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Abstract

Interest in the relationships between the Catholic Church and the environment has grown in recent years, especially following Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, or *On the Care for Our Common Home*. His letter was widely praised by many Catholic and non-Catholic scholars, journalists, and activists who suggested that this encyclical marked a massive shift in Catholic views about the environment, particularly the climate crisis. Yet despite this early hope, policies around the world remain generally unchanged and the promise early commentators saw in *Laudato Si'* lies unfulfilled.

This thesis investigates whether the Catholic Church has attempted to act on Pope Francis's encyclical, and if so, how the *Laudato Si'* has led to changes in Catholic teaching and practice. I use the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, NY as a case study. I contend that the parochial clergy must be central to any successful effort to implement *Laudato Si'* and Catholic environmental teaching. Drawing on fieldwork from the summer and fall of 2018, I argue that few clergy are using *Laudato Si'* to change their lives or those of their parishioners. This thesis does not blame the Catholic clergy for this but instead contends that, due to both internal and external pressures, Catholic clergy are not currently able to implement the changes the encyclical demands, though many want to. This thesis thus adds important empirical information to discussions about Catholicism and the environment. However, its contributions go beyond this particular case, as the thesis also argues that Catholic environmental teaching is a distinct subset of Catholic social teaching and should be considered as such. It also offers a corrective to ongoing academic and public discourses about religion and the environment that are often overly focused on texts to the exclusion analyzing practices, arguing that discussions of religion should foreground practical and lived methodologies. Speaking directly to such practical concerns, this thesis also argues that far more must be done by Catholic actors if *Laudato Si'* is to transform the world, as well as suggesting possible steps Catholic parochial clergy could take to bring environmental themes into their parishes.

Building an Ecological Church: *Laudato Si'*, Climate Change, and Clergy in the Roman Catholic
Diocese of Syracuse

By Dominic Wilkins
B.A., Colgate University, 2017

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Geography

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I have too many people who I am indebted to and I have had to stop somewhere so readers can get to my thesis. What follows is thus a short and incomplete list.

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As is the proper and entirely accurate end to these acknowledgments, all errors within are my own.

Table of Contents

Introduction: The Environment, Climate Change, and the Catholic Church	1
Chapter 1. Where We're Standing in the Academy	17
Chapter 2. Drawing the Blueprints: Paul VI to Benedict XVI	48
Chapter 3. <i>Laudato Si'</i> : Pope Francis Sets the Cornerstone	75
Chapter 4. Setting up the Scaffolding: What Do Clergy Think?	105
Chapter 5. Stalled Construction: What Do Clergy Do?	137
Chapter 6. Community Participation and Parishioner Responses	170
Conclusion: Building New Churches Takes a Long Time	191
Appendix A—Supporting Documents	205
References	209
Curriculum Vitae	229

Introduction—The Environment, Climate Change, and the Catholic Church

On June 26, 2015, the recently elected Pope Francis released the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, focusing on how the Catholic Church understands humanity's duty to care for the earth and establish mutually beneficial relationships with the non-human world. Within Catholicism, papal encyclicals are extremely serious documents meant to influence the behaviors of all Catholics (and since the mid twentieth century, often all people) concerning a particular topic. Never before had a Catholic pope written so much on the environment--indeed for many people *Laudato Si'* was the first time any link between Catholicism and the environment was made explicit--and the reactions from numerous commentators around the world were swift and often laudatory.

Laudato Si' is quite long for a papal encyclical with 246 sections—in comparison, Paul VI's deeply influential discussion of marriage and rebuke of contraception, *Humanae Vitae*, had only thirty-one. It makes an impassioned argument that every person has a serious responsibility to love and protect the non-human world. Francis does this primarily by advocating for an “integral ecology” attuned to the links between environmental and social degradation and oppression. To him the Earth is not just an object people walk on but should be envisioned as a person who suffers and cries out because of the violence environmental degradation and climate change brings about.

Laudato Si' urges every person around the world to alter their personal lives and dismantle ideologies of consumerism, dominionism, and technocratic economics to protect and care for the world and all within it. Recognizing differential responsibilities and capacities, Francis also argues that those who have benefited from environmental degradation have a greater responsibility to bring about this change. In response to this radically new geography, the pope implores all people to work together for a better future for every person.

The encyclical sparked responses from many academics and activists involved with many environmental projects. Many of these commentators, especially those professionally engaged with

environmental justice and climate activism, hailed *Laudato Si'* as a watershed document that would significantly alter the perspectives and behaviors of the 1.2 billion Catholics around the globe. J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke encapsulated many academics' expectations when they said "Pope Francis sought to raise the odds of a political breakthrough" as the encyclical thrust "the moral weight of the Vatican firmly on the side of climate stabilization" in the run-up to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference. The renowned writer Amitav Ghosh similarly saw *Laudato Si'* as "the most prominent example" of religious leadership not just critiquing but actually influencing climate policy by speaking directly to the powerful in the manner needed to change the world. The leading environmental activist Bill McKibben noted that the encyclical marked a major shift in the discourses surrounding environmental issues, as "the power of celebrity is the power to set the agenda, and his timing has been impeccable...*Laudato Si'* stands as one of the most influential documents of recent times."¹

McKibben also argued that through this encyclical Francis joined spirituality with science in a manner that might be able to expand the climate movement into religious spaces. Jim Antal, a major figure in the United Church of Christ as well as among climate activists, is one of many who similarly discussed a "Francis Effect" where *Laudato Si'* will inspire not just the Catholic Church but all of Christianity to foster deeper concern with the moral crisis of climate change. Notably, Antal recommended that non-Catholic congregations approach local Catholic churches to discuss incorporating *Laudato Si'* into their ministry and life, a suggestion that though possible this thesis will show to be far more complicated than what Antal imagined.²

Media reactions were similar to those in the academic and activist communities. *The Guardian* called *Laudato Si'* "the most astonishing and perhaps most ambitious papal document of the past 100 years" while *Time* claimed it was "poised to reshape the international conversation on climate change." Many voices around the world envisioned *Laudato Si'* as a document that would not just

alter what Catholics thought and did concerning about the relationship between humans and the environment but could change the world beyond the Church. They hoped especially that it could provide the necessary impetus for the climate movement to achieve policy objectives it has long desired yet failed to realize.³

It is not difficult to imagine what these commentators thought would happen in thousands of parishes around the United States and the world. Dozens of families, some with newborns and others whose children have long since grown, would file into a quaint country church on an early summer Sunday. As the pews fill up about people are buzzing about the recent papal pronouncement, the first major teaching from their charismatic new leader, before they fall quiet as the mass begins with the sounding of the organ and the processional hymn. About twelve minutes into the mass, the priest begins his homily, but this time discusses not only the scripture readings for the week but also draws from this new encyclical, talking about climate change and the duty of all to care far more for the environment than they are right now. He urged congregants to reduce their carbon emissions, not just in personal lives but by changing and working with their broader communities to reduce collective environmental impacts and transform the world for the better.

Near the end of mass, the deacon announces that in response to the challenge issued by *Laudato Si'*, the parish is putting together an action team to implement changes in their community and are looking for volunteers to come to an exploratory meeting that Thursday. He encourages everyone who has not already to read the document. While most are too busy to get through the whole encyclical, the majority do have the chance to skim at least a few online summaries and are inspired by Francis's words. Later that week, the pastor forwards a message from the local bishop on the parish listserv announcing that this year's fundraising drive will go toward reducing energy use in all diocesan buildings. The bishop also urges parishioners to lobby local and federal representatives to develop responsible environmental and climate policy. Over the course of the next year, a

number of homilies will highlight the ecological teachings of the Catholic Church and its saints, and the parish will develop and implement plans for new educational and social justice programs to bring this global teaching to life in their local community. No community would remain unchanged by this encyclical that sparked a behavioral sea change first among Catholics that over the course of a few years spread to millions across the United States.

Such a scenario, of course, was always an idyllic dream. While it would certainly denote strong engagement exceeding the expectations of the encyclical's authors, the more interesting question is to what degree *any* of these desired changes happened. In the scholarly literature the practical influence of *Laudato Si'* on U.S. Catholic communities is severely under-researched, a lacuna this thesis addresses. A focus on if and in what ways Catholic churches across the United States embraced Catholic environmental teaching lies at the heart of this project, as is a concern with how Catholics incorporate papal teaching concerning the environment into their behaviors.

