

# ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AS A CORE VALUE

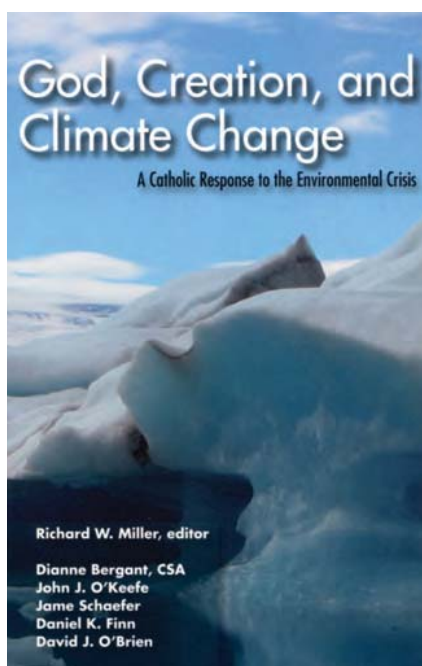
REVIEWED BY DANIEL DILEO

Catholic health care increasingly understands environmental sustainability as a core value. For example, Catholic Healthcare West notes on its website, “As health care providers, we also recognize the interdependence between human health and our environment and believe in the caring stewardship of a renewable Earth for the enhancement of all life.”

In particular, both the health care and faith communities are addressing climate change. The American Medical Association and the American Public Health Association are concerned with its health-related effects, while the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops points out in *Global Climate Change 2011* that “Pope Benedict XVI has continually emphasized the moral dimensions of climate change and our responsibility to care for creation.”

As climate change intersects health care and Catholic mission, *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis* by Richard W. Miller, assistant professor of systematic theology at Creighton University, Omaha, Neb., can help Catholic health care professionals obtain an advanced understanding of how the church is responding to climate change and how the Catholic health care ministry might continue to do so.

The book is a collection of essays by six prominent Catholic theologians based on lectures they presented Sept. 26, 2009, at the seventh annual Church in the 21st Century Lecture Series in Kansas City, Mo. The book is accessible to a general audience, but it is particularly targeted at readers who possess a



**GOD, CREATION, AND CLIMATE CHANGE: A CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS**

BY RICHARD W. MILLER  
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basic understanding of theology and how the Catholic Church has already responded to climate change. For them, the distinct yet complementary essays offer an advanced theological reflection on how people of faith and goodwill might further address the issue within the context of Judeo-Christian faith.

For Catholic health care professionals, four of the essays are particularly germane.

Miller’s essay, “Global Climate Dis-

ruption and Social Justice: The State of the Problem,” offers a good explanation of the causes and consequences of climate change. It documents both “the dangerous gap between scientific knowledge and public awareness” and how climate change is understood by people of faith and goodwill as a social justice issue. While Miller spends little time addressing the church’s particular response to climate change, his thorough research provides a solid scientific and socio-economic foundation upon which the subsequent five essays build.

“Environmental Degradation, Social Sin, and the Common Good,” by Jame Schaefer, Ph.D. associate professor of theology at Marquette University in Milwaukee, argues that climate change necessitates a new conceptualization of sin because the issue transcends time, space and species. Schaefer advances the thought-provoking idea of “planetary sin,” described as “an all-encompassing category of human sinfulness and underscores our culpability for actions or inactions — commission and omission — that adversely affect more than human constituents of Earth.” Such a concept of sin could be of particular interest to mission leaders and sponsorship personnel in helping Catholic health care organizations more fully reflect on the consequences of actions and choices.

“Theology and Sustainable Economics,” by Daniel K. Finn, professor of theology and Clemons professor of economics and the liberal arts at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minn., considers how market-based

economics facilitate environmental degradation through their inability to account for the negative ecological impacts of transactions. Finn argues that Christian theology — particularly the teachings that creation is both good and a gift — can serve as market correctives to help Christian individuals and ministries such as Catholic health care make more sustainable economic choices. CFOs and other Catholic health care leaders who deal with finances and purchasing may find this essay especially insightful.

Finally, “Another Call to Action: Catholics and the Challenge of Climate Change” by David J. O’Brien, university professor of faith and culture at Dayton University in Ohio, considers how the church’s historical contributions to social movements can help shape our current and future responses to climate change. O’Brien’s essay can help the Catholic health care ministry think about how best to advocate for practices and policies that address climate change according to authentic church teaching.

The book’s remaining essays address how the books of Wisdom and Job express the place and role of humanity vis-à-vis the rest of creation, and the propensity to over-spiritualize Jesus’ resurrection to the detriment of the natural world. Although both offer profound theoretical consideration of climate change and Judeo-Christian theology, they are of less immediate practical use to the Catholic health care ministry. The book concludes with an authors’ panel discussion that is theologically engaging but less operationally useful to the Catholic health care ministry.

Additional elements of Christian theology beyond those considered in *God, Creation, and Climate Change* could contribute to an even fuller discussion of climate change in Catholic health care. These could include: Christian prudence and decision-making; temperance and simplicity; Christian notions of suffering and sacrifice vis-à-vis the common good. Nevertheless, this book is a valuable and highly recommended resource for leadership formation programs and mission teams within Catholic health care who seek a deep understanding of climate change within the Judeo-Christian faith.

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## THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION



# A Shared Statement of Identity For the Catholic Health Ministry

**W**e are the people of Catholic health care, a ministry of the church continuing Jesus’ mission of love and healing today. As provider, employer, advocate, citizen—bringing together people of diverse faiths and backgrounds—our ministry is an enduring sign of health care rooted in our belief that every person is a treasure, every life a sacred gift, every human being a unity of body, mind, and spirit.

We work to bring alive the Gospel vision of justice and peace. We answer God’s call to foster healing, act with compassion, and promote wellness for all persons and communities, with special attention to our neighbors who are poor, underserved, and most vulnerable. By our service, we strive to transform hurt into hope. 🕊

As the church’s ministry of health care, we commit to:

- Promote and Defend Human Dignity
- Attend to the Whole Person
- Care for Poor and Vulnerable Persons
- Promote the Common Good
- Act on Behalf of Justice
- Steward Resources
- Act in Communion with the Church

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