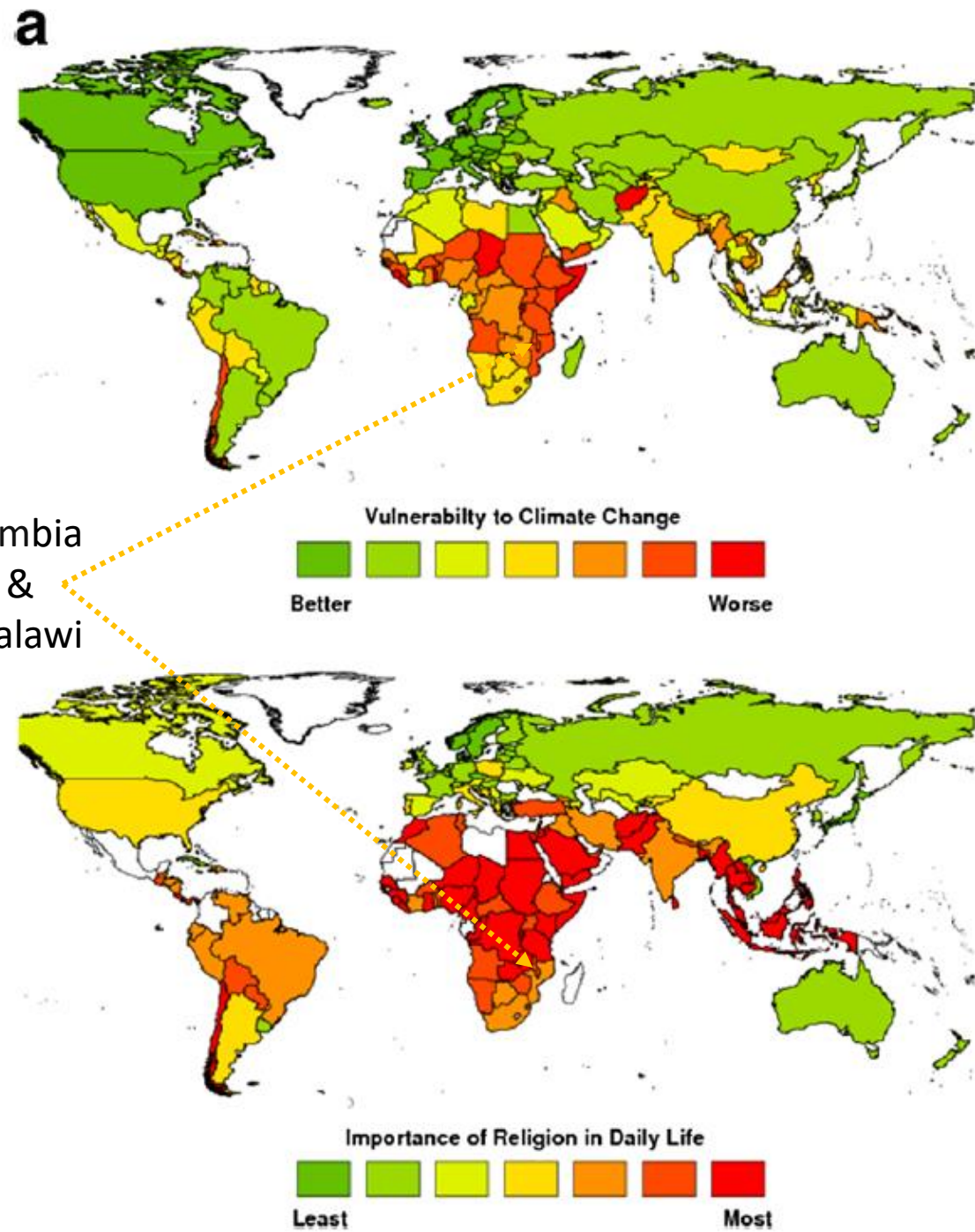


Adapting to Climate Change – Murphy et al.