As the central result stemming from a sustained investigation into these topics, this thesis argues several key points. Its central claim is empirical and is of interest to anyone hoping that *Laudato Si'* and broader Catholic environmental teaching will successfully address ongoing environmental degradation and the climate crisis in particular. At least in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, this is not happening. Though they have heard about it, clergy are broadly not reading *Laudato Si'*. Relatedly, they are not acting or meaningfully changing their behaviors across scales ranging from the personal to the diocesan. There are, as in any case, a few exceptions, and these are highlighted throughout the thesis. In general, however, the empirical thrust of this thesis urges substantial restraint when discussing, to use Bron Taylor's term, the "greening" of Catholicism. *Laudato Si'* has not substantially changed Catholicism in this diocese.⁴

The conceptual reasons why this is the case underlies the central theoretical contribution this thesis seeks to make to the discipline of geography. I argue that knowledges about the relationships

between Catholicism and the environment can be improved by drawing on Edward Said's discussion of "geographic imaginaries," or the ways in which people learn to view the world and themselves in specific and extremely influential ways. This framework can certainly be used to distinguish between Catholic and non-Catholic views, but I contend in this thesis that it also should be applied in order to contrast different Catholic perspectives that are part of the same tradition yet in tension with each other. As becomes clear in Chapters 2 and 3, Catholic environmental teaching and *Laudato Si'* in particular advance a distinct way of understanding humanity and the world that, though theologically consistent with millennia of Catholic tradition, is geographically distinct from other expressions of Catholicism as it weakens humanity's division from the non-human world by emphasizing the connections every individual person has to numerous environments. While for the sake of making this thesis comprehensible to a wider audience conceptual phrases such as the "greening of religion" intentionally remain absent from the body chapters, this and other concepts discussed in Chapter 1 ground the structure and arguments throughout this thesis. Yet for academics, especially those interested in religion, the thesis shows one way that geographic theory can enrich understandings of Catholicism in Central New York.⁵

The second main conceptual concern of this thesis is deeply related as I analyze whether and how religious institutions influence the behaviors of their adherents in the world today. While religious institutions have historically wielded significant influence in several spheres, such as abortion and access to healthcare, the ways in which these institutions inform perspectives on nature-society relationships is severely underexplored. Knowledge of how institutions (do not) influence individual behaviors is crucial for understanding how Catholicism functions today, for though the two are often conflated individual and institutional Catholicism must be understood as distinct. This thesis specifically adds environmental concerns to research about lived Catholicism and helps broaden how religions are understood as influencing geographies across a range of scales.⁶

While this thesis is by no means the final word on these topics, it provides crucial insights to these conversations by examining the ways in which Catholicism is (and is not) influencing the quotidian life of Catholic clergy and the parishes they lead. Sustained engagement with religious actors when ascertaining the causes, both proximate and ultimate, of contemporary environmental change is crucial for geographers and other scholars interested in not only *what* the world around us is and how it is changing, but the *why* such changes happen, *how* we came to be where we are, and *where* might we all be heading. Though it is all too common, geographers should not ignore questions of religion when trying to address these questions and discuss the subjective geographies all people create and deploy in their daily lives.

Before delving further into these questions through this thesis's empirics, however, it is important to briefly discuss what the institutional Catholic Church is and why it is interesting for geographers. The Catholic Church can be understood as a global institution that locally materializes in quite diverse and at times contradictory ways. It is led by its Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is elected following the death or resignation of his predecessor by the College of Cardinals. This group is composed of the most prominent figures of the Catholic Church and typically, though not always, the leaders of major centers of Catholicism around the world. A subset of these cardinals, themselves assisted by other bishops and priests, who comprise the Curia, or the bureaucratic administration of the Church. The Curia is based alongside the pope in Vatican City and works with him to support and advance the institution's global mission.

Beyond Rome itself, the Catholic Church is spread over the planet via a distinct geography. The entire world is divided amongst national conferences and further into ecclesiastical provinces, each of which is divided again into individual dioceses. Each diocese is led by a bishop, one of whom in each province is named archbishop, nominally though not juridically the leader of the entire province. Each diocese is itself divided into parishes, led by a pastor or administrator who is

typically assisted by one or two deacons. Upon advancement throughout the hierarchy, whether from laity to the priesthood or from priest to bishop, each cleric swears a vow of obedience to their superior and is technically required to follow his orders without question, though often in practice there is far more cooperation than statutorily required. While a parish may have a council to aid in administrative affairs, final juridical authority lies with the pastor, who bears direct responsibility for teaching Catholicism to all people who live within his parishes' borders. Religious orders, non-territorial dioceses, and less common rites are separate from this diocesan structure, but in each authority flows hierarchically from the pope to their most junior members through a similarly geographical structure.⁷

It is easy to extrapolate from this description that the Church is an entirely centralized hierarchical institution and that Catholicism around the globe is completely uniform as directed by the Pope and his Curia. This is indeed the case for some parts of the tradition, such as the structure of the mass--though shifts in the 1960s to allow celebration of the mass in the vernacular have allowed geographic variability to penetrate even this core ritual. Beyond such rituals, however, regional and even individual Catholic communities often in practice have a substantial degree of flexibility in their day-to-day operations and even long-term plans. National bishops' councils and individual diocesan bishops can focus their attention on whatever topic grasps their attention or that they think is most important for their diocese. While the pope or his Curia could direct them to do something specific if he wanted to, practically speaking the distance of many dioceses from Rome and the sheer size of the institution leads to significant deference toward individual bishops.⁸

Pastors and other clerics often have similar flexibility in their own parishes, though their greater proximity to diocesan officials does restrict this. While each cleric and parish are expected to toe the line with respect to dogmatic teaching, there is considerable variability in how they interpret and live Catholic teaching, particularly when different branches of the hierarchy conflict. Such

tensions are not uncommon as factionalism and politicking within the Church is ever present and individual clerics have a considerable ability to position themselves in agreement with *someone* far greater in rank than themselves. Moreover, there is a vast corpus of Catholic teaching, ranging from eliminating nuclear weapons to the protecting the right of workers to unionize to a focus on contemplative prayer and the rosary, and priests and parishes have considerable choice as to what to emphasize given their limited resources. Though the Church spans the globe it does not do so uniformly but is highly uneven in both its presence and influence across the globe. Its geographic differences are something that at the level of purely basic research are central to geography.

In this narrative, the formal institution of the Church is equated with Catholicism, and its texts stand in for the religion's influence in the world. This is the geography of Catholicism (notably and importantly distinct from "Catholic geographic imaginary") often deployed by those in the academy and beyond. Unfortunately, as this thesis will reveal, such a narrative is largely incomplete and leaves out a great deal of what Catholicism actually is.

What is neglected to mention, and as a result what is missed by the throngs who deploy such narratives when discussing religion, are the people who make up the Catholic Church. A story about religion, even a story such as this thesis about a text, is never just or even primarily a story about text. It is a story about the people who (do not) interact with the text, whether and how it influences their lives and matters on a day-to-day basis. This thesis foregrounds this dimension of the intersection of Catholicism and the environment and contends more broadly that, whenever discussing the relationship between any religion and the environment (or more broadly religion in general), the people who comprise the tradition must be at the center of the story. If *Laudato Si'* or any other text, religious or otherwise, is going to radically transform the world as so many seek to do, it cannot remain solely on the page but must have a life through people who act in the world. This is an important reminder for scholars and all other authors to keep in mind, particularly those

who are not content with the world as it is but believe that “the point is to change it.” Texts, religious or otherwise, mean very little if people do not respond to them in their lives, no matter how correct or well-written they are. This, more than anything, is the broad theoretical argument at the center of this thesis.⁹

This argument requires considering religion largely by examining people’s daily lives and experiences rather than conceptualizing religion as bracketed off from mundane life. As such, religious motives and subjectivities should be considered at least as potentially important variables in scholarly analysis even when research does not explicitly or formally engage with questions of religion. The conversation around policy mobilities is one particularly clear example of how this perspective and the geographic study of religion in general, enriches ongoing conversations in geography. While scholars of policy mobilities often focus on explicitly political or economic policies in their field, it is important to recognize that policy is not restricted to those dimensions and that a policy’s efficacy may involve how people responding to it are influenced by other factors that at first glance appear unrelated. Though perhaps an uncommon method, examining local dimensions of global religious policy within such a global institution as the Catholic Church offers an alternative way to study local differences in global policies. The question of whether and how *Laudato Si’* influenced local decision making and/or behavior adds key knowledge to discussions of what impact global policy shifts actually have on the day-to-day lives of those affected by these changes.¹⁰

While this thesis was written principally for an academic audience, it is by no means written solely for one. I can imagine that the empirical dimensions of this thesis in particular will be of interest to many beyond the academy, including both Catholic clergy themselves and those involved with environmental movements inside Catholicism and without. I have included several suggestions for ways to begin incorporating Catholic environmental teaching into parish and communal life for these groups throughout the second half of this thesis. Similarly, while the second and third chapters

of this thesis are primarily written to explain the decades-long historical emergence of Catholic environmental teaching recently capped by *Laudato Si'* for academic audiences, they were also conceptualized so that Catholics and others interested in the underlying empirical changes can use them as instructional aids in navigating what can be a confusing literature. Given the argument of the paragraph immediately preceding, it was important to include suggestions for practical changes alongside the empirical and theoretical critique as this text too means very little if no one responds to it. Academics can certainly also comprise part of this practical audience, but the suggestions in those sections are predominantly meant for those seeking to increase everyday Catholicism's engagement with Catholic environmental teaching and *Laudato Si'* in particular.

Outline

This thesis examines how Catholic parochial clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse are involved in the process of building an ecological global Catholic Church. I also frequently discuss cases where Catholic ecological discourse has not influenced the environmental outlooks of clergy across the diocese. Barriers to action are numerous and overcoming them has been a far harder task than early commentators on *Laudato Si'* anticipated. Given the dire state of human-environment relations today understanding both the ways in which Catholic environmental discourse can inspire change and how such change is frustrated are crucial for mitigating these changes.

