

**Drawing from *Laudato Si'*:
The Moral Implications of Deep Cold and Polar Ice on the Climate
Change Debate**

KA Colorado Lecture Transcript 10/4/16

Well, good evening, everybody and welcome. I am delighted the room is standing room only, that is fantastic. My name is Dr. Karen Eifler, and together with Fr. Charlie Gordon, we co-direct the Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture, who are you host for this evening.

We always start with just a couple bits of housekeeping. If you are a k12 teacher, and you are here tonight, we have the ability to give you free PDUs. Teachers know what that means, and how great that is. And all you have to do is sign up on, there's a well marked, cleverly labeled PDU sign up sheet in the back.

And you can sign that on your way out. And those will be in the mail to you tomorrow. If you are a student here, as part of a course, the sign-ups for that will be available after K.A. Colorado's talk is completed. And if you think that this talk sounds really cool, and you would like to find out what else are those Garaventa Center people doing, we have some copies of our calendar for the year in the back.

And we also have a signed up sheet that allows you to be a part of our electronic mail list, and keep on top of what's happening, because we're always adding things to our schedule. Next up is a wine and cheese reception at a pre-play panel in front of this Saturday's production of Good Kids, by our theater department.

And the doors for that will open at 6:45. Complimentary for all ticket holders, and we have three really interesting folks lined up to help illuminate some themes that help you see a different show than you would otherwise. And after that, it's zombies and brains reading the Bible in Apocalyptic times, and that's coming up.

We always like to do a zombie oriented activity near Halloween, and that's coming up October 25. So, you don't wanna miss cool stuff like that. Does anyone know what a Mobius strip is? Okay, it looks kind of like this, this isn't a great example. But what is cool about it is that even though you know it was constructed by human hands, you can't really tell, it blows all the rules of one and two and three dimensions.

You can't really tell where one surface starts, and another surface enters, and I think that you'll find out tonight's presenter is sort of a human Mobius strip. It's not merely that he's packed a lot of achievement into his life, which he has, it's not merely that he's traveled all over the world at the invitation of scientific agencies and museums to create works of art.

And to lend his voice to those others who study the Earth, and the impact of human activity on climate change, which he has. And that he speaks out on behalf of the interconnected lives of all forms of being on the planet. He has, is K.A. Colorado a sculptor? Check.

Is he a painter? Check. Is he an environmental scientist? Check. Is he a filmmaker? Check. And we're actually going to see the debut, the world premiere of his most recent film as part of our activity tonight. Is he the voice of conscience, with 30 years worth of calling us to be mindful of the need to care?

For our common home, check and check. Each of these are tremendous accomplishments well worthy of our attention. Why don't you scoot in? I think you can find your way around the room. We won't embarrass you in any way. [LAUGH] What made us stop and take note of K.A. Colorado is that like a Mobius strip, it's virtually impossible to tell where his artistic endeavors stop, and his prophetic communication of the science of climate change begins.

His art incorporates the very words of poets and graphs and reports from scientists of every discipline, as well as elements from the Earth itself. You can see evidence of his artistry, his theological understanding that all of Earth is interconnected, and his science on display in the three large scale paintings from his ice core series that he gifted to the university last spring, and are now on display on the main floor of Clark Library.

Those are the images that were cycling through as you were trickling in. And it's so fitting that on today, October 4th, when the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, who reference all creation as a gift from God that was ours to cherish and take care of that we welcome internationally renowned artist and climate change educator, K.A. Colorado of Vancouver BC, who will share his reflections on the moral implications of deep cold, and polar ice on the climate change debate.

Please join me in welcoming K.A. Colorado. [APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much. I first want to thank the University for offering me this opportunity to come and speak about something that's dear and very important to everything that I've done last 25, 30 years. There's a few people here who are all friends of mine, and I want to also acknowledge your support and help and patience with dealing with all my foibles and mistakes, and attempts to try to portray what I've done.

Beginning this lecture, this morning I had a chance to go to the chapel here. And this University has become a really critical issue for me, morally, in the fact that I've received so much attention, and support. But also the fact that there's this energy here, and the fact that all of you bring a special existence and resonance to this place.