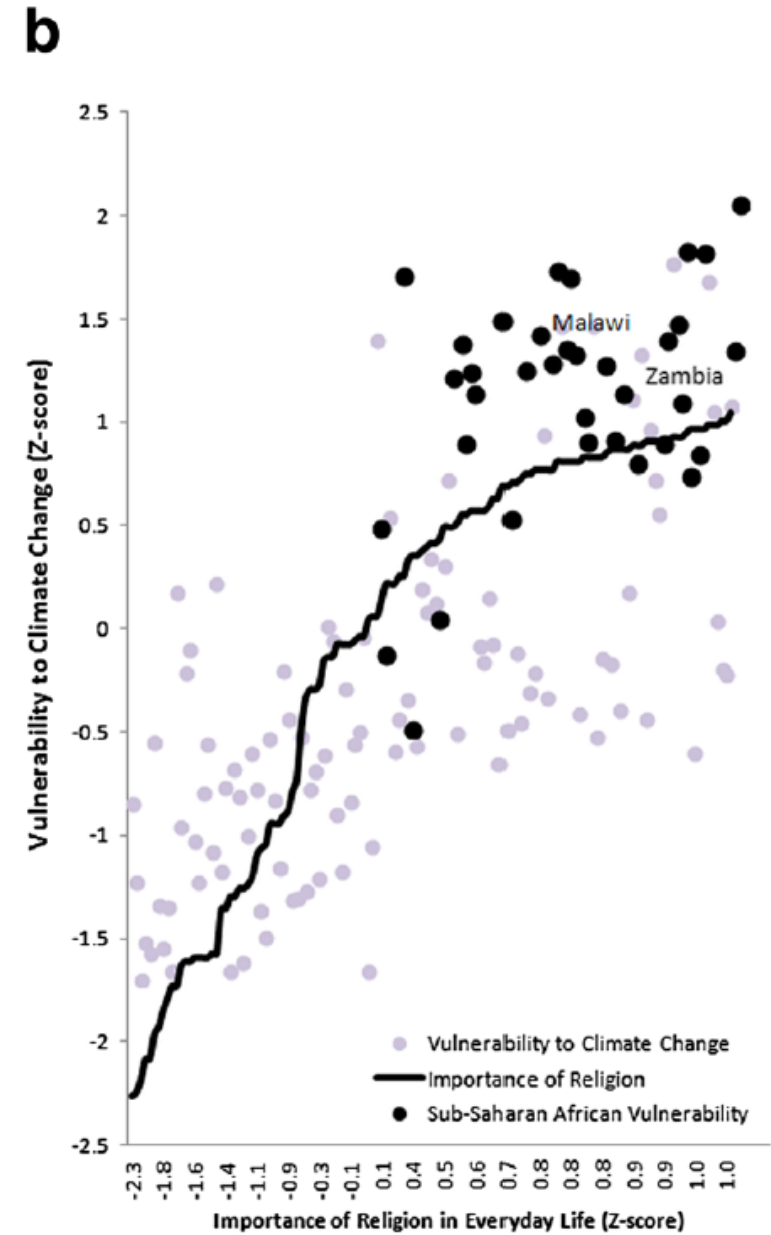
As Murphy and co-authors argue, “Social and individual values and worldviews, often determined by religion or spirituality, influence decisions about whether and how to adapt, while religion has been positively associated with adaptive capacity by enhancing social capital.” As they also noted, “On a global scale, **vulnerability to climate change tends to be greatest in parts of the world where religion is most important in daily life.**”

It is important to note in the context of these cases that traditional African religious beliefs and practices have existed for millennia, while Islam and Christianity are newer practices. By 2010 the number of Christians in southern African nations had increased by 70% and Muslims by 20%, which has led to a rapid decline in African traditional religious beliefs over the past century.

This **decline came in two major waves**, first during the 1800s when European and American colonizers and missionaries tried to bring Christian “civilization” to Africa, and secondly, in later waves during the 1980s when we saw the “Africanization” of Christianity and the rise of African Independent Churches and the growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. Yet as our authors note, many Africans hold traditional religious beliefs alongside Christian and Muslim beliefs, **leading to what religious studies scholars refer to as syncretism or hybrid forms of religious belief.**



Correspondence between vulnerability to climate change and importance of religion in everyday life.



