

What Prompted This Catholic Nun to Tackle an Environmental Protester?

In the picturesque village of Saint-Pierre-de-Colombier, a clash of convictions unfolded that left onlookers in shock and raised environmental concerns. On a sunny Saturday morning, members of the aptly named eco-group Les Amis de la Bourges, "Friends of the Village," converged to protest the construction of a new religious complex.

Little did they anticipate that their peaceful demonstration would escalate into a dramatic confrontation.

The construction site was encircled by a human chain of nuns from the Missionary Family of Notre-Dame, determined to shield the project from disruption. As tensions flared, an unexpected moment caught the world's attention—a French nun tackled an environmental protester who appeared to be carrying construction materials.

The altercation took an even more chaotic turn as other demonstrators stomped on the piping materials, heightening the animosity.

Sylvain Hérenguel, co-president of the association for the future of the Bourges valley, expressed his astonishment at the nuns' unanticipated use of force, describing the situation as far from the reasonable expectation for public order. "I was attacked three times by five people," Hérenguel said, emphasizing the nuns' determination to protect the construction site.

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The primary point of contention for environmental activists is the potential threat the construction poses to rare plant species. Specifically, they cite the presence of reseda of jackfruit, a plant noted by the French Biodiversity Office, which was not adequately addressed in the environmental study relied upon to approve the project.

According to Hérenguel, the construction lacks authorization to destroy the habitats of these protected species.

In response to these concerns, the environmental defense collective has called for the suspension of construction until all necessary environmental authorizations are obtained. Their stance is rooted in their belief that the construction is an overambitious project for a small village, with plans for a chapel capable of seating 3,500 people.

This, they argue, goes against the approval of both the bishop and the Vatican. Their movement is pacifist in nature, seeking only to ensure proper environmental studies are conducted before the project proceeds.

The controversy surrounding the construction of this religious complex began in December 2018 and has been punctuated by numerous environmental demonstrations that temporarily halted progress. While activists installed a Zone to Defend around the area in June 2020, construction eventually resumed in 2022 following additional environmental studies.

The Missionary Family of Notre-Dame has yet to provide a response to these allegations. {eo}

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Shawn A. Akers *is the online editor at Charisma Media.*