I think that in looking at the landscape here, the position of the University on the bluff here, overlooking the city is also a part of Feng Shui that really is inspirational, and continues to add to all of your academic ability to do the things you have to do. In experiencing all of the students here, it feels like it wasn't very long ago that I was sitting in those seats doing the same thing all of you are doing.

And it has been a long progression for me to try to understand and focus on the things that really are meaningful to me, and relate those into some kind of moral discipline for myself. One of those things was the physical landscape of the Earth. And my involvement with art really supports that kind of expression.

And I have attempted to help a lot of my friends here who have given me help on understanding and getting to these kind of locations, what they mean to all of us. This lecture is about the common home, our common home. And I'm going to talk about an encyclical from the Pope.

I think it's very, very critical and important to this issue. But before I begin that, I went and I had a chance to stop at the chapel. And there's these magnificent carvings, which I'm sure all of you have seen on the door. And looking at those I realized what the sculptor must have felt when he was doing this, and his commitment and track to trying to portray something that all people would benefit from.

Because the doors represent an opening to a spiritual place. That kind of expression is something always in individual ways, also need to open. While I was there I had the chance to look at the book that people jot down things in. And one of the captions that really caught my eye was someone had written down in very tiny letters, looking for a friend.

It was, for me very, very emotional, because whoever that person was, the fact that this is our common home. We all have to go on this kind of plane, also shows that there are people who do not make those contacts and aren't able to link easily. And I think all of us a great effort to try to reach out to people like that.

And I was one of those people myself a long time ago, I am not a verbal person. I've said this to a few people here already, but I work with visual content and my expressions are always on the visual level. But I've had the opportunity to cross over some time ago and work with scientists.

So I have just come back from the Yukon. And I had an extreme experience but was able to do some work with a few scientist, geologist, from different universities with the art specific design on the last date. And I'm gonna show those images to you by can right now.

[COUGH] The area that I went to in the Yukon was called the Kluane National Forest. And the Kluane is the highest range of mountains in the Northwest. And the reason we were there is because the climate change has affected the melt. So much so, that the value is being adjusted at a very quickly pace.

These are installations that I had taken with me group, tennis balls with pins in them. And I locate it into the earth, and what I'm attempting to do with these, is I'm trying to place the idea of border and boundary with national, geologic features. But they also represent the current themes on borders with culture now.

And I think that it's kind of important to lock the two of those things together in art form, which is why I did these pieces.[BLANK_AUDIO] The glacier impact to this area, which is happening very quickly, is blocking up the water glacier melts into different regions, and blocking other lakes.

And so what we're looking at in this particular image is, one of the big, important lakes called Slims lake, that has been totally blocked off. And because of that the geologic formation of that particular area has been changed. [BLANK_AUDIO] My chance to do this project, really has been benefited because, for me, been benefited.

Because I'm able now to talk about working with geologists on site, on location, with these formations. And evidently this kind of thing hasn't been done before. The ability to work with art and simulation with geologic futures is one way of bringing to some kind of dimension what the landscape looks like for the average person.

So by having the balls in this location and having them adjust to elastic forms, there's a big interest now in having these published now in a scientific journal. In this location; this is maybe 6 to 7,000 feet in the sky, in the air. And this location right now, is actually a glacier.

And the glaciers rip down through the mountains. And so there's rubble that has fallen on top of the surface of the glacier, and formed irregular terrain. [BLANK_AUDIO] This specific image is of a glacier that's beginning to crack. And the reason why this was so exceptional is the fact that we were at this location, which these normal kind of features don't happen for hundreds of years.

And this happened within a matter of four or five days. So this was really an event that was symptomatic of the climate change effects in the geologic areas. [BLANK_AUDIO] While I was there, I've been telling a story about a grizzly bear, which I hope you find some kind of humor from, because I met my mortality there.

But this is the helicopter that dropped me off in this particular location. And I was by myself, but the ground there that you see is actually glacier that's actually moving, cracking, splitting, and melting. And I was dropped off to spend two hours at this particular location when the helicopter took off.

At that time I had lunch and I placed these devices on the ground, and was beginning to take a break when I saw the footprints on the ground. And probably, maybe, I don't know 30, 40 yards away I heard these bellowing noises coming up. And it turned out to be a grizzly bear.