Adapting to Climate Change – Murphy et al.

This has created local environmental challenges as older animistic religious practices and rituals come into conflict with dogmatic monotheistic beliefs. As our authors noted, **“Traditional belief systems are often intricately intertwined with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in which spirituality is rooted within the ancestral spirit-world and built from adaptive processes of trial and error of living with the land. Thus, TEK is a knowledge-practice-belief complex that has long been the organizing attractor around which the culture and practice of rural community life has persisted.”**

As our authors point out, **three important aspects of TEK’s local adaptive capacities** include:

- The qualitative monitoring of change for early warning by individuals or communities.
- The protection of important refuges that facilitate recovery following disturbance (e.g., sacred groves, taboos against use of specific plants and animals that may facilitate recovery or coping during extremes).
- The practice of rituals in passing on institutional memory and facilitating communal responses to pressures.

The challenge many traditional communities face from outside religions such as Christianity and Islam is that **they are often not responsive to local dynamics and can even be hostile to them**, which leads to a rapid breakdown of successful environmental conservation practices that conflict with new religious beliefs and practices, something our case studies from Malawi and Zambia clearly highlight.

Adapting to Climate Change – Murphy et al.

The two case studies from Malawi and Zambia help us look at specific examples where **changing religious beliefs have affected the adaptive capacity of rural communities**. They also show how holding multiple belief systems can affect climate-sensitive livelihood practices related to food production and communal rituals.

Researchers found that **cultural changes caused by changing religious beliefs between generations can impact the adaptive capacities of communities to respond to climate change**. One impact from these changes was driven by hostile Evangelicals, embodied in the growing number of Pentecostals who reject their own traditional religious beliefs and practices. This **hostility has disrupted traditional forms of ecological practice (TEK) by substituting in their place reliance on Western technology and agricultural practices**, neither of which are connected to traditional beliefs or practices.

As the authors argue, “The importance of TEK in building adaptive capacity is well established. However, **in both communities our findings suggests that changing beliefs are undermining the effectiveness of TEK management practices**...interviewees noted concern that the expansion of Christian religions is affecting preservation of TEK practices, particularly through non-adherence to taboos deemed important for preserving system resilience [by young people].”

Bolero (Malawi) v. Monze (Zambia)

Densely populated rural area

(95% Christian – Tumbuka ethnicity)

- Risks include environmental degradation, climate variability, erratic rainfall, droughts, land shortages, food insecurity, HIV/AIDS
- Strong organized social relations and leaders
- Traditional religious taboos for certain foods, protection of certain sacred trees, group identity more important than individuals
- *Chiuta* (local name for God) responsible for disasters, can be called w/ ancestors for rain
- Use of *sing'anga* (medicine man) to drive out evil spirits preventing rain, causing sickness
- Tumbuka had good relations w/ Presbyterian missionaries who respected many local practices

Agricultural/Pastoral area

(87% Christian, 12% traditional - Tonga ethnicity)

- Risks include problems with rain fed crops, lack of agricultural grazing lands, droughts
- Never had an organized state or social relations, no centralized leadership
- Tonga rain shrine (*Malende*) where rain spirits live are key to the two Lwiindi rain rituals (July/Oct)
- Region named after former chief Monze, seen as a prophet able to control rain (Lwiindi ritual)
- Lwiindi ritual forecasts rain in coming season and serves to thank local ancestral spirits and brings different local tribes together
- Tonga had contentious relations with British South African Company and missionaries, who tried to undermine and resist local religious leadership

Bolero (Malawi)

(95% Christian – Tumbuka ethnicity)

- Smooth co-existence and integration of both traditional religions and Christianity.
- Traditional leaders noted lack of tension between different belief systems.
- Different religions associated with different types of knowledge (TEK & Western science).
- Village elders often serve as traditional religious leaders and Church leaders, which helped to legitimize both sets of religious practices.
- Faith-based organization (FBOs) viewed as helping to understand the causes of climate variability in the area, which was previously seen as punishment from ancestral spirits.

