



## **Post-Event Summary of Religious Education in the Era of Climate Change: A Summit of Conscience**

Over twenty people participated in a workshop to improve faith and ecology education at seminaries and religious institutions. The event was co-organized by the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (ICSD) and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) was held on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at the KAS office in Jerusalem.

The day started with a welcome by Dr. Michael Borchard, resident director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Israel office, followed by remarks from Rabbi Yonatan Neril, director of ICSD. Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem Rabbi Tamir Nir then spoke about the moral imperative of environmental stewardship based on Jewish texts, based on his experience teaching a course on Judaism and ecology at the Schechter Rabbinical Assembly/ Mishlei Master's Program. This was followed by a presentation on the impact of climate change globally and in the Holy Land by renowned climate scientist Dr. Pinhas Alpert of Tel Aviv University. Dr. Alpert mentioned current research he is undertaking on the link between climate change and the escalation of dust storms in the Middle East in recent decades. Participants then listened to best practices by instructors on faith and ecology from a Catholic seminary in Rome and the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University (U.S.). The remaining time was dedicated to strategizing about how to advocate for faith and ecology in local seminaries and religious institutions.

The following ideas were suggested during breakout sessions of the event, as possible follow-up actions: Convene interested parties to promote this effort in live face-to-face meetings (preferably evenings), and/or in web-based conversations, with the aim to engage the following stakeholders:

- Religious educational institutions and seminaries: deans/rectors, faculty, and students of institutions in the Jerusalem area. Later, expand this to theological institutions outside Jerusalem.
- Political stakeholders
  - Ministry of Education, Ministry of Environment, The Jerusalem Municipality, possibly other municipalities, and Members of Knesset, especially those with an interest in ecology
  - Other educational institutions, such as: Arava Institute for Environmental Studies; local schools already working on this that might be a good entry point (Yad be Yad, for example)
- Individuals like educators dedicated to this cause; parents (this is more relevant for advocacy in younger target populations)

Such meetings could focus on the following:

- Provide practical educational opportunities for seminaries, such as: visits/talks in seminaries by alumni from the Arava alumni network, from Israel and neighboring countries; educational field trips; guest lecturers by scientists.
- Advocate for environmental education for all ages, beginning with primary education. The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Environment both have led effective campaigns in this field, and supported this work in the past. This should enable us to begin building up relationships with these ministries.
- Identify funders, advocate for funding in this area. Educate funders about the importance of work in this area.
- Incentivize faculty to attend professional development seminars and hiring practices that value environmental ethics.
- Create a match-making service of scientists and seminaries to teach together.
- Hold a session specifically dedicated to students.

**Other topics that emerged:**

- 1) Political: How can we acknowledge and address normalization, especially in developing new partnerships?
  - a. Maintain and foster long-standing partnerships to better understand the circumstances, needs, and opportunities of all parties.
  - b. Be respectful and sensitive to the fact that some participants may be in danger or face backlash when cooperating in such initiatives.
  - c. Continue this conversation at future roundtables.
- 2) Explore how to apply this conversation spiritually, not just practically, i.e. ‘encourage leaders to live with intention by values of ecological respect’; and ‘encourage leadership to live by values of ecology and faith.

**Successful approaches for improving faith and ecology in seminaries (tips from guest speakers):**

Father Joshtrom Kureethadam (Professor at Salesian Pontifical University in Rome, including a course on Catholic teachings and ecology, and author of Creation in Crisis)

- 1) Green seminaries-- the buildings, surroundings, and operations
- 2) Work on the academic curriculum
- 3) Integrate environmental ethics into prayer/spirituality/worship

Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker (Founder and director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University)

- 1) Retrieve/reevaluate/reuse existing environmental values in religious and cultural heritages
- 2) Share and circulate available resources
- 3) Suggest including environmental goals in the mission of religious academic institutions
  - a. Faculty hiring and training

b. Inter-institutional collaboration

- 4) Create alliances of faith and science
- 5) Promote curriculum development using already existing courses and resources, and new classes

As was mentioned at the event, ICSD has undertaken an initiative to motivate seminaries in the Holy Land, Rome, and North America to teach on faith and ecology. In June, ICSD published a Report on Faith and Ecology Courses at North American Seminaries, with an appendix on four courses at Pontifical Universities. This report was made available in paper form at the event. A link to this report can be found [here](#). ICSD also created on its website the largest [online searchable collection](#) of seminaries' faith and ecology syllabi and reading lists, which serves as a resource for learning best practices from courses already being taught on the topic.

**Practical Follow Up Steps to this Workshop**

Dr. Maria Leppäkari, Director of the Swedish Theological Institute (STI), hosted a follow-up conversation at STI the week following this event. Deputy Mayor Nir, ICSD staff, Robin Twite of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, and STI staff participated.

ICSD will partner with KAS to research and produce a Report on Faith and Ecology Teaching in Holy Land Seminaries. The focus of the Report will be on what level of teaching on faith and ecology is currently taking place, and what level of interest senior staff see in expanding teaching in this area. For Catholic seminaries, we also seek to know what impact Pope Francis' Laudato Si has had on the seminary's instruction on Care for Our Common Home. For Orthodox seminaries, we will inquire about what impact Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has had on the seminary's instruction in this area. Interviews would be conducted in multiple languages, including English, Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, Italian, and/or Spanish. The first draft of the Report will be completed by January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016.