As the eminent German theologian Karl Rahner advised, the place to begin any inquiry is to ensure that you are asking the correct question. Without this, you have nowhere to go and nothing to guide you. This thesis is driven and structured by the empirical question of whether and why *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teaching influences clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse in order to understand, at least in a small part, the lived relationships between Catholicism and the environment in the world today.

Before jumping into this, however, I want to take a step back to reflect on the lenses through which I view this question. Chapter 1 does this by quickly reviewing how the studies of geography and religion come together. It then shifts to discussing how studies of religion and the environment, paying particular attention to the Lynn White Jr.'s well-known charge that religion is at the heart of contemporary ecological crises and recent academic rejoinders, particularly the 'greening of religion' thesis. It also discusses the potential benefits of further study of these two topics. While this chapter may be somewhat theory-laden, especially for an unfamiliar reader, its insights underlie the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter 2 approaches the question of what Catholic popes have historically taught about the environment, focusing especially on Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. By doing this the chapter helps show how, rather than something entirely new, Francis's *Laudato Si'* built on a tradition of Catholic environmental teaching that developed over the latter half of the twentieth century. Beyond the popes, this chapter also discusses how local bishops' conferences and other key leaders in the Catholic Church have contributed to this teaching. This chapter is principally meant to clarify, for academic and non-academic audiences alike, what the Catholic popes have recently taught about the relationships between humans and the environment.

Chapter 3 shifts into a discussion of Pope Francis's work through a close reading and analysis of *Laudato Si'*. The rationale behind doing this is two-fold. Firstly, as will become clear throughout this thesis, many of the people who talk and write about the encyclical often have not thoroughly or critically read the document. Speaking about how Catholic environmental teaching has and has not influenced behaviors and perspectives is a futile task without first discussing what that teaching actually is. Secondly, by providing this close reading I hope to make what is a daunting and at times confusing document legible for unfamiliar readers without training in the myriad of scientific and theological literatures that Francis draws on in his encyclical.

Chapter 4 throws a wrench into what had been until then a rather positive narrative highlighting a building concern for environmental issues in the Catholic Church. Broadly speaking, this chapter highlights the tensions between textual and quotidian approaches to religious studies as the former does not necessarily affect the latter. Drawing on interviews and observations from across the Diocese of Syracuse, I discuss what it is both in general and specific terms that Catholic clergy know and think about not just formal Catholic environmental teaching but relationships between humans and the environment more broadly. It would be naive to assume that, if the bishops or leading theologians write something, then the billion Catholics globally will immediately read, process, and, when applicable, shift their perspectives and behaviors to align with such teaching. It appears far more likely that, if such change is to take place, someone needs to actually foster it. If Chapters 2 and 3 showed what the popes have taught about the relationships between humans and the environment, Chapter 4 approaches this question by asking those who actually have to bring Catholic environmental teaching to the world and get people to enact it as part of their lives what it is they know. The parish priests and deacons are the people who interact on a routine basis with the Catholic laity, preach weekly if not daily to their congregations, and have far more impact on day-to-day Catholic life than a council of bishops on the other side of the world or a long dead theologian.

Chapter 5 continues with this concern about quotidian approaches to religion by discussing what it is that clergy and parishes are actually *doing* to incorporate *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teaching into their communities. While in many cases very little has happened, this chapter also has suggestions for how clergy and others might successfully incorporate Catholic environmental teaching into different parts of Catholic life.

Chapter 6 builds directly out of the previous two chapters and examines how clergy expect their parishioners to react to Catholic environmental teaching. It also delves into the ways in which

these expected reactions influence how clergy (do not) go about raising environmental issues within their parishes. In doing so this chapter points beyond this thesis's limited scope and suggests further research and avenues for others interested in Catholic environmental movements to engage communities and clergy with their work.

This thesis ends with an assessment of the process of building an ecological Church in the Diocese of Syracuse and the ways in which this study is applicable to parishes beyond the diocese. This process is far more complex than scholars and others approaching the intersection of religion and the environment often understand. As will become clear over the course of this thesis, discussing the Catholic Church's teaching concerning the relationships between humans and the environment is a complicated, multi-faceted conversation about what it means to be Catholic while simultaneously absent from much of quotidian Catholic life.

Site Selection and Methodology

A brief word at this point is needed about this study's method and site selection for its fieldwork. Chapters 2 and 3 draw sporadically on John XXIII and Paul VI but are primarily focused on the teaching promulgated during the latter half of John Paul II's, Benedict XVI's, and Francis's papacies, both by the Vatican and by national bishops' councils around the world. Restricting analysis to the contemporary hierarchy helps address this chapter's aim at understanding the current perspectives of the Magisterium. This chapter also draws from the United States Council of Catholic Bishops to provide more detailed context for analysis of Catholic teaching in the United States. As the United States is this thesis's area of empirical focus, and the U.S. Catholic Church predominately interacts with Catholic teaching through its English translations.¹¹

Instead of textual sources, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 each stem from 31 semi-structured interviews with priests and deacons in the Diocese of Syracuse, New York conducted from May to October 2018. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in concord with the IRB-approved

research protocol; all references to interviewed clergy use only these pseudonyms. Participants were primarily recruited through face-to-face conversations, either after mass or during parish office hours. A small number of participants were recruited instead by phone using contact information publicly available through parish bulletins when office hours were not accessible. Interviews covered both the perspectives of these clerics concerning *Laudato Si'* in particular, their knowledge of general Church teaching on the relationships between humans and the environment on these topics, and their personal opinions. The interviews also explored whether and in what manners priests and deacons engaged with environmental themes in their ministry, whether from the pulpit, in informal conversations, or through other parish programming to ascertain how this changes people's behaviors. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary interaction between researcher and participants rather than other methods to understand what priests are willing to share with someone who asked them about the Church's (and their own) perspectives on human-environment interactions. Much has been written about the isolation experienced by Catholic clerics, including from their parishioners, and the constant requirement to present a facade as representatives of the Church-as-institution. Regardless of whether they have underlying beliefs different than what they shared, the question of what the Church *teaches* is best addressed through interviews. A few clergy also provided documents to show how they engaged with these topics in their parishes.¹²

To further bolster the data collected through interviews, 30 participant-observations, mostly attending weekly and Sunday masses, were undertaken with fieldnotes written immediately following the event. Some of these participant-observations occurred in churches with priests and deacons who were also interviewed, while others occurred at events led by individuals who did not participate in this study. In addition to these fieldnotes, I also collected bulletins and other relevant documents publicly available in churches and parish offices to better understand parish operations.

The Diocese of Syracuse was chosen as the site for this project for several reasons. Spanning seven central New York counties (Broome, Chenango, Cortland, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, and Oswego), the diocese includes approximately 238,000 Catholics in a proportion (approximately 20%) similar to the total U.S. population. The diocese also covers two urban areas, Syracuse and Utica, two large urban clusters, Binghamton and Rome, several smaller urban clusters, and many rural areas. Given this variety in urbanity/rurality and occupational activity among parishioners, I was able to more closely find parishes across the range of sizes identified by the American theologian Bryan Froehle and gain a broader perspective among clergy than would have been possible in a more homogenous diocese. The Diocese of Syracuse is also whiter than average, which allowed this study to focus specifically on the dimensions of white Catholicism so often opposed to environmental and climate action to ascertain particular effects of the papal encyclical.¹³

It should be noted that this study is limited to assessing a small fragment of Catholicism in the United States. Its conclusions are not definitive for the whole tradition, though the skepticism concerning the adoption of ecologically friendly theologies and the lack of indicators of such transformations further corroborate other studies suggesting that the “greening of religion” is far from occurring within U.S. Catholicism. Further study is required, both within the United States as well as beyond, particularly in the Global South, to fully ascertain the influence of various Catholic moves towards ecological theology among both the clergy and laity and to better understand environment-society relationships influenced by religion and Catholicism in particular.¹⁴

¹ John Robert McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 81; Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 159; Bill McKibben, “The Pope and the Planet,” *New York Review of Books* (2015). <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/08/13/pope-and-planet/>

² McKibben, 2015; Bill McKibben, “Global Heating, Pope Francis, and the Promise of *Laudato Si’*,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, ed. John Hart. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 2017): 457; Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 99, 125.

³ “The Guardian View on Laudato Si’: Pope Francis Calls for a Cultural Revolution,” *The Guardian*, June 18, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com>; Elizabeth Dias, “Pope Francis Urges Climate Change Action in Encyclical,” *Time*, June 18, 2015 <http://time.com>

⁴ Bron Taylor, Gretel van Wieren, and Bernard D. Zaleha, “Lynn White Jr. and the Greening-of-Religion Hypothesis,” *Conservation Biology* 30, no. 5 (2016): 1000-1009.

⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Edition, New York: Vintage Books, 1994. See also Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

⁶ For a clear entry into this discussion, see Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988 and Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

⁷ Catholic Church, “Christ’s Faithful--Hierarchy, Laity, and Consecrated Life,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012); *Code of Canon Law*, c. 601, in *Code of Canon Law*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), <http://www.vatican.va/archive>

⁸ Ex. Franco Garelli, “Flexible Catholicism, Religion, and the Church: The Italian Case,” *Religions* 4, no. 1 (2013): 1-13.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, London: Pelican, 1975, quoted in Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy, *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, New York: Routledge, 2015, 185-187.

¹⁰ For brief overviews of contemporary policy mobility studies, see Jamie Peck, “Geographies of Policy: From Transfer-Diffusion to Mobility-Mutation,” *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 6 (2011): 773-797; Eugene McCann, “Urban Policy Mobilities and Global Circuits of Knowledge: Toward a Research Agenda,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 1 (2011): 107-130; and Russell Prince, “Local or Global Policy? Thinking about policy mobility with assemblage and topology,” *Area* 49, no. 3 (2017): 335-341.

¹¹ The limitation to English translation runs so deep in the U.S. Church that its bishops were notoriously marginalized during the first sessions of Vatican II as formal proceedings were conducted entirely in Latin. While they expanded their delegation for later sessions to include people proficient in spoken Latin, the U.S. Church still relies heavily on such translations. For more, see Ian Linden, *Global Catholicism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), especially pp. 45-90.

¹² For discussions of how priests perceive themselves vis-a-vis their parishioners see, among others, Michael N. Kane, “A Qualitative Survey of the Attitudes of Catholic Priests Toward Bishops and Ministry Following the Sexual Abuse Revelations of 2002,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 57 (2008): 183-198; Bryan T. Froehle, “Research On Catholic Priests in the United States, Since the Council: Modeling the Dialogue between Theology and Social Science,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 29, no. 4 (2011): 19-46; and Andrew Szasz, “Novel Framings Create New, Unexpected Allies for Climate Activism,” in *Reframing Climate Change: Constructing Ecological Geopolitics*, ed. Shannon O’Lear and Simon Dalby, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 150-170.

¹³ Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. *CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) 2016: Attitudes about Climate Change*. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016a; Diocese of Syracuse. *Diocesan Profile*, 2018a.; Bryan T. Froehle “Catholic Pastoral Sociology in the United States since Vatican II: Making a Path by Walking It.” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25, no. 4 (2007): 94-96; J.Patrick Hornbeck II. “Counting Catholics in the United States of America.” *American Catholic Studies* 123, no. 4 (2012): 1-3; and Jones, Robert P., Daniel Cox, Navarro-Rivera, and Juhem. “Believers, Sympathizers, and Skeptics: Why Americans Are Conflicted about Climate Change.” In *Environmental Policy, and Science; Findings from the PRRI/AAR Religion, Values, and Climate Change Survey*. Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute/American Academy of Religion, 2014. <https://www.prii.org>.

¹⁴ Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010; Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha, 2016a, and Bron Taylor, Gretel Van Wieren and Bernard D. Zaleha, “The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part Two): Assessing the Data from Lynn White, Jr. to Pope Francis.” *Journal of the Society of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2016): 306–378; and Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay. “Climate Change and Religion as Global Phenomena: Summing Up and Directions for Further Research.” In *How the World’s Religions Are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, 297–315. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Chapter 1—Where We're Standing in the Academy

Geographers do not often bring religion into conversations about the environment despite the numerous ways that religions are tied to nature-society relationships around the world. When they do end up considering religion with more than cursory care, scholars often see religion as either a regressive and antagonistic force or at best an inert barrier to be overcome by those seeking progress. Yet if geographers who do seriously interact with religion in their scholarship have told us anything, it is that even organized religion is simply not going away. Though it is certainly changing in response to global shifts, the category retains much of its historical utility for scholars across the academy.¹

This thesis takes a less confrontational approach towards religion by considering how Catholicism influences nature-society relationships. Contemporary Catholicism presents a good opportunity to study what happens when a startlingly new geographic perspective is promulgated. Understanding the ways this new religious policy influences Catholic leaders is crucial for increasing knowledge about the ways people perceive and act toward the world around them. To fully grasp the importance of this study, however, requires first delving into the foundations of both religion and geography as fields of academic study, particularly focusing on how their joint study may especially benefit those seeking better understanding of contemporary nature-society relationships. Seriously considering the academic study of religion will allow geographers to see that, far from some marginal pursuit for the discipline, concern about religion and religious people is at the theoretical heart of geography.

While such theory is not the most pleasant to read or certainly to write it is needed to frame any project, understand its implications beyond its specific empirical context, and discuss its importance for other scholars. Yet recognizing that not everyone has the interest, need, or perhaps time to delve into these theoretical weeds underlying this project requires succinctly presenting its

theoretical scaffolding for a reader more curious about this project's empirics. This chapter is, however, primarily directed toward an academic audience interested in the theoretical backdrop to this thesis and its claims that the study of religion should both methodologically focus far more on people directly and concerning the deep theoretical synergy between the studies of religion and geography despite their current separation.

The academic study of religion is at its broadest a study of the ways people re/create meaning in the world at scales ranging from the microscopic to macro-cosmic, answer unanswerable questions no one can avoid about individual purpose on the planet, and how creating meaning influences people's behaviors across a wide range of scales. As the study of representations of the world drawn from all epistemologies across these same scales and their subsequent impacts, geography is theoretically concerned with these same topics (though incorporating representations from non-empirical epistemologies remains a weak point in the discipline). Similarly, while environmental geography is itself not just the study of relationships between people and environments around them but also the study of why and where this divide between human and non-human is created it remains dominated by empiricist epistemologies. Yet at the core of nature-society scholarship are questions of how people understand themselves vis a vis all that surrounds them. Neglecting to consider religion, geography, or environment-society principles when discussing any of these topics misses important insights as it artificially and arbitrarily restricts the already partial knowledge scholars have about the world.

While it is not overly difficult to make such claims abstractly, by the same token it is not too difficult to dismiss them. This thesis pairs the theoretical arguments of this chapter with an empirical study of how Catholic clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse engage with global environmental discourse to show the insights possible from taking an approach that brings religion into environmental studies, primarily by beginning to reveal answers to crucial questions about how people make sense

of the non-human world in everyday life. This thesis also addresses why it is climate denial and especially inaction remain prevalent across the United States despite clarion calls for deep, systemic change from many major leaders, religious and otherwise. Such inaction concerning environmental issues, a characteristic common among clergy across the Diocese of Syracuse, is a far more important barrier to desperately needed change than outright antagonism. Though proposing strategies for how to address this lies beyond the scope of this thesis, questions about how to spark change in the world must continue to motivate environment-society scholars and others moving forward.

What are Religion and Geography?

It would be a serious mischaracterization to suggest geographers and other scholars interested in questions about people's relationships with the non-human world have not previously engaged with religious or spiritual dimensions in their scholarship. Indeed, interest in religion has been a part of the academic project that became geography since its very inception, albeit often at the margins rather than the center. While few of these engagements have left a deep imprint on the discipline, at least explicitly, and critical engagement with religion was (like most other social theory) absent from the discipline following geography's Hartshornian and quantitative turns, there always remained at least a few geographers considering what it might mean to consider religion in the study of geography. What they have written about geography of religion as an academic project is thus deeply important for imagining how future research at this intersection might occur. Though as so many recent theorists have shown arriving at a final or complete definition for any topic as complex as religion or geography is impossible, for any meaningful conversation to take place a necessarily fallacious attempt to do so must be made.²

Religion is perhaps one of the few terms that could give Raymond William's oft-quoted aphorism about the difficulties of understanding nature a challenge. Without straying too far down a

path from which we might never return I will outline my approach to understanding religion to help explain the theoretical contributions of this project.³

Talal Asad, J.Z. Smith, Sylvester Johnson, and many other scholars have demonstrated the vapidness of the category religion studied in the academy. The study of religion has always been a historically limited project that provides necessarily partial insights into the world around it. Despite some of their contemporaries' fears, however, observing the artificiality of religion-as-category has not led to the disintegration of the study of religion or the total rejection of the term as part of an analytical framework. Instead, scholars of religion have often moved toward more general, polythetic approaches sensitive to self-definition in order to minimize assumptions about what is and is not religion. Ethically studying religion also requires bracketing, at least when describing any such system, questions about the validity of truth claims in order to understand how it is that people see themselves and their relationships with all that is beyond them.⁴

Definitively unpacking and reconstructing what religion *is* lies far beyond what I can accomplish here, for such a project is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis if not impossible altogether. However, I do have a few pointers for how human and environmental geographers could incorporate questions about religion into their scholarship. Such insights are both possible and necessary even without a firm definition given that the creation of the academic category religion has meant certain subjects, ideas, groups, and perspectives are only considered by scholars under the umbrella "religion" (and thus in practical terms neglected altogether). To split such topics from religion would depoliticize these terms and remove them from the historical context so key to their contemporary manifestations. Weber's argument that religion influences historical events--and perceptions of them--cannot be dismissed. The categorization of certain things as religion has had a substantial ramifications and advanced certain political projects that should not be erased by pretending that such categorizations never existed. Religion as defined by leading scholars such as

Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, Mircea Eliade, or even William James has in many ways been a key tool for European colonialism and imperialism. It was especially important for producing narratives that allowed Europeans to justify disciplining and oppressing non-European peoples for the past five centuries. More recently millenarian and dominionist religion doctrines have significantly impacted environment-society relationships, whether by casting doubt on climate science or more directly by inspiring those such as Interior Secretary James G. Watt (1981-1983) to take an aggressive utilitarian approach to valuing the non-human world. Though an unstable and slippery category, religion continues to influence the world and thus geographers cannot ignore it.⁵

To actually do this, however, is quite difficult. Most attempts to develop a theoretically coherent methodology are predominantly concerned with notions of the sacred and processes by which it is produced and/or comes to be known in a particular person, object, or place. While not being easy to define, the sacred is often thought of either as an innate characteristic recognized by people or a produced characteristic imbued onto something for some broader purpose. Focusing solely on the sacred or the divine, however, is insufficient for understanding religion as an academic category, for it entirely misses the point of studying religion.⁶

Many contemporary approaches to studying religion instead focus on the deeper frameworks and cosmologies that produce subjects in relation their world and argue that the sacred--and other perceptions of the world--are only a part of this wider perspective of religion. The study of religion is in many ways a study of how people understand their relationships to the world and to others in practice, the ways they arrive at this understanding, and the resulting consequences from these perspectives. Religious narratives, including the narrative that religion itself exists, contribute to how people identify themselves, allow for the production and projection of value into the world, and influence what people (are meant to) do.⁷

It is the scholar of religion Charles H. Long, however, who provides perhaps the most useful theoretical approach for geographers. To him religion is “orientation in the ultimate sense...how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one’s place in the world.” His definition is deeply geographic in several senses and succinctly captures the breadth of topics religious studies entails. By thinking about relationships to the ultimate, rather than the supernatural or divine Long moves beyond Christo-centric religious studies toward a study of religion centered around how people relate to the material world beyond as well as the transcendent. Understanding the ground religions are built on and see from--what Long means by orientation--is at its core a geographic question. The latter half of Long’s definition, “how one comes to terms...in the world,” is similarly about meaning grounded in material realities, not something esoteric or separate from the world. In geographic terms approaching religion as such is one way to take a place-based approach to meaning, and thus the insights geographers can provide for this process are crucial. Without acknowledging the material conditions from whence religion stems, the study of religion cannot talk about the world in meaningful ways. Religion cannot be understood without applying a geographic lens that appreciates not just the ultimate but the ground from which people come to terms with the world as well as the historical rationale driving institutions and individuals categorized as religious. Geographers are well positioned theoretically to help enrich religious studies at this intersection.⁸

To turn from this theoretical discussion toward a more practical methodology I find it useful to draw on Bruce Lincoln’s method. He suggests a polythetic approach that, while fallible, provides a useful methodology for focusing on the production and imposition of such cosmological perspectives and subjectivities. Merging textual approaches to religion with analysis of lived religion, Lincoln like Long pushes scholars to study where such narratives are grounded and linked to specific practices, especially in quotidian life. He suggests doing this by going to religious communities and examining how they communicate, refine, enforce, and reject such narratives. Scholars are always

limited to discussing particular manifestations rather than *the* religion itself and should thus take cues from primary evidence rather than superimposing expectations derived from external theories, approaching religions honestly in an attempt to understand what they are and do. Religions are all, of course, expressed and known solely through religious subjects rather than in some pure form. While this appears obvious, moving to grounded quotidian methods when studying and discussing religion is both somewhat novel and a crucial reason why face-to-face qualitative methods are so important.⁹

Stopping with Long and Lincoln is not to suggest that theirs' are the only ways to approach religion. However, they provide adequate direction so as to allow geographers some idea about what it would mean to think about religion and some ways they might theoretically position their contributions. Delineating more precise boundaries is a task that can only be accomplished with further work as scholars better ascertain the influence these forces have on the world we all inhabit. Of course, such work probing the boundaries of a category--or perhaps pushing for its further dissolution--is a task geographers, with their focus on borders and the crossing thereof, are well positioned to undertake. While difficult, geographers cannot continue ignoring religion. At its core religious studies are about how people live and see the world. To neglect these perspectives does a serious disservice to the discipline. Moreover, because of the historic use of religion as classification to diminish non-European perspectives about humanity and the world as a whole, failure to consider religion reinscribes this injustice and continues to exclude communities from academic geography.

Compared to religion, defining geography appears to be a far more straightforward task. Definitionally geography must have something to do with how people represent the world--their graphs of the geo. Speaking theoretically the study of geography is thus the study of different ways the world is represented. What the discipline is in practice, however, is again far more opaque than

this simple abstract definition suggests. Many geographers delineate geography by arguing that it is the study of places and spaces. But what does this mean?

Neither term lends itself particularly freely to definition, at least in any way that helps narrow the scope of geographic study. Space is often simplistically thought of as the surface everyone operates on and the backdrop against which history unfolds. Geographers such as Doreen Massey have demonstrated that space is by no means this static but is better understood as a product of dynamic relationships at and across various scales manifesting in any given instance in a particular manner because of some specific convergence of possibilities. Space is constantly reformed and remade as relationships form and break apart in a way that influences and is influenced by what various actors do. Spaces are never closed off from these processes and made static, or from any thing or force--how could it be since closing off fundamentally involves both a renegotiation to exclude something in particular--and it is difficult to imagine any thing or process that is ever tied to some question of space. While Massey has not by any means provided the final definition of space in a manner that cannot be challenged, refined, narrowed, or potentially rejected at some point down the line, such breadth remains the contours of its definitional debate. Using space to define geography, while perhaps useful in presenting some of the questions geographers ask, does not on its own clarify geography enough to understand how scholars could bring religion into the discipline.¹⁰

Unfortunately, place is little better in doing this. Some geographers reject distinguishing place from space at all and argue that place is just a localized dimension of space. Yet even those who define place as distinct and think of it as physical location with a deeply significant meaning for one or more communities have trouble moving beyond all-encompassing space in their attempts to clarify geography. In such perspectives place is quite real and does help provide some specificity for what geographers do--they do not only look at the world on its own but are especially focused on

the places that mean something important. Such an approach to geography clearly opens a door for considering religion--the geographer Nicolas Howe's discussion of place as a confluence of physical materiality with emotional and cosmological with emotional and cosmological perspectives seeks to do just this. Yet geography cannot be equated to place, either theoretically or in practice, and its potential intersection with religion is not just limited to concerns of place either. Moreover, if place is thought of as--at least partially--produced by people, place-making has the potential to reorganize knowledge and relationships with the entire world, not just the specific physical location and thus requires studying far more than just one particular place. Questions of place, even when beginning with an assumption concerning place's distinct character, quickly find themselves drawn back to spatial questions. While not necessarily collapsing the division between place and space, this relationship demonstrates how these concepts are related and thus continue frustrating attempts to theoretically delineate geography in order to figure out where religion might fit.¹¹

An alternate approach is offered by the geographers David Harvey and Neil Smith as they argue that geographers focus on

“Physical, biological and ecological systems are seen in relation to culture, economy, politics, and society, all considered in the context of the organization of human activity over the surface of the globe.”

This definition certainly is more refined just “place and space” is little more help in clarifying geography's scope. The first part--“physical, biological and ecological systems”-- covers the wide range of work undertaken by physical sciences, and it is difficult to find anything not in some way covered by that phrasing. “Culture, economy, politics, and society” presents a similar problem concerning the social sciences and humanities, for it is difficult to imagine any human activity not covered by those terms.¹²

Is it then this third element of their definition, “the organization of human activity over the surface of the globe,” that can help non-geographers understand what the discipline is? At first

glance this seems more promising, but it too raises problems beginning with a question about whether geography should only be concerned with humans. Even when bracketing this statement's anthropocentrism, how do could geographers know what "the context of...human activity" entails if they do not also understand non-human dimensions of the world? Additionally, in light of climate science and the concept of the Anthropocene it is difficult to categorize anything in the world today as independent of human interference. The "surface of the globe" is also of little use for, even when considering something like religion that appears in certain definitions to exist independent of the world, Donna Haraway's reminds scholars to critically reflect on the partiality of their visions given their positionality remains applicable. Moreover, this religious or spiritual thought happens in a particular context itself something that falls within the scope of geography. Concerns with location and the world permeate even discussions of the esoteric or immaterial.¹³

Perhaps the "organization" is the key? Yet organization has this same border problem, for it requires understanding what is organized, what is not organized (leaving open the question of whether anything is not organized), and how it all came to be arranged as such. Relation then? This may be some help for defining geography--it would not be up to geographers to figure out the particulars of any of these systems but rather to understand them in relation to one another. Yet this presupposes that these interactions do not influence or shape each other in any manner that might be missed by focusing on the tree instead of the forest, and so exploring the characteristics and re/creation of any one of these single processes identified by Harvey and Smith is certainly appropriate for geographers. Their definition similarly is of little use in figuring out precisely how religion can (and should) fit into geography or even for understanding geography itself.¹⁴