Monze (Zambia)

(87% Christian, 12% traditional - Tonga ethnicity)

- Deep conflicts between traditional religions and Christianity, especially Pentecostal & Evangelical.
- Western science and agricultural techniques seen as opposed to TEK and religious rituals like Lwiindi.
- Rain forecasts only in English, not always reliable.
- Tonga following traditional Lwiindi rituals are victimized by Christians as “devil worshippers” and risk communal shunning and Church expulsion.

As the authors note, “Here tensions between belief systems emanated from the practice of rituals, the use of western science and technology in seasonal forecasting of rainfall and between generations. Community members again associated Christian religions with certain knowledge forms, specifically western science and particularly through the presence of FBOs concerned with agricultural development and climate change adaptation.”



Images from Lwiindi Gonde ceremony in Zambia (2015-2018)

*Gonde Lwiindi Ceremony
of Tonga People Southern
Province of Zambia.*

Adapting to Climate Change – Murphy et al.

In interviews with elders, they noted that certain local sacred tree species play an important role in moisture retention for crop production during droughts, which allows farmers to continue growing food during extreme weather periods. **But as more young people embrace Christianity, they no longer pay attention to local taboos, which has led to an increase in deforestation, increasing droughts, and other local agricultural problems which traditional religious advocates blame on young people's neglect of their ancestral rituals and forest spirits.**

As one Tonga elder noted, “I was in the process of initiating my son as a priest of the shrine but **he is lost into evangelical churches.** He is no longer cooperating. **He considers the shrine evil...**” As the authors noted, this trend is especially strong where charismatic Pentecostal churches are dominant.

“In **Bolero**, there is evidence that communities recognise the utility of pluralistic beliefs and practices in livelihood activities of food production, **merging and blending beliefs and practices in different situations.** In **Monze**, by contrast, **changing religious beliefs have introduced tensions around the practice of TEK** which are played out in how associated knowledge types are considered valid or not in agricultural decision making and practice, with direct implications for livelihood decisions.”

As our authors suggest, “**Culture**, here approached through the lens of religious beliefs and practices, **plays an important role in adaptive capacity, but is not static.** We find that in communities holding multiple belief systems **adaptive capacity is largely determined by the manner in which belief systems co-exist.** Religious beliefs have tangible influences on lived practices of individuals and communities, and vice-versa, and are an important determinant of adaptive capacity. **In the context of changing religious beliefs, adaptive capacity will be determined by how epistemological and intergenerational frictions are negotiated by individuals and communities and ultimately how different knowledge forms are valued, accepted and integrated.”**





World Religions & Global Issues

Week 3 Lecture | RELS 332

Professor Chris Crews

Laudato Si' Encyclical:

On Care for Our Common Home

Pope Francis



Laudato Si'

Laudato Si' – Pope Francis

In chapter six of *Laudato Si'*, the 2015 Encyclical from Pope Francis, we get another perspective on how religion and environmental issues intersect, in this case with an emphasis on ecological education and the role of spirituality in helping to bring about a global change in consciousness.

As Pope Francis writes, “We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. **A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.**”

The global urge to buy and consume more stuff, which forms the heart of economic globalization, is part of the problem according to Pope Francis, because it creates a false sense of freedom through consumer choice, while in reality “those who are really free are the minority who wield economic and financial power.” As Francis argues, “When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases. **The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality.** In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears...Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction.”

Laudato Si' – Pope Francis

What we need is a change in lifestyle, Francis argues, which can help pressure those in positions of political and economic power, **such as through boycotts and consumer actions**. As Francis notes, when powerful individuals feel the pinch of economic loss, they have a much greater incentive to change their actions and respond to social pressure. But the changes we need go much deeper.

“An awareness of the gravity of today’s cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits. **Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them.** In those countries which should be making the greatest changes in consumer habits, young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. **At the same time, they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits.**” One of the biggest challenges, Francis argues, is how to break through these consumer habits and develop a new mindset. Ecological education, Francis suggests, may be one important solution that can help with this challenge.

Laudato Si' – Pope Francis

As Francis points out, early environmental education was mostly focused on scientific facts, but over time it has **“evolved to include a critique of the “myths” of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market).** It seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God.”

