

Faith Leaders Gather To Discuss Climate Change At A South Florida Conference



Representatives from the Vatican discuss Pope Francis' second encyclical, 'Laudato si.' THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE, NATURE, AND SOCIETY / COURTESY

A two-day conference at St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens is convening the faith community to discuss how the social impact of climate change can be tackled through religious dialogue.

The 2nd International Conference on Climate, Nature, and Society began on Thursday with a series of talks and panels discussing challenges the faith community faces when discussing science. The environmental organization The Nature Conservancy Florida is a partner in the event. Representatives from the Vatican will also be in attendance to discuss Pope Francis' second encyclical 'Laudato si', which focused on climate change reduction efforts and the role of the Catholic Church in leading that effort.

Father Alfred Cioffi, associate professor of Biology and Bioethics at the university, is leading the benediction and closing ceremonies at the event. He joined Sundial.

CIOFFI: The beauty of nature and the elegance of nature, how everything works so well, took me to a greater appreciation to the creator of nature: God. It put me more in contact with my faith but then at the practical level my parents had an accident precisely when I had graduated from biology at FIU (Florida International University) and that made me rethink my lifestyle. I had to take care of my parents for over a year. I discovered truly within me a generosity that I hadn't discovered before.

WLRN: As you made that decision, you didn't let go of your appreciation of nature and science though.

Exactly. I thought that from that point on going into priesthood, biology would still be a hobby for me and then these bioethical issues started coming up in the 90s with cloning, stem cell research and Dolly, the first cloned sheep. As a mammal I thought to myself, 'Well, cloning a mammal in the lab is basically the same technique.' Biologically we humans are mammals too. The same technique to clone a sheep or to clone a human is now available. What used to be science fiction is becoming a reality.

What was the impetus of bringing faith leaders together to talk about climate change?

Today basically bioethics has two pillars: one pillar is on the bioethical issues of human life, the beginning of human life, the end of human life and also health care. But the other pillar is environmental bioethics, care for the environment. We had a first conference three years ago because it was the occasion of the first encyclical in the history of the Catholic Church devoted to the environment. The name is 'Laudato si,' care for creation, care for common home by Pope Francis.

Together with some colleagues, we started organizing that first international conference three years ago and it was to look at the scientific evidence for climate change. We wanted to make sure that there was a human component that correlates roughly to the beginning of the industrial revolution about 300 years ago. This is when we started using fossil fuels big time in industrial quantities. So [this is] the gradual accumulation of CO₂, which is a greenhouse gas, which retains heat and so forth. So we establish that that there is an anthropogenic component, there is a human component to the global warming that we're seeing, because there are also natural cycles of glacial periods and so forth that we had nothing to do with. We established that now we want to see the social and spiritual impact of climate change. What can we do to be better stewards of the environment?

How do you talk to someone who denies the science?

So I admit that I was once a denier too. I'm now a converted denier and more strictly we would call it a skeptic. As a scientist and now speaking, we want to see the evidence. Where's the evidence? And that's why we had that first conference precisely to see that correlation between CO₂ rise, melting and the fact that there is scientific evidence now that this is real. This is true.

Source:

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