I could continue through additional definitions, but each tend towards the same breadth and frustrate attempts to locate specific points. Yet this difficulty in delineating what exactly geography considers should be understood as a strength of the discipline. Though its breadth geography can

bring *individuals* who specialize in a particular subfield together with a common language to have a conversation about the world as a whole. While no single person can know every field, if the discipline as a whole is comprised of specialists from particular subfields that intersect with other disciplines across the academy while also trained in a common vernacular it may offer a path for more insightful conversation that synthesizes knowledge and allows for broader insights than are possible through the highly specialized approaches so dominant in the contemporary academy. Indeed, this appears to be the case in much of environment-society geography (and especially political ecology) as techno-scientific concerns about changing physical environments are understood alongside their socio-political causes and effects.¹⁵

There is one common approach for facilitating such a conversation that is especially important for bringing religion into this conversation. Rather than focusing on the world itself as the object of geographic study, geographers can instead concentrate on the *representations* of the world, the manners in which they are created, and the effects such representations themselves have. Discussing the ways different people come to know, think about, and react to the world, regardless of the epistemology or methodology employed to create the initial representation, is a major focus for geography. This is clearly an area where religious knowledges can be brought into the discipline, for whether scholars agree with such geographic imaginaries or not they are important ways the world is understood and produced. Geographers of religion could not only describe these representations and their consequences but compare and critique them to push against disingenuous or harmful portrayals of the world. The benefits such inquiries could offer are astounding and the surface has heretofore been but scratched. Given that so much of the discipline (and academia as a whole) is devoted to changing the world through argumentative writing and rhetoric, religion and the perspectives of those people who actually make up humanity cannot be ignored or left out of geographic narratives.

Geographies of Religion

Further incorporating religion into geography is necessary if the discipline is going to understand how the geo is graphed. Examining the ways people produce meaning for themselves, the world, and their relationships with that beyond themselves, as well as understanding how these meanings are produced and interact with other dimensions of human life are each important tasks for enriching the discipline. While by no means should religion be geographer's sole focus, it is worthy of far more consideration than it has heretofore received. Human geography as a whole has for the most part failed to engage with these possibilities and investigate whether the geographic study of religion would benefit the broader geographic project. Neither Audrey Kobayashi or Karl Zimmerer in their centennial reviews of the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* mention religion, spirituality, or the sacred as having made any imprint into that journal's study of geography. A search of databases of geographic publications, conference presentations, or course listings reveals a similar paucity.¹⁶

Some might argue that there is no need to emphasize religion in particular--after all, cultural geography has enjoyed a resurgence in the twenty-first century and cultural geographers surely would have considered religion if it was an important variable in their work. Indeed, the same process of empty reification identified by Don Mitchell as the core of culture appears similar to Talal Asad's critique of religion and its uncritical application by scholars. Yet while folding the study of religion into cultural geography makes a great deal of theoretical sense, this remains an area for substantial improvement.¹⁷

While this holds for several reasons, I suspect in large part its absence is pragmatic--cultural geographers, for the most part, are not seriously engaging with religion, the sacred, or the secular or participating in ongoing interdisciplinary conversations concerning these topics. As a result, they do not keep up with religious studies literatures and miss the debates about contemporary issues that

make for interesting reading and teaching. The study of religion thus becomes a dated straw man in their minds and a relic of the past. Since cultural geographers have never been part of scholarly conversations around religion, breaking into that conversation requires a great deal of work catching up on literatures before being able to publish in the high-status outlets as required by the contemporary university. This leads to a vicious cycle where, though many geographers consider religion important, they personally do not think they are in position to bring it into the discipline and thus it remains absent.¹⁸

The consequences of this absence are particularly evident in Mitchell's widely-used textbook on cultural geography. Religion does not appear once throughout his text, even when he discusses David Harvey's work concerning the construction of the Basilica du Sacre-Coeur in Paris. While the construction of the basilica was clearly an exercise of the French Republic's power through culture, this happened in a particular form, and a religious one at that. Erasing that perceived as sacrilegious, the Left's martyrs, through constructing and imposing the 'legitimate' sacrality of the Catholic Church was something that effectively undercut the ability of the French Left to turn the site of their former commune into their own monument. Why they built a basilica, rather than an opera house, university, zoo, museum, military monument, or marketplace deserves far more consideration than it receives here. The question of the French Republic's choice to use religion as the way to dominate, rather than some other form, deserves far more consideration than it receives here.¹⁹

While culture very much may be entirely political, such a rebuke of culture's independent existence does not address why or how *specific* manifestations of culture are used in particular circumstances. It is in response to these sorts of questions that Howe can reveal so much about how secularism has been utilized as a tool of oppression and landscape alteration at numerous points in U.S. history. Though there are exceptions, the relative dearth of attention given to religion even as a dimension of culture suggests the need for an emphasis on geography of religion within cultural

geography. Whatever theoretical lens one approaches questions of culture and power through, religion should not be dismissed as readily as it has been by (often secular) geographers.²⁰

In 1990 Lily Kong published the first of her three reviews of religion in geography. Contemporaneous with the spatial turn across the social sciences and humanities, much of this early work focused on how religion influences the re/production of space and performance therein. This scholarship focused predominantly on the poetics of religion, leaving largely dormant questions about the political dimensions of religion and religious actors. This began to change a little over the next decade or so as the influences of religion on landscapes became a central dimension of this research, but for the most part political concerns remain ancillary within the subdiscipline, especially at scales beyond the body.²¹

Though it has begun to change over the past decade, geographies of religion have largely involved isolated topical explorations of whatever topics those few scholars working in this intersection find interesting. Most commonly this scholarship focuses on bodily affect, but over the years a few other topics have come up. Geographers have also highlighted the interplay between religion and biopolitics in quotidian life, for instance in the case of women's veiling in relation to secularism and Islam. Incorporating religion into geography has also led to a greater focus on the materiality of secularism and religion and their effects on landscapes, though at times this work tends toward a descriptive cultural ecology reminiscent of the mid-twentieth century discipline. Others have focused on contemporary intersections between religion and modernity to reveal how the public sphere is changing while also challenging assumptions that actions and spaces not formally denoted as religious are thus profane. One strength of this recent scholarship has been examining the influences modernity has on re/producing place and meaning in quotidian life.²²

Over the past decade geographers of religion have become particularly interested in "grounded theologies" and the ways in which theology and space and/or place co-produce each

other and inform knowledges about their subjects, both in the academy and without. Through applying methodologies of grounded knowledge to theology and religion, geographers have been able to uncover additional ways that religion has influenced behaviors around the globe.

Geographers of religion have also helped reject approaches to religion that focus solely on official or formal practices by delving into quotidian religion. The geographers Justin Wilford and Nicolas Howe each brought these strengths together by examining ways religious worldviews have serious influences in social spaces often imagined as entirely secular to help people find new meanings in their own lives, homes, and communities. This work has been important for challenging notions that ‘areligious’ spaces such as the U.S. public square are deeply and importantly tied to religion (and especially religion as imperial category). Wilford’s ethnography helps show that, far from the distance implied by many theorists between sacred places and the profanity of quotidian life, religion is often deeply woven into the ways people interact with the nominally secular dimensions of the world.²³

There is significant additional room for geographers to engage with religion. This thesis addresses a few of these gaps by typing localized religious practice to a discussion of global religion and religious policy as well as by bringing religion into environment-society geography. This thesis contributes to the ongoing project within geographies of religion to move beyond the formally sacred to understand religion’s influences in other spheres as well as pushing against solely text-based approaches to religion and especially its relationship with the environment. It also helps connect the conversations within geographies of religion to broader environment-society geography, a significant branch of the discipline where the consideration of religion is quite nascent.²⁴

Religion and the Environment

The remainder of this chapter focuses on various ways scholars concerned with the intersection between religion and the environment have begun taking religion seriously in their

scholarship. A coproductive instead of unidirectional approach to understanding religion's relationship with environments and the physical world more broadly is necessary for fully understanding how the world was made as it is today. Rather than focus solely on tangible things it is critical that scholars honestly and openly assess how ideas influence and are influenced by these tangible things. Concern with nature narratives and various nature-culture divides are well known within geography and other environmental studies. Understanding the role religion played (and still plays) in re/producing this division and our current conceptions of nature is critical as understanding these imaginaries through the lens of religion helps explain some of the reasons why this problem, especially in the public square, has proven so intractable. As the historian Michael Rawson suggests in his environmental history of Boston, "ideas about nature, as ethereal as they might seem at first glance, have a very real impact."²⁵

