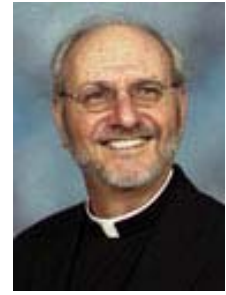


Reverend John S. Rausch is a priest in the Glenmary order and director of the Office of Peace and Justice for the Diocese of Lexington, KY. He is a syndicated columnist whose articles are published in diocesan newspapers throughout the United States. He also serves on the Social Concerns Committee of the Catholic Conference.



Dealing With An Inconvenient Truth

Al Gore won an Oscar for his film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, a documentary about global warming. In accepting the award for Best Documentary he said, "We need to solve the climate crisis. It's not a political issue. It's a moral issue." He couched global warming for a billion viewers worldwide watching the Academy Awards not as a partisan issue, but as an ethical one.

The 2007 report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—a body of distinguished scientists established by the UN and the World Meteorological Association—concluded that "the warming of the climate is unequivocal" and that climate change is "very likely" caused by humans. The use of "very likely" means a greater than 90 percent certainty that global warming results from our burning fossil fuels.

The consequences of global warming, according to the report, will likely include stronger storms, longer droughts and more frequent heat waves. Sea levels are projected to rise 7 to 23 inches by the end of the century flooding coastal areas and redrawing shoreline geography. To avoid the most catastrophic scenarios, climatologists are urging nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions 70 percent by 2050.

The Kyoto Protocol, ratified by over 160 countries, requires nations to cut greenhouse gases by an average of 5 percent below their 1990 levels by 2012. While a 5 percent reduction sounds meager, it actually represents a 29 percent reduction in the level of emissions projected for 2010 given the rate of growth without the agreement.

Because the Bush Administration argues that the Kyoto agreement would hurt the U.S. economy, it has refused to ratify the agreement. Instead, the U.S. is spending \$3 billion a year on research and development of cleaner energy technology to combat climate change. Scientists counsel the issue looms so large and so critical that the world's future depends on *both* reducing emis-

sions *and* devising advanced technology.

Like Al Gore, people of faith see global warming as a moral issue. The U.S. bishops in their 2001 statement, "Global Climate Change," state: "At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, not about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family." Their statement echoes the teaching of John Paul II who argued that humanity with its free will has "a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations."

Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the USCCB's International Policy Committee, emphasizes three principles from Catholic social teachings in dealing with global warming: prudence, the poor and the common good. By prudence he does not mean caution, but "in this case (prudence) 'requires us to act with urgency' lest the problem gets worse and the remedies more costly." Enough evidence exists that prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action about global warming.

Another principle, "priority for the poor," demands we not forget the vulnerable who pay the greatest price during natural disasters. A report issued by over 15 charitable organizations including Oxfam and Christian Aid, predicts more flooding, declining food production, more disease, and deteriorating ecosystems on which the poorest depend because of global warming. Solidarity with the poor demands attention to climate change.

The third principle, "the pursuit of the common good," questions an unbridled free market solution. Social controls need to harness oil, coal and industrial interests so all can have enough while caring for the earth.

Undoubtedly, by recognizing our stewardship of the earth, people of faith can deal with this inconvenient truth.

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.