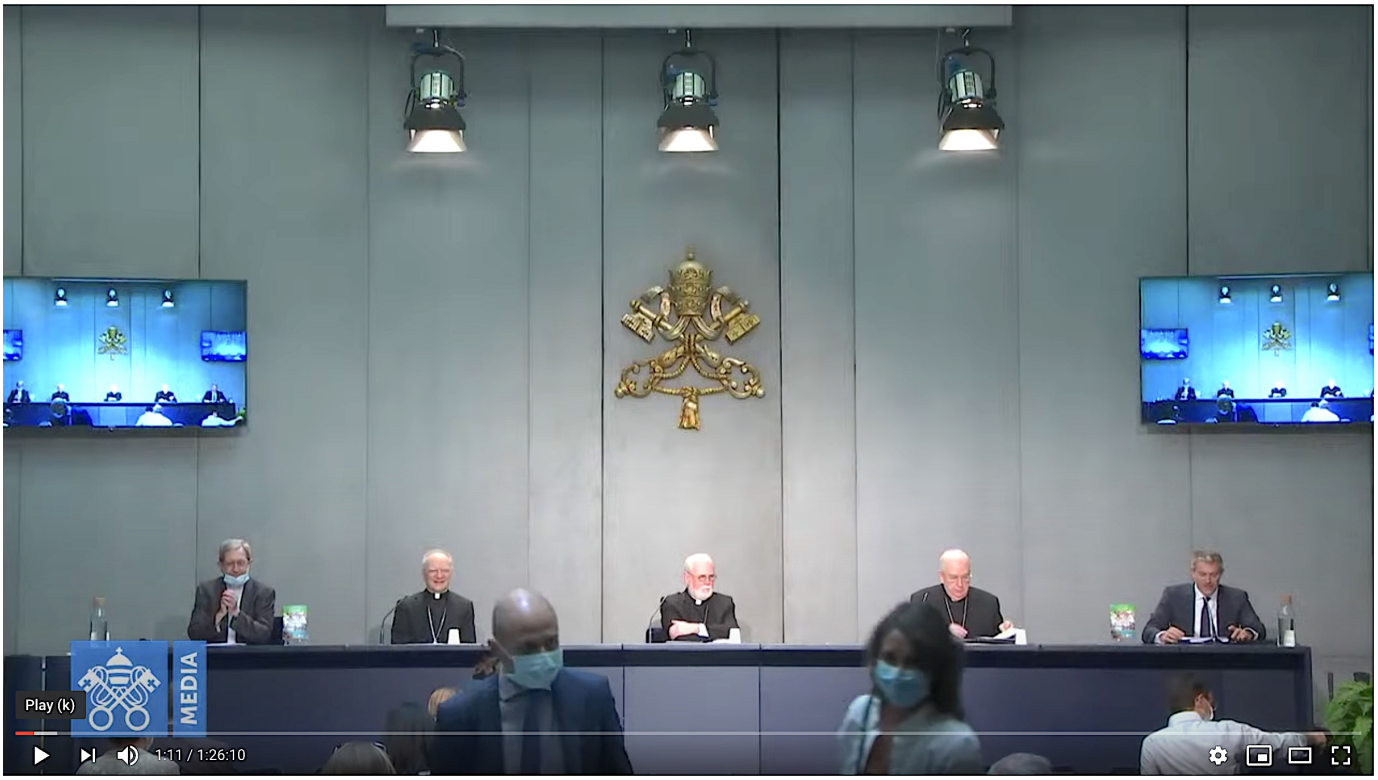
News
EarthBeat



Screengrab from video of June 18, 2020 Vatican press briefing five years after the release of Laudato Si'.



by Bill Mitchell

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Many mornings, well before NCR's U.S.-based staff members have opened our browsers, Vatican correspondent Joshua J. McElwee is alerting us to news of the day via Slack, the digital communications tool we use to link up our geographically dispersed colleagues.

In the EarthBeat channel of Slack on Thursday, five years to the day after Pope Francis released Laudato Si', Josh reported that he was just back from the first in-person briefing the Vatican press office had conducted since the pandemic lockdown. He said the Vatican had released an extensive report about what the city-state had done about the environment since the pope's encyclical.

In the last paragraph of his story, Josh reported that the Global Catholic Climate Movement had issued a statement highlighting the Vatican's suggestion that Catholic institutions might divest from the fossil fuel industry.

That was in line with what the Vatican's office of peace and justice office said last month, inviting Catholic communities across the world to work toward "total sustainability," a path that would include carbon neutrality, simpler lifestyles and divestment from fossil fuels.