Francis refers to this as **developing an ethics of ecology**, or “ecological citizenship,” which he explains more fully in another part of *Laudato Si'* through the concept of **Integral Ecology**. This is important, Francis argues, because laws and regulations don't get to the root problems driving global climate change. **“Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment.** A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes, shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment.”

Such acts, Francis argues, have their own value and can contribute to larger systemic changes and they can take place anywhere, including in both religious and secular educational spaces.

Laudato Si' – Pope Francis

“By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. **If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour.** Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual **unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature.** Otherwise, the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance, with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market.”

What we need, Francis argues, is an “**ecological conversion**” driven by faith and spiritual conviction, which can address both our interior mental world and how we relate to our external environment. “So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. **Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.**”

As an example of this, Francis points to **St. Francis of Assisi**, who is often held up as the patron saint of nature who embraced and celebrated nature as a divine manifestation of God’s greatness.





The Canticle of the Creatures

Praised be you, my Lord,
through Sister Moon and Stars.
In heaven you have formed them,
lightsome and precious and fair.

And praised be you, my Lord,
through Brother Wind, through
air and cloud, through calm
and every weather by which
you sustain your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord,
through Sister Water,
so very useful and humble,
precious and chaste...

Praised be you, my Lord,
through our Sister, Mother Earth,
who sustains us and directs us
bringing forth all kinds of fruits
and colored flowers and herbs.

Ecological Conversion – Pope Francis

This ecological conversion that Pope Francis talks about includes certain attitudes, such as:

- Gratitude, generosity, and a recognition that the world is God's gift to us
- Loving awareness that we are connected to all life in a "splendid universal communion"
- Seeing all of creation as reflecting a part of the divine with a message for us to learn from
- Recognizing God created nature perfectly and we have no place trying to change this natural order

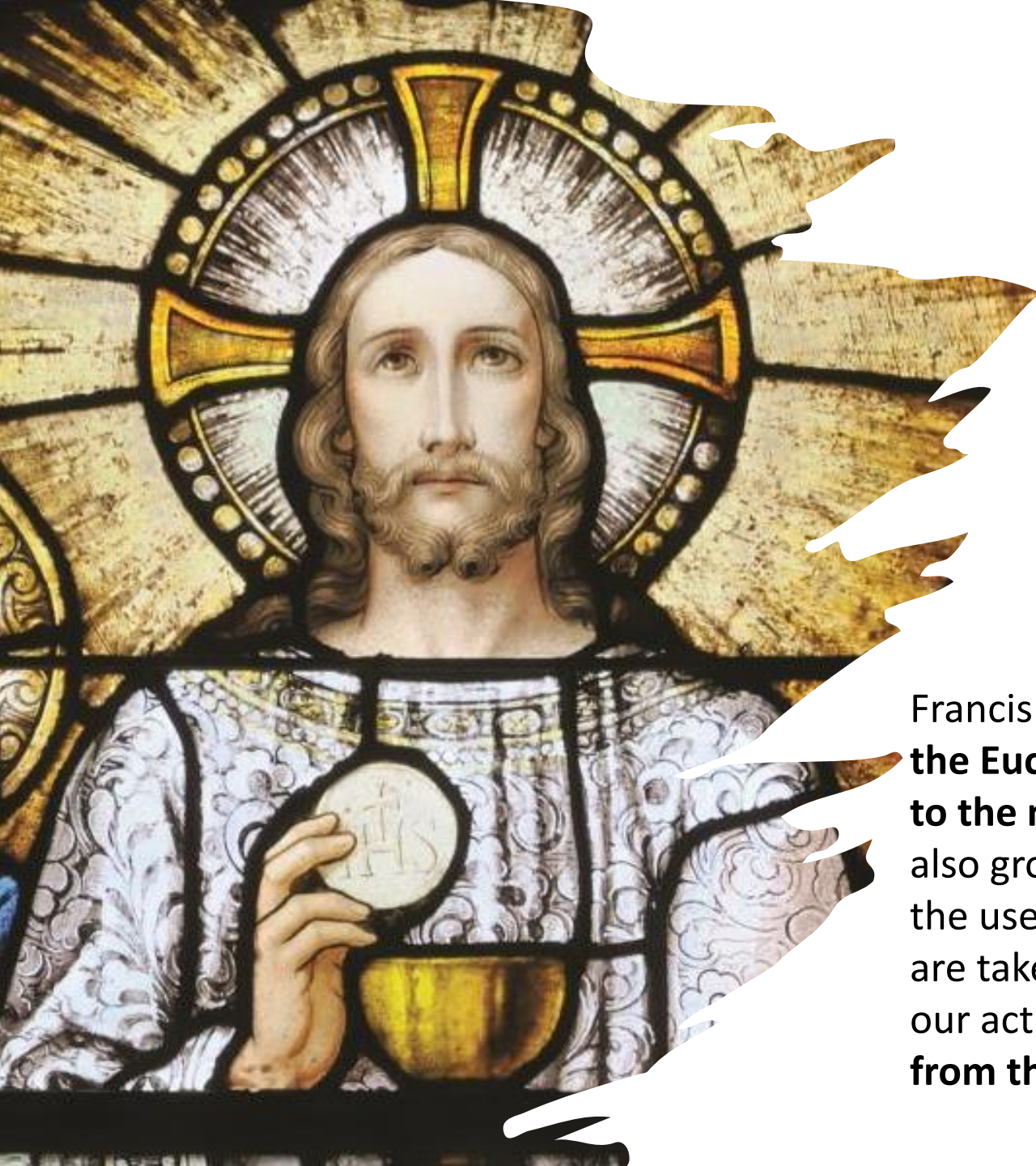
As Francis argues, "**Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little.** It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. **This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures...** Once we lose our humility, and become **enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment...** Many people today **sense a profound imbalance** which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them."