And so the pilot which had taken off, after he had left realized it might be dangerous, flipped back and came back and picked me up. And so I was able to capture these photos of this big one. Now, after I left this particular location I went to a place called Kapan Lake.

And it's a lake that is frozen, has been frozen since recorded time, human recorded time. And I was there to, first of all, check out the locations, because I'm supposed to have gone there in four or five

months and do another project on the frozen lake, on the frozen surface of the lake.

And because of the climate change, the lake is not freezing anymore and hasn't frozen for two years now. [INAUDIBLE] That's all the pictures. Okay, that's it. So anyway, that was the recent trip I took. The reason I wanted to show these is because, knowing I was gonna come here and give a presentation on climate, I really thought that this was something immediate that I was seeing.

This is not the first time I've actually done this kind of thing. I've been very fortunate to have gone with other geologic groups to different locations when something actually was happening in extreme situations. One of the situations that we saw recently, four or five years ago, was a mountain that slid off in Canada, which was called Pemberton, and Pemberton is above the Whistler ski resort area.

And Pemberton, which normally is a beautiful valley, is impacted quite a lot because of the melt, the situation. The mountain in that area is volcanic over 10,000 years but it is a vertical volcanic structure. And the melt from the glacier actually lubricated the mountain and blew the whole thing out and blew out 17 miles of forest in about a minute and a half.

So we happened to be there to see this and it was a very unusual time to see that. The thing I'm gonna talk about tonight is, first of all I'd like to talk about how, I myself as an artist have come to this place doing the work I do now.

I'm a sculptor, basically. And I'm a visual sculptor, and I work with removing large amounts of material that's not exactly a part of the sculpture. And my focus is not about one particular part of the sculpture. It's about everything that is not there. And my attitude about this really has affected how I approach my work, in those kind of ways.

Having worked in areas with some of my friends here that were relatively screened with ice and snow, we've seen slow progression of climate change in some areas of Europe and Switzerland and Europe. And I've worked in Russia quite a bit and also had experience of working with sculptures that mimic the content of the ice melts in the sculpture itself.

When I say that ice sculpture, one of the things we've done is we've been able to build form, large form. That leverages out into space and is held by the tensile strength of the snow. And as things have gotten progressively warmer in different areas, that capacity to hold leveraged mass into areas is not there anymore.

And, I kept a record of this for quite a long time. And that record then was forced to a few scientists who I work with now. Who I'm lucky enough to work with now. [COUGH] Excuse me. [COUGH] [BLANK_AUDIO] And Buenos Aires which is one of the cities I traveled to.

A few years ago I was doing a project in Antarctica. And I had gone down through Buenos Aires to travel down there to get materials to take to Antarctica. And while I was there one of my great friends is a lawyer and I got on a bus in Buenos Aires.

And as we got on the bus there were people pounding on the side of the bus. Making a lot of noise, rocking the bus back and forth. And we thought it was a soccer game. And it turned out the Arch Bishop of Buenos Aires was on the bus in the back.

And I walked in and everybody said, described him who he was and he and I nodded at each other, and looked at each other, and I was struck by the intensity of his vision, of his eyes. That person later became Pope Francis. And Pope Francis has been an extreme guiding light in my life.

Currently it's someone who is waiting to come to the format to the stage, to be able to address the issues of climate change, poverty, and all those things are all connected that we all are now facing. Excuse me. [BLANK_AUDIO] One of the things I wanted to talk about today, was the fact that, art can be used as an archival instrument.

And now it's actually being instigated, in Germany right now. With the geoscience group in Germany, who actually look at some of the paintings and sculptures, from the last 5, 600 years. As our [UNKNOWN] information for addressing climate change, understanding climate change. So, little by little, a crossover between science and art seems to be growing more and more, in my experience.

I think that for you, for me to bring the reality of what I've seen, and what that kind of expression has been is important because some of you are far removed from places that are extreme. And some of you, you know, will have a length of time before you can get to those places.

And I've seen those, but also, the places I've seen are not exactly the same as they were 20, 30 years ago. And I think with these kinds of beginnings of the real change is happening. Your experience and your children's experience is gonna be quite different than what we're looking at today.