It also fits with the Vatican's own practice, as Josh reported last month: Director general confirms Vatican bank is not invested in fossil fuels.

In other words, although the discussion of divestment in the report issued Thursday was interesting, it didn't strike us as all that new.

In its statement on Thursday, though, the Catholic Climate movement drew a distinction: "This is the first-ever endorsement of the fossil fuel divestment campaign to come from the Vatican as a whole."

In posting Josh's story to ncronline.org, I included divestment in the subhead but not in the main headline.

The Reuters news agency took a different approach, reporting: "The Vatican urged Catholics on Thursday to disinvest from the armaments and fossil fuel industries and to closely monitor companies in sectors such as mining to check if they are damaging the environment."

That quickly lit up the Twittersphere. Bill McKibben, the activist and writer who has been urging the Vatican to take a leadership position on divestment for years, linked to the Reuters story and told his 349,000 followers:

The Vatican just called for our planet's 1.2 billion Catholics to divest from fossil fuel stocks--indeed to 'shun' those companies. It is one of the great moments in a 10-year campaign--thanks to all!

Al Gore, addressing his 3 million followers, tweeted:

5 years after the groundbreaking encyclical #LaudatoSi, the Vatican has called on the world's 1.2 billion Catholics to #divest from fossil fuels. God bless @Pontifex for his strength and moral leadership.

Interestingly, neither the Associated Press nor Catholic News Service included any mention of divestment in their stories Thursday.

Whatever the particular significance of the Vatican's wording on Thursday, one thing is clear: Divestment is coming up more and more frequently in the strategies the Vatican is recommending for addressing the climate crisis.

The Vatican has also hosted two meetings of fossil fuel company executives, though. So it wouldn't be fair to say they've ruled out shareholder engagement -- the idea of trying to persuade companies to do the right thing -- as a strategy, either.

Here's what else is new on EarthBeat this week:

- Staff writer Brian Roewe interviews sociologist Robert Bullard, known as the father of environmental justice, about racism in pollution and policy. The story includes a link to a video recording of their conversation on NCR's Youtube channel.
- It was a busy week for Brian. On Thursday he reported that 16 U.S. congregations of Dominican sisters have pooled more than $46 million to establish new investment funds aimed at addressing climate change and helping communities around the world that are most at risk.
- Robert McKim, editor of a new book about Laudato Si', explores what he describes as four puzzles in the document as part of our "Laudato Si' at Five" series.

- As part of EarthBeat's partnership with Covering Climate Now, we're able to publish this piece by Inside Climate News: Across America, five communities in search of climate justice.
- In today's installment of our "Digging into Laudato Si'" series, Samantha Panchèvre explores what Pope Francis has to say about spirituality and consumerism, along with an intriguing video about minimalism.

Here's some of what else is new in the world of climate news:

- The Irish online publication, The Journal, reports on the Irish government's version of the Green New Deal.
- If you're someone who reads the labels at the store (as soon as you're able to return to the store, that is), you'll be interested in Unilever's decision to include carbon labels of 70,000 products.
- Speaking of products, if you've been worrying about the cardboard you're consuming with all those deliveries showing up on your doorstep, the New York Times says you can relax. (See the second item in the Climate FWD newsletter at that link.) Turns out that the drop in sales at brick-and-mortar stores has rendered demand for cardboard mostly unchanged.
- Remember our discussion a couple of months ago about reduced pollution as a result of the lockdown? We knew it wouldn't last and the Times confirms as much with this story.
- Teamed up with the Columbia Journalism Investigations team, Public Integrity reports on how "a decade of neglect and politics undermined the CDC's fight against climate change."

Upcoming Event:

At 10 a.m. EDT tomorrow (Saturday June 20), the Franciscan Action Council will present a webinar focused on the climate crisis and ecological conversion. Br. Jacek Orzechowski, OFM, will lead the webinar, joined by Br. Joe McKay, OFM, from Australia, Junghee Min from South Korea, and Steeven Kezamutima, OFS, from Kenya.

One advantage of so many events moving online is their accessibility to a wider audience. If you'd like to expand the audience of your next virtual climate event, please post it here.

Closing beat:

At some point next month, I'll be moving to a new role at NCR. That means we need a new EarthBeat editor. If you're interested – or know of someone who might be – please read the job description and follow up!

We hope you'll forward this week's newsletter to anyone you believe might want to subscribe. They can do so here. As you know, neither EarthBeat nor NCR restricts access to coverage with a paywall. Instead we depend on readers like you to sign up for a voluntary membership. If you'd like to join their ranks, please join NCR Forward for as little as five bucks a month.

Thanks for reading!

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