Other benefits stem from bringing religion into nature-society studies, particularly for political ecologists. Political ecologists are concerned with how power shapes environments around the world and especially on underlying processes that skew nature-society relationships often in deeply harmful ways. Since such research within this subdiscipline occurs not for its own ends but instead as part of an attempt to change the world for the better it makes little sense for political ecologists to continue ignoring religion given its importance to so many people's lives. The easiest example of this are religious institutions, which in many cases influence their adherents' behaviors. Historically, various Christian monastic traditions envisioned working the land as a religious duty and part of worship and thus required those involved with the monasteries to control and transform the landscapes surrounding them. During the 11th and 12th centuries, some monasteries were granted their own granges, areas removed from the royal demesne system to materially support and enhance the monastery's productivity, and they came to dominate the production and sale of goods taken from the environment. At various points certain monastic communities and churches were

able to position themselves as independent feudal lords who controlled surrounding communities. They could compel labor and were able to usurp control over choice plots of land from independent smallholders. More recently, groups such as the U.S. de-growth movement draw from neo-monastic traditions in attempts to live lives they see as more in line with how humanity was created to live.²⁶

Though they are an important part, monastic communities are not the only ways that religions influence the ways humans interact with the non-human world. In many places around the world, especially in the Global South, religious communities have played a central role in forest conservation and management. Faith-based organizations have themselves become part of activist movements resisting processes of political-economic reorganization often classified as neoliberalization and key leaders in helping communities craft strategies for looking beyond impending environmental apocalypse. In cases where catastrophe has already occurred the connections that religious groups have had with other communities around the world have been important paths for money and aid to help rebuild communities. In these and many other ways, religious people and organizations are important figures in how people interact with and respond to the world around them.²⁷

Religious actors are important even beyond these obvious cases. Much of this has to do with ways the religious production of meaning can de/legitimate certain environment-society relationships, particularly given that religion and the meanings it produces are often deeply tied to other political concerns. The discursive division between religion and secular politics so common across the academy when thinking about power is a relatively recent Western invention that stems from the Enlightenment's reorganization of the world. Perpetuating such a divide and excluding religion from discussions of power, as political ecology and many other geographers have so often done, is to reinscribe as universal this particular European lens. By ignoring facets of the individual and communal life when discussing power as a result of particular actors categorizing them as

religious misses something key about how people create meaning and interact with the non-human world. Bracketing religion from analysis of power or failing to consider all areas of life when trying to understand how people approach the world around them is a significant oversight. This is even more important given that contemporary civil religion, nationalistic place-making, and the ways certain actors have used religion as a key tool in countering the climate movement are all deeply influential in the world today.²⁸

Often political ecologists and other environment-society scholars appear to dismiss considering religion and other ideas by arguing that “environmental actions, behaviors, or rules systems” create new people, belief systems, and attitudes rather than the other way around. Yet this unidirectional approach to the relationship between actions and belief systems fails to recognize that believing and perceiving are themselves types of actions. Regardless of the theoretical chicken-egg problem of belief-social conditions, beliefs and corporeal action are related through a dynamic coproduction. To (consciously or not) believe something and view the world through a certain lens as a result is an important condition that many not only influence the development of subsequent subjectivities but also the ways in which subsequent corporeal conditions are themselves interpreted and created. Beliefs and ideas more broadly are not only a product of a one-way street but rather an ongoing part of a dynamic process. This is not at all to suggest that belief systems are independent of material environmental conditions or to advance an idealism that argues thinking about the world in a particular way can make it so. Instead, it is to show that the relationship between belief, religion, and the tangible world is far more complex than the relationship between ideas and corporeal reality is often considered to be. To ignore how beliefs and attitudes produce both environmental subjectivities and social conditions is to miss a large part of what it is that contributes to contemporary world, including ongoing nature-society relationships.²⁹

Even when religion does manage to make its way into scholarship about the relationship between humans and the environment it does so in a very limited way. While numerous histories of environmental movements highlight how religious views influenced such movements, scholars have paid far less attention to the influence religious viewpoints have on perceptions of nature-society relationships beyond those already involved in the environmental movement and an often-crude stereotype applied to conservative Evangelical Christians. There remains a serious need to study how people not involved in particular movements come to think about their place in the world, a process that often happens in a quasi-religious manner. Mike Hulme has forcefully advocated such study particularly in regard to addressing climate change, for numerous studies have found that ideologically-driven perceptions often reinforced through religious narratives are often a key factor in both active and especially passive climate denial. Through focusing on white U.S. Catholicism this thesis helps reveal how in practice perspectives about the relationship between humans and the non-human world frustrate action on these and other similar issues.³⁰

Geographers are not the only scholars interested in nature-society relationships and the way religion influences how people construct, change, and perceive them. As is an all too frequent narrative for the discipline geographers are in fact lagging in this conversation. Research into the intersection of religion and the environment began in earnest across the academy following Lynn White Jr.'s argument that blame for contemporary ecological crises lay at the feet of Western Christianity. While the geographer Yi Fu Tuan was one of the earliest critics of White's hypothesis, very few of his disciplinary colleagues then or now have engaged with these ongoing conversations. Pushing against White's oversimplified representation of Chinese nature-society relationships, Tuan argued that Chinese cosmologies legitimated human manipulation of landscape and in several cases catalyzed environmental degradation, particularly through deforestation, well before Christianity showed up. Scholars working with Indigenous traditions have also pushed against narratives that

position religion at odds with the environment, though within Western Christianity White's initial proposition is frequently supported. While concern with Western Christianity provided the genesis for academic concern about religion and the environment, cross-disciplinary interest quickly made it clear that questions about this intersection was applicable in many other contexts as well.³¹

During the late 1990s an interdisciplinary subfield interested in these issues arose under the auspices of the American Academy of Religion. Some of the field's progenitors focused on sparking new religious movements focused around ecological issues as others wanted to descriptively explore religious traditions' intersections with the environment. Though these early scholars each advocated drastically distinct methods for such research, together they made it clear that serious, multifaceted discussion of the relationship between humanity and nature had to include religion as an especially important variable. The steady build of this subfield has thus far culminated in the publication of two anthologies with 78 chapters between them spanning topics from ideologies of consumption to an eco-Kabbalah movement and environmental law to the sixth century Byzantine St. Maximus the Confessor.³²

A key recent focus of this work, and one that this thesis engages with directly, is Bron Taylor's query as to whether there is a green future for religion and, if so, what form it might take. Recent reviews have found drastically conflicting answers to this question, with some suggesting an ongoing greening of certain traditions while others are far less optimistic such greening is underway among those very same communities. This thesis addresses this incongruity through a mixed methods approach to the Catholic Church that demonstrates how the results of studies ascertaining the "greenness" of a tradition significantly depend the choice of method and empirics during research design. The results of this thesis also help illuminate why conflicting answers to questions about the greening of religion crop up.³³ Geographers have begun contributing to these discussions,

though these topics have been largely ancillary to the already small group studying the geographies of religion and as a result geographers have remained marginal to religion and ecology.

The geographer perhaps most closely tied to religion and ecology, Adrian Ivakhiv has discussed at length the ways in which religious actors and concepts of the sacred have influenced (and been influenced by) numerous, varied landscapes and places around the globe. Asking not only what these relationships and their effects are but how they came to be, Ivakhiv reminds scholars that religion's influence on nature-society relationship never happens in a vacuum or against a static backdrop but itself always in spaces constructed and construed through prior social and biophysical processes. Particularly considering the production of nature-as-concept, Ivakhiv has also highlighted the historical role religion has had shaping nature-society relationships.³⁴

Nicolas Howe also adds to this conversation by discussing the centrality of religion to how we know how to interact with the 'secular' world. Moreover, Howe's work highlights how the environmental movement, through its creation of space and especially place in the late 20th century, shut out religion from the conversation--for example Murray Bookchin's reference to neo-paganism and nature religions as "Eco-La-La." Consequences of this division with the environmental movement continue today and are particularly problematic for a climate movement so desperate to penetrate religious communities yet continuously unable to do so.³⁵

Such contributions as those made by Ivakhiv and Howe reinforce the need for geographers not only to understand how we interact with the world but also how we "know" what to do and normatively evaluate our relationships. Despite their work and the theoretical centrality of such questions to geography, the potential for greater integration of geographers into the subfield of religion and ecology remains unfulfilled.