We live in a relatively great place, the Pacific Northwest and this kind of built that goes across the world is one of the better places to be. But another place is extreme impacts to water and to different aspects. One of my friends here who I would like to mention is involved with Mercy Corp Water Resources Worldwide, okay, has done a lot of work in Africa and other places.

Mort was also instrumental in helping me do the film that I'm gonna present tonight, so I wanted to talk to you about that a little bit. This conversation about climate is extremely broad, and covers so much area that it's not easy for me to exactly tell you all the things easily that I'd like to say.

However I'm hoping there's a answer and question period after this, so that we can actually, I can tell you some of the things that you may want to hear, what my reaction would be for that. But the film itself, was done with a NOAH representative. I am the artisan representative for NOAH, in Washington, DC.

And I do love their work on bringing sanctuaries and underwater things. And this film is about carbon

and water. The Pope expressed and is in cyclical, great comments about how we adjust to carbon. And the film basically is about how our experience and interaction with carbon is, except it's an art film, so what you're gonna look at is kind of an artistic expression of what carbon is.

Carbon is in all of us. Carbon is in the DNA, carbon is in the environment, carbon is in the air. It is part of our experience. Carbon also is invisible. But we're all connected in one way or another and one of the products of carbon CO₂. Which of course is one of the big impacts to climate now.

The other thing I should say, is I have some paintings here which I think some of you have seen at the library, and those represent ice cores. And I'm known for doing ice cores now for some time. When I first began doing work with climate issues, I was challenged in a lot of different kind of ways.

Work was taken down when I put shows up. I've had people threaten me. I've had people come to the studio and tell me that I'm part of a radical group of individuals. This has been going on for maybe the last 20 years. It's only been in the last five or six years it's changed.

And of course, now there's at least a big focus now on what this might mean to all of us. But from my experience and from what I've seen over these years, over 30 years, this is very relevant to what we have to address now. [BLANK_AUDIO] I'd like to show the film I think, if we could do that.

[BLANK_AUDIO] [MUSIC] This is my grandkids. [APPLAUSE] Thank you, thank you so much. I wanted to close by saying a couple things. Before I left the Yukon, I ran into a Tlingit Indian, first nations person. And he gave me this little note that I wrote down. I wanted to read it now cuz it ties in with what the Pope has also said.

[BLANK_AUDIO] [COUGH] Please respect their land and water and the lives that depend on it. It is the land from which we came that connects all life and our land and our life blood. Our land looks after us and we after our land. Anything that happens to Tlingit land affects our culture.

And this I think is probably what the Pope was doing a summation of in his writings. I think the encyclical is really critical for any logic thinking person now to use as a guideline about climate and also about poverty and about the situation we're facing right now. In ending all this, a lot of this is gonna be left up to you.

Your future is gonna change and I think that you are capable of also adapting very well. But I think the real issue is gonna be how we morally adjust to all of this, how we treat each other. How we get through the period we're in right now which is political chaos here in this country.

And things that really are coming paramount that we have never seen before, in my generation. I also know that you have the capacity and the energy and the commitment. And of course I'm talking to an audience here who felt we would embrace most of the things here we're talking about.

My problem is that I also have to bridge over into people who will not listen to this and will not believe these kind of things. And try to at least get them to open up and at least consider. So, I hope you've enjoyed this, I thank you so much for coming.

I appreciate everybody's who's given me support now, thank you. [APPLAUSE] [UNKNOWN] Has said that he'd be happy to take a couple of questions, and engage in dialog, so please, feel free to raise your hand, and we just call away.[BLANK_AUDIO] Yes? What would you say is the single greatest moral issue that's associated with global change and global warming?

Well, I think probably the thing that I would focus on right now is poverty. In fact this Pope and the elected bishop in Buenos Aires used to be called the Archbishop of slums. And I think that he was a voice for people like that. And unfortunately, in our realm of this world, we have a lot of privilege, but there's enormous amounts that don't have that privilege.

As a matter of fact, when I've driven across the states in travel, I've gone to little places that are off the map or isolated. And there really are people suffering quite a lot. And I think the Pope's message is the fact that if we take care of our common home, if we address what climate is to all of us.

