

# Catholic Ecology

"We are losing our attitude of wonder, of contemplation, of listening to creation and thus we no longer manage to interpret within it what Benedict XVI calls 'the rhythm of the love-story between God and man.'"

+ Pope Francis

## Bridging the two ecos

"The New Climate Economy" conference considers how economies can benefit by supporting ecology

May 20, 2015



After a week of what seemed to be growing divides between the Vatican and the business world over the issue of climate change, a gathering at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross highlighted the mutual benefits of bridging economic and ecological interests.

Citing the impact that Pope Francis's encyclical could have on international sustainability and climate talks later this year, organizers of the "[New Climate Economy](#)" conference noted worries that "many politicians believe that

economic growth and climate change are at odds with each other, and therefore fear taking action.”

Seeking to calm these fears, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace joined forces with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Holy See; the World Resources Institute; and the [Global Commission on the Economy and Climate](#), a sizeable international coalition seeking to bridge economic and ecological interests. That group’s [New Climate Economy Report](#), for instance, “demonstrates that the goals of improving economic performance and reducing climate risk can complement each other.”

Examining the impacts of the private sector on the environment (and vice versa) is “not an attempt to put anybody down,” said Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in an [interview](#) on Tuesday with Vatican Radio. “It’s an invitation to consider new possibilities that a changing situation brings up.”

The cardinal noted appreciation for the business community for its contributions to the human condition. He also encouraged it to use its creativity not for immediate and unsustainable profit, but to help the poor, the planet, and (at the same time) their own interests, all for the long term.

It turns out that there are signs that this is happening.

Her Excellency Lilianne Ploumen, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Coordination of the Kingdom of the Netherlands—a nation leading the way in adapting to flooding—mirrored a sense of optimism from many of the conference speakers.

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Cardinal Peter Turkson

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“Some business leaders, and more and more I have to say, act on their moral convictions to do the right thing,” she said. “I would encourage everyone—we’re moving [in the right direction] but we’re not yet there—so please step up and join this club.”

Dialogue with the business sector is not new for the cardinal or the Church. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* had something to say about all this. More recently, "[The Vocation of a Business Leader](#)," published last year by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, continues to offer the Gospel to the world of production and commerce.

In an [interview](#) with the Catholic News Agency after the New Climate Economy conference, the cardinal said that the Church's primary concern is not "statistics and graphs, it's about those who are now being thrown out of their houses, who cannot feed themselves...So that's why from the point of view of the Church the discussion has never been purely climate and science, but it's been the human person."

### **Prepping for the eco-encyclical—and beyond**

The gathering was another in a string of preparatory events leading to the June release of Pope Francis's encyclical on ecology.

For the past six months, the Vatican has sought to catechize the faithful (and the world) about the intent and scope of the encyclical (and the Church's more general engagement of ecology), even as some secular reports have—by accident or design—seized the narrative in favor of unhelpful ideological divisions.

The participation of Cardinal Turkson and Cardinal Donald Wuerl of the United States demonstrated a unified voice within the Church on issues of economics and ecology, irrespective of national borders.

Cardinal Turkson of Ghana shepherds a nation suffering from economic and environmental harms instigated in large part by global business practices. Cardinal Wuerl, of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. in the United States, shepherds a nation where politics has divided the Church as powerful industrial forces condemn any engagement of climate change. The Church wishes to unite the peoples and perspectives under the care of both cardinals, and elsewhere.

This spirit of unification was also present in [the papal greetings](#) offered through a letter by the Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Pietro Parolin. He opened his remarks with an extensive quote of Benedict XVI, which emphasized the continuity of thought between Pope Francis and his predecessor.

From Cardinal Parolin's talk:

I would like to start my brief reflection by recalling the following passage of the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* of Pope Benedict XVI: “the human consequences of current tendencies towards a short-term economy — sometimes very short-term — need to be carefully evaluated. This requires further and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its goals, as well as a profound and far-sighted revision of the current model of development, so as to correct its dysfunctions and deviations. This is demanded, in any case, by the earth’s state of ecological health; above all it is required by the cultural and moral crisis of man, the symptoms of which have been evident for some time all over the world”

Further along Cardinal Parolin added,

When the future of the planet is at stake, there are no political frontiers, barriers or walls behind which we can hide to protect ourselves from the effects of environmental and social degradation. There is no room for the globalization of indifference, the economy of exclusion or the throwaway culture so often denounced by Pope Francis [as in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*].

Chances are, all three cardinals were offering insights into the unitive approach of the encyclical and—likewise—the work of the Church once that document is issued. No matter what else that work might include, dialoguing with international bridge-building coalitions will certainly continue to be part of the journey.

For now, stay tuned as events from Rome and the world continue to accelerate.

And spend some time listening yourself to conference attendees, including Cardinals Turkson and Wuerl, [here at the Vatican Radio YouTube channel](#).