The scholar of religion Anna Peterson is person who political ecologists and others interested in nature-society relationships might find useful for expanding their analyses. Building

from an understanding of all ethics, including environmental ethics, are lived and practical, Peterson argues that discussions (especially in the United States) of the ways people should act in the world are often framed using religious discourse even if they are not formally motivated by religion. As the language people use to speak about the world and their place in it, she urges scholars to take religious discourse and related social movements seriously as part of how people function, including in their relationships with the non-human world. Focusing on what people do and why/how they justify acting as such could be a useful additional lens for scholars outside of formal religious studies. Moreover, given that for better or worse these ethical discourses are happening in particular forms categorized as religious, to meaningfully transform ethics one must engage with these religious discourses and the narratives underlying them. The stories people tell about themselves, their communities, and the world all live in are an important part of how people relate to the world, even in the twenty-first century United States.³⁶

U.S. Christianity, particularly conservative Protestant evangelicalism, has been a leading topic for scholars within this subfield, yet the question of whether Christianity is 'greening' lies unanswered. Regardless of Western Christian denomination, higher levels of religiosity frequently correlated with lower levels of environmental concern. At the same time, scholars working with environmental movements and performing detailed, single site ethnographies have been able to find cases where churches and other Christian organizations have heavily engaged with environmental issues. Why this discord is, however, remains unclear. There remains a great deal more to be done probing into specific Christian denominations and traditions concerning their nature-society dimensions and the ways in which they participate in discourses concerning these issues. This is yet another entry point for geographers into this conversation given Hopkin's (2017) observation that geographies of religion primarily employ the qualitative methods missing from contemporary religion and ecology scholarship.³⁷

Catholicism is little better in terms of specific details about what its adherents think about their relationships with the environment and how this influences their actions. Despite advancements in Catholic theology, the question of whether they will actually reach the laity is entirely unclear, though the few studies that have been taken suggest that this is not the case. Yet no matter how thorough or radical this theology is, if it does not reach the laity and influence their behavior it will have little effect in addressing the serious problems that face the world today. This is the central empirical gap that this thesis responds to, for though an ecological Church can easily be imagined, whether it is actually being built is another--far more important--matter entirely.³⁸

This does not mean theology is not important. However, the discussion of what adherents ought to do that often dominates religion and ecology literatures should not be conflated with descriptive analyses of what people affiliated with that tradition are doing. If we are to discuss what religious perspectives concerning environment-society relationships exist and their consequences, we cannot start without understanding what is going on in Catholicism today. Though theological debates may be interesting, they pragmatically matter very little without knowledge of where and when engagement with already extant theology has occurred, if it has at all. It is also for this reason that throughout this thesis I present multiple, often conflicting positions, as equally “Catholic.” Concern with actions rather than abstract theoretical debates drives this thesis.

There is very little academic literature that addresses the environmental behaviors of Catholics. This is a particularly problematic oversight given the voluminous productivity of scholars writing in attempts to convince U.S. Catholics to care about environmental issues, for there is no data about whether this massive undertaking is actually having any effect on what people are doing. Such paucity is even more troubling as Catholics comprise just under one-quarter of the U.S. population (and one-seventh globally) and are highly influential in U.S. and global politics.³⁹

In 2014, the American Academy of Religion commissioned the Public Religion Research Institute to survey the broad contours of how religious adherents were reacting to climate change across the United States. While this survey was conducted prior to *Laudato Si*'s promulgation, its findings mirror internal surveys conducted by the Catholic Church's U.S. research arm since then. One of the largest divisions they found was between self-described Hispanic Catholics, who were among the most likely to have heard about the intersection of Catholicism and environmental issues, and non-Hispanic white Catholics, who were comparable to Christian evangelicals in their apathy concerning environmental change. Around 40% of white Catholics indicated that they supported purely utilitarian approaches to the environment, and just 1-in-5 said their clerical leadership discussed environmental matters in any fashion. Unpacking the reasons behind this racialized division is a project larger than what this thesis can do by itself, but by incorporating the voices of the Diocese of Syracuse's almost entirely white clergy this thesis adds important information to this discussion.⁴⁰

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change (now the Catholic Climate Covenant) was formed in 2006 by several national bishops' conferences, but initially only six of 210 U.S. dioceses joined and little movement on these issues has occurred. Even today four years after Francis's encyclical, only 51 arch/dioceses have signed the covenant and key leaders such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Houston and Detroit remain notably absent. Of note for this thesis, Syracuse is part of the majority that has not yet signed. Moreover, even when they do sign diocesan environmental messages are often dominated by concern for the poor and eliminating poverty. The environment itself is often seen as a less immediate concern even when it is explicitly part of the conversation. With many different projects under their purview today, the U.S. bishops are not seriously engaging with environmental topics or spending their limited political influence on them.⁴¹

Over the past few years, several Catholic organizations in the United States have attempted to increase awareness of climate change and other environment-society issues among Catholics. In the early 2010s Catholic Climate Covenant sent “climate ambassadors” to churches around the United States and received pledges from thousands of individuals and institutions to care for creation and act against climate change. Yet the effect of all this has had on changing the hearts and minds of adherents is unclear, as there is still general resistance among the laity, especially white Catholics, to any sort of climate or environmental messaging, even when it comes from the Church.⁴²

Laudato Si' itself sparked a great deal of interest and scholarship concerning Catholic perspectives on the relationship between humans and the environment, though much of that too was philosophical or theological rather than qualitative work. A couple of broad quantitative studies sought to understand the encyclical's immediate impact. They found that *Laudato Si'* had little influence on Catholics after its release and was not widely read, though it did spark discontent among portions of the laity. This thesis expands on these studies of the laity to show that beyond failing to reach people in the pews, these messages from the hierarchy often fail to reach the parish, pulpit, or frequently even the priest in any meaningful way. Though whether this is causally related to its failure to inspire the laity to change is beyond what this thesis can conclude, my results suggest that parochial clergy were not that dissimilar from the laity in their disengagement with *Laudato Si'*.⁴³

Another key driver of this thesis was the question why, despite numerous pro-environment statements from religious leaders and lay activists, there remain few environmental movements within most religious traditions. This leads to the correlated question of whether locally-engaged religious leaders might be able to begin such movements and, if so, what barriers are preventing them from doing so. The sociologist Andrew Szasz has begun probing this question, finding that Christian clergy were in general reluctant to address environmental topics as they feared alienating

parishioners. This thesis extends beyond his initial foray to suggest other intersecting barriers within Catholicism, including especially clerical reluctance due to their self-perceived lack of the knowledge necessary to facilitate such discussions. This lack of knowledge about ecological teaching and environmental science is likely a far more substantial barrier to clerical action than has heretofore been realized. The disconnect between parochial clergy and environmental thought, Catholic or otherwise, and the surprise with which many clergy reacted to *Landato Si*'s publication raises further questions about the limitations of the Catholic hierarchy's ability to influence Catholics on any issue. As concern about the consequences of environmental and especially climate change increases, it will be interesting to see if this changes. Understanding how global institutions are (and are not) able to influence behaviors is critical to understanding not just contemporary environment-society relationships but the wider world. Environmental geography should engage with religion if it is to speak about the breadth of how people understand and imagine the world, and this thesis is a modest step toward that integration. Religion has had a major historical role in and continues to influence the lives of countless people around the globe.⁴⁴

I want to end this chapter by returning to the initial question about my own positionality. I am not a Catholic by any means, and this is not an insider's apologetic, a story meant to proselytize, or a theological treatise. Yet regardless of one's own thoughts about religion, when faced with a global challenge such as climate change it does not make any sense to write the Church or such global institution out of the narrative. In this thesis I stand neither here nor there on issues of theological truth or Christianity but am instead driven by a concern about environmental degradation and am searching for ways to address these problems. This thesis is a story of how contemporary attempts to 'green' the Catholic Church play out among the clergy who administer the physical churches that comprise the Catholic Church. While it may no longer have the power it once did this does not mean Catholicism has none. This thesis tries to understand the various, at times

conflicting, ways Catholicism influences how people think about and interact with the world we all live in. Religion and Catholicism in particular cannot be ignored.

¹ The perspective that religion and religions were declining came to be known as the “secularization thesis.” For further discussion see James Proctor, “Introduction: Theorizing and Studying Religion,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 165–168; Nicolas Howe, “Secular Iconoclasm: Purifying, Privatizing, and Profaning Public Faith,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 10, no. 6 (2009): 639–656; or Peter Hopkins, Lily Kong, and Elizabeth Olson, *Religion and Place: Landscape, Politics, and Piety*, London: Springer, 2013, 5–7. There are of course geographers who have engaged with religion—Yi-Fu Tuan is one key example—but by and large this work remains marginal to the discipline and is rarely discussed by scholars not already involved in this subfield.

² For further discussion of the history of religion in geography, see David Livingstone, “Natural Theology and Neo-Lamarckism: The Changing Context of Nineteenth-Century Geography in the United States and Great Britain,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74, no. 1 (1984): 9–28; Gregory J. Levine, “On the Geography of Religion,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 11, no. 4 (1986): 428–440; Lily Kong, “Geography and Religion: Trends and Prospects,” *Progress in Human Geography* 14, no. 3 (1990): 355–371; Chris Park, *Sacred Worlds: An Introduction to Geography and Religion*, London: Routledge, 1994; or Julian Holloway and Oliver Valins. “Editorial: Placing Religion and Spirituality in Geography,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 3, no. 1 (2002): 5–9. For particular moments in geography’s history when religion cropped up, see Pierre Deffontaines, *Geographie et Religions*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1948; David E. Sopher, *Geography of Religions*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967; or Roger W. Stump, *The Geography of Religion: Faith, Place, and Space*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, 219.

⁴ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; Smith, Jonathan Z. *Religion, Religions, Religious. Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Edited by Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 269–284; and Johnson, Sylvester A. *On Religious Matters. African American Religions, 1500–2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 56–83. See also David Chidester, “Colonialism and Religion,” *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no. 1 (2013): 87–94.

⁵ For the discussion of Weber and religion, see Bron Taylor, Van Wieren, Gretel and Bernard D. Zaleha The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part Two): Assessing the Data from Lynn White, Jr, to Pope Francis,” *Journal of the Society of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2016b): 329. Also, see Asad, 1993; Adrian Ivakhiv, “Toward a Geography of ‘Religion’: Mapping