As a common good, as one of the rights that we have in our lifetime, to have good climate. I think it reflects onto people who don't have that opportunity, and don't have that voice, and can not help themselves. Thank you. [BLANK_AUDIO] Yes? I guess there's this is college, for college students, what do you think is the best way for people like us to start beginning that dialogue talking about climate change in the public sphere?

Well it's beginning to happen now. Unfortunate, it's awful late. When I first started this focus that I was on years ago, maybe 30, 40 years ago, it was kind of a joke. But I was able to see things that at that point. I think that also there is this ability to be able to understand the things you're looking at intuitively.

But some people have to come to it through a different method, which is education, which is experience, those kinda things. And as much as we can possibly share that experience and share the information, I think that's really important.[BLANK_AUDIO] Along with the moral adjustments that we'll have to make in the future, do you think that climate change will be something that we learn to live with and adapt with?

Or it is something that- This is a question I don't wanna, hoped nobody would ask. [LAUGH] There's two different groups of information that I've received from people I've worked with before. One is we're past the tipping point, we're way past that and we have to adapt in some kind of way.

The other thing is that the real threat to climate change is not the things that we're talking about now. The real threat is the oceans, because the oceans are beginning to slow down because of the climate impact. We're getting dead areas in the ocean, we're getting dead things. And most of the food, like the lady said in the film, most of the food that we eat comes from the oceans, the large part

of that.

So it is a very dire path thing, we're gonna have to adjust and it's gonna be warmer. Unfortunately for you living in this area, in the band around the world, and Russia and this band of this area. We're not gonna be impacted as much as people in places I've come from in Middle East and subtropic areas and the Caribbean, it's gonna be a different situation.

But here I think that the ability to address that kind of change, and what it's gonna take to bridge that, is gonna have to come from places like this. Also I should say something else. There's a lot of response to China, what China's doing and the impact of that.

But actually, from what I've experienced and what I've been told, China's moving very quickly to try to at least come to some grips with this. And I don't know if that's the answer. I don't know if that's gonna come from that. But the answer may come from places that are not here.

This is a different time that we're in right now. Yes. How would you suggest that we, as small community members, how we would want to evangelize to make sure that we're doing our part and spreading the word? That educating other people who otherwise might not be educated. And what kinds of activities in terms of our personal lives should we be involved in, in order to not to take advantage of the environment, i.e., the climate?

[CROSSTALK] In the encyclical, Pope Francis speaks about the rapidity of society. And he talks about the fact that we move faster and faster, quicker and quicker, digitally and all kinds of ways, transportation and everything else. And when we are moving this quick, the ability to contemplate and to consider, and to take the time out to really understand how we're interacting with our environment is not very easy.

So if you're asking me the question, I would say first of all, I think really think about how you can slow your lives down, and really think about things that are really intuitive. And very linked to how we're dealing with each other. I have a problem myself with how much we can do.

Because obviously we can quit eating some foods, we can not use styrofoam cups and things like that. But everything that's packaged, everything that's packaged, and automobiles, airplanes are filled with styrofoam. It's exponential and there's also an industry that's very involved with that. One of the things that Bolton talks about and it's a very dangerous thing right now, but he talks about the excess of capitalism.

He talks about how it's a money driven society, here and other places. And the fact that we've lost our compass on what really is relevant to us and how we need these things to survive. And so addressing that kind of thing, we're talking about a revolution. And I think we're beginning to see some of these kinds of things in this country right now.

Is the money thing more important than other our morality? So I think, in terms of individuals, I think

everyone has to find their own moral compass. And that compass is different for a lot of people. There's people on the streets here that have to rob and do whatever they do.

But I think everyone, even those people that are doing the wrong things, have some kind of compass that they're trying to live up to. And it's our duty to sort of make them understand the value of a better compass, of a better reality. [BLANK_AUDIO]Have you found that getting at this through art, have people been more receptive to contemplating these questions of climate change?

Sort of sneaking it in through art versus reading statistics and scientific surveys, and sort of barrage of facts. That's what I was thinking of a long, long time ago. Because I realized you can't have an argument about these things. Some people are really threatened by the fact that they have to consider climate change.