Laudato Si' – Pope Francis

As Francis reminds us, ultimately ecological conversion is about “**an attitude of the heart,**” and a recognition that the way many of us are living today harms people and the planet and is not sustainable. By slowing down, using less, and embracing an ecological lifestyle, we can begin to change how we relate to the planet and to each other. **Ultimately, these changes must happen if we want to ensure a future on this planet for all of creation.** This is the central message of Laudato Si'.

As Francis argues, “**We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.** We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good. When the foundations of social life are corroded, what ensues are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for the environment.”

These beliefs, when put into practice through ecological conversion and integral ecology not only help promote peace and social harmony, but also foster what Francis calls a “**culture of care.**”



As Francis argues, to put these ideas into practice we don't have to become directly involved in politics and government, as we can find many different ways to make these changes. "Some, for example, show concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square), and strive to protect, restore, improve or beautify it as something belonging to everyone. Around these community actions, relationships develop or are recovered and a new social fabric emerges...These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences."

Francis also points out that in Christianity, **especially through the Eucharist (bread and wine), we are intimately connected to the natural world.** The use of oil, holy water, and baptism also ground us in natural elements, as do images of fire and the use of colors. As Francis notes, "Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise...**Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature.**"

Laudato Si' – Pope Francis

As Francis also reminds us, ideas such as the Sabbath and a day of rest, are central to both Jewish and Christian religious practices, and **have their origins in the value of rest—both for people and animals and the land—which is where these religious practices first began, as a time to let the draft animals and fields lay fallow and recover.** These were also times to celebrate, often tied to the cycle of harvests and plantings, and which emphasized the value of communal solidarity and mutual aid. As Francis reminds us, “Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. **And so the day of rest, centred on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.**”

Such reflections and practices, Francis argues, help us to realize that **“Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity...”** It is in such expressions, Francis argues, that we might be able to form the basis for a new spiritual awakening and a renewed appreciation for the value of nature and our place in it. In this way we get a clearer glimpse into how religious traditions, in this case Christian (and specifically Catholicism), can be mobilized to bring about an “ecological conversion” to help address the global crisis of climate change.

Assignment Reminders

A few reminders about class assignments for this week:

Be sure to watch the videos included in the Weekly Schedule to provide you more context and details about the cases we are exploring this week.

- Discussion post #3 is due Wed July 14 by 11:59 pm in discussion forum.
- Peer response posts (x2) are due Fri July 16 by 11:59 pm in discussion forum.