

RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT IN COMPANIES PRODUCING FOSSIL  
FUELS—INVITED SESSION

- Topic: Responsible Investment in Companies Producing Fossil Fuels:  
Developing Guidelines for the CTSA  
and other Catholic Institutions
- Convener: Thomas Massaro, S.J., Jesuit School of Theo. of Santa Clara Univ.
- Moderator: Thomas Massaro, S.J., Jesuit School of Theo. of Santa Clara Univ.
- Panelists: Erin Lothes Biviano, College of Saint Elizabeth  
Regina Wentzel Wolfe, Catholic Theological Union  
John Carr, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life,  
Georgetown University

The purpose of this invited session is to provide resources for potential action on the part of the CTSA Board and membership on the important matter of investments in the fossil fuel industry. If the CTSA is able to develop sound guidelines to steer its own modest assets in the direction of greater social responsibility, then perhaps other Catholic institutions will be able to make constructive use of this initiative as they shape their own policies.

Erin Lothes Biviano began by presenting a rich array of statistical evidence regarding global climate change. The case for the importance of reducing our carbon footprint has never been clearer. Drawing upon her previous work on sustainability and energy ethics, Dr. Lothes Biviano emphasized the urgency of a shift from fossil fuels to sources of renewable energy, and proposed ways to accomplish this without enacting a disproportionate burden on under-resourced communities and nations. The commitments already enshrined in international agreements are supported by magisterial teachings on climate change, particularly in *Laudato Si'*, published by Pope Francis in June 2015. To continue current practices of investing in the fossil fuel industry, which derives profits from environmental degradation, may constitute formal cooperation with evil and ignores our moral obligation to protect the earth. Our investment policies must not betray the social mission of the church. The case for pursuing alternative strategies, whether full immediate divestment or more gradual and targeted measures, is very strong.

Regina Wentzel Wolfe next offered a presentation that featured careful attention to precision in the definition and use of relevant terms, including “socially responsible investing” and “sustainable, responsible, and impact investing.” Dr. Wolfe called particular attention to developments beyond the United States, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (based in Europe) and the United Nations Global Compact (the successor to the Millennium Development Goals) that includes Sustainable Development Goals for progress through the year 2030. As difficult as it is to establish and measure reliable metrics, various reporting protocols and even sanctions (beyond voluntary compliance with international conventions) hold great promise in addressing climate-change concerns and advancing sustainability and social responsibility.

The third presentation, offered by John Carr, was “Georgetown University’s Response to ‘Fossil Free’ Campaign.” The Powerpoint presentation he provided chronicled the key events over the past few years as one of the preeminent Catholic universities in the nation grappled with the many thorny issues surrounding

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investment strategy on this complex bundle of questions. Drawing upon his decades-long experience in various capacities at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Carr outlined the key dynamics governing any effort at socially responsible investing, but especially the challenges facing religiously affiliated institutions, with missions that include prophetic discipleship. Starting in May 2013 when a student-led group challenged Georgetown to divest fully from fossil fuels, the administration and trustees of that university have been struggling with a range of complexities regarding the management of its investment portfolio. The issues are never simple, since strategic engagement through tactics like participating in shareholder resolutions emerges as a viable (often more practical) alternative to full and immediate divestment from holdings in objectionable corporations. Ultimately, it is best to draw attention to the broadest horizons, including the university's role as an energy consumer and leader in research, education and advocacy, not solely to consider it as an investor.

Following the three presentations, a brief but lively discussion ensued that involved topics introduced by all three speakers. Among the topics covered during the question-and-answer period were the many challenges associated with replacing fossil fuels with alternative sources of energy, such as the loss of jobs in the oil and coal-mining industries. Other questions and comments pertained to next steps as the CTSA uses the valuable resources presented today in shaping its ultimate response to the challenge of enacting investor responsibility in the most effective way possible.

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