And I don't blame them. Some people, if you consider how do you deal without a car? How do you deal without a home? How do you deal without things that are really essential? So when someone comes and says we have to adjust, that's a very threatening thing for them.

And I understand this. My thing, in my background, in my career, is to try to address these kinds in a visual way, a different kind of way. So at least the consideration of them coming through where they stand on these issues is clear for them. So using art as I do, I'm not trying to blast them with, and by the way, I've avoided for a long time taking a stand on whether this is right or wrong.

Because I thought that I have to sort of not take a position as an artist. I just need to present how it is. I think that the reasonable artist mirrors the society he's in. And I think that we now are going through something right now. There's a lot of artists out there.

But very few artists are doing things that really have content. At least social content. And in terms of mirroring a culture, I think that's what an artist is supposed to do. We have vulgarity, we have violence, we have all kinds of things expressed in art. And I don't think that really is mirroring exactly what the culture is.

I think it's more of a message that's used to keep people busy and occupied. So I think myself, I think the fact that it's trying to find how to express what the real issues are in our society right now is that. I also think that climate change is ultimately the most important issue there is right now.

I really believe this. I think there are military things that are leveraged on that thing. I think there's food things that are gonna be leveraged on that thing. I think water, very soon, will really overshadow climate itself and become even more important, and water's a necessity we all have to have.

It is at jeopardy right now. I also think it's a right, it's a human right for everyone to have water. So those kind of issues. And I'm not a very good spokesman for myself being a Catholic. But I find myself, at this point in my life, falling back into things I've learned in that, that make so much more

sense now, now that I have that distance and can see that.

So like I said, I don't wanna represent myself as a religious person. I also don't want to paraphrase the Pope's encyclical's words. I want you to read them. I'm hoping that there's enough out of this that you'll at least pick it up. Because I think that when you pick it up you won't be able to put it down.

It is incredible. [BLANK_AUDIO] One in the back. One more question, maybe in the back there. Yes. Is there a specific event or moment that drew you to working with climate in your life? Or was it a progression? It began from my father. That's a long story. My father and my uncle were both artists and they were twins.

So for a long time I couldn't tell which one was which. [LAUGH] And we also had models in our house and I didn't know that they weren't part of the family. It was some years before I figured out they weren't. [LAUGH] So this is a background, but I was always going to look at different things.

My father was always angry at me because I'm always going to new places, and it's been that way all my life. In terms of climate, I lived in Los Angeles for a little while, and I happened to work in Griffith Park in the mountains, in a zoo a long time ago.

And working in the zoo at night time, I was able to see the change in environmental conditions in the mountain area, the Griffith Park area because of homes being built and traffic happening and smog and everything else. And for me it was a really impact early on about those kind of things.

So my uncle, I should also mention, was a great character. He was outrageous. But my uncle, also who worked in that zoo, who also got me that job working at a zoo. He also would take little trees out on the weekend in his truck at six o'clock in the morning and plant them all around the city.

And now when I go back to visit those places, the trees are big and all I can think so and I had that with him for a little bit. But he also packed bags for people that he knew that didn't have enough food. This is the truth. And I was embarrassed, because I thought, why are we going to these places?

And he would pack these little lunch things, and he'd drop them off at people's houses and just drive off. And my uncle was not a, he wasn't a special kind of person. He was a character. But he just had this kind of thing in his system, and I think I grew up with that.

So that's part of that. [BLANK_AUDIO]

Well, when KA Colorado and we at the Garaventa Center first started talking about bringing him out, he said, I wanna talk about climate change, I wanna share my paintings, I want to debut a film. And I want to shine a light on *Laudato Si'*.

And I said, well you've got an hour, can you do all that in an hour? [LAUGH] And I think he did that

with a couple minutes to spare. Lots to think about. You just keep driving home that we are all connected and that's a very powerful message. And we're in one of the best places on the planet to do something to make sure that those connections bring life to our common home.

So please joining me in thanking KA Colorado. [APPLAUSE] So if you'd like to stick around for a couple of minutes and carry on the conversation, you're welcome to do so. Again, if you are a student here as part of the class, signups are over there. Sam, wave your hand.

He'll point you in the right direction. Safe travels and thanks for coming out tonight.