



THE GREEN NEW DEAL

BY DENNIS KALOB, PH.D.

The planet is warming; the climate is changing. This is mostly due to human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels. Impacts are being felt now and are expected to worsen. Without action, conditions could become catastrophic—significant sea level rise, stronger storms, dramatic flooding, excessive heat and drought in many locations, net negative impact on agricultural output, large-scale displacements of human communities, and war are all likely outcomes in the coming years. This is the consensus of the U.S. and global scientific community.¹ Nearly every government on earth accepts this consensus, as do the Pentagon and NASA, major players in the private sector, and many world religious organizations and leaders.²

Catholic Church representatives, from the U.S. Catholic bishops to popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have all weighed in and have done so in unambiguous ways.³ Climate change is real and serious. God's creation is under assault, and we have a social and moral obligation to act.

Enter the Green New Deal.

The term "Green New Deal" was apparently first coined by columnist Thomas Friedman in 2007. Shortly after Friedman's call, others here in the U.S. and around the world began using the term as a rallying cry for decisive action to combat the growing climate crisis.⁴

FDR's New Deal in the 1930s was a collection of aggressive social policies (e.g. Social Security, minimum wage, banking regulations, and jobs programs) meant to transform our economy and people's lives at the time and into the future. So we now need here, in the 21st Century, a new collection of aggressive policies that will address our current emergency and build a more secure future.

It was a 2019 proposed Congressional Resolution that brought the term "Green New Deal" to the front of public consciousness and has been—and will continue to be—hotly debated.

The Green New Deal Congressional Resolution⁵ is a 14-page nonbinding proposal that represents a framework for action. The text of the resolution first identifies the problem of climate change and some of the significant

impacts it will have on our country and world. It then outlines critical goals:

- to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers;
- to create millions of good, high-wage jobs and ensure prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States;
- to invest in the infrastructure and industry of the United States to sustainably meet the challenges of the 21st century;
- to secure for all people of the United States for generations to come clean air and water; climate and community resiliency; healthy food; access to nature; and a sustainable environment;
- to promote justice and equity by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing historic oppression of indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth.

To achieve these sweeping goals, the resolution calls for a “10-year mobilization” that would create the necessary programs and projects.

What is particularly striking about the document, aside from the magnitude of the changes it calls for, is the linkage that is specifically made between the environmental and the social spheres. We need the transformation of both, the document makes clear. We need an environmentally sustainable and just economy that serves everyone. We must be particularly sensitive to those on the margins of society who will suffer the most from climate change and who could also suffer disproportionately from the changes that we must adopt.

Economists, for the most part, see a transition away from dirty energy (coal, oil and gas) and toward renewable, clean energy (i.e. solar and wind) as providing a net gain in jobs.⁶ It can be a win-win: more jobs and a cleaner environment. However, this transition will be disruptive and will cause significant numbers of people to lose their jobs, particularly in the old energy sectors. We need to address the problems many workers, families, and communities will have and make sure that, as necessary as the transition may be, it must be accomplished with minimal hardship on the most vulnerable. That is why

advocates of a Green New Deal typically emphasize the concept of a “just transition.”

By linking social and economic justice with environmental sustainability, the resolution mirrors the message found in Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. There Francis urges us “to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*”⁷ As he further explains,

We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.⁸

It is critical to understand the following: the proposed Green New Deal Congressional Resolution described above is far from a detailed piece of legislation. Some activists, policy wonks, and politicians have developed detailed plans for moving forward; but, in truth, what is needed to eventually put a Green Deal into law and allow it to be implemented will be up to the political process that will unfold in the coming years. The policies that are needed to adequately address climate change and pressing human needs must be bold and comprehensive. We will see if we can, in time, do what is needed.

Indeed, scientists tell us that we do not have much time left to act before we will be unable to stop the march toward environmental and human catastrophe. This means we must seriously contemplate the scientific consensus and the moral imperative that we have before us. Also, before we too quickly dismiss the idea of a Green New Deal as too ambitious, improbable, or radical, let us reflect upon these words from Pope Francis:

The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems.⁹

Indeed, in *Laudato Si’*, Francis makes very clear that “radical change” is required in the “present circumstances.”¹⁰ It is clear that too much is at stake for us to fear being bold and courageous. Science and faith are calling us to work together, NOW, to save our common home.

—Endnotes on page 8

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- 1 See the Global Climate Change page of NASA: <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>; Frederick Hewett. (2019, June 5). *The Scariest Thing About Climate Change: What Happens to Our Food Supply*. WBUR Radio. Retrieved October 8, 2019: <https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2019/06/05/climate-change-food-frederick-hewett>.
- 2 Daniel Etsy. (2018, September 6). *Is There Reason for Optimism on Climate Change?* Yale Insights; *Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders on the Upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21, in Paris, December 2015*. Statement retrieved October 6, 2019: https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/COP21_Statement_english2.pdf.
- 3 Catholic teachings on climate change can be found here (on the website of Catholic Climate Covenant): <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/teachings>.
- 4 Alexander C. Kaufman. (2018, June 30). *What's the 'Green New Deal'? The surprising origins behind a progressive rallying cry*. Grist. Retrieved October 6, 2019: <https://grist.org/article/whats-the-green-new-deal-the-surprising-origins-behind-a-progressive-rallying-cry/>.
- 5 The details on the Green New Deal Congressional Resolution described in this article come from the text of the document found here: <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hres/109/BILLS-116hres109ih.pdf>.
- 6 Robert Pollin, Heidi Garrett-Peltier, James Heintz, Bracken Hendricks. (2014, September 18). *Green Growth: A U.S. Program for Controlling Climate Change and Expanding Job Opportunities*. Political Economy Research Institute. Retrieved October 6, 2019: <https://www.peri.umass.edu/publication/item/585-green-growth-a-u-s-program-for-controlling-climate-change-and-expanding-job-opportunities>.
- 7 Pope Francis. (2015). *Laudato Si'*, 49, emphasis added.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 139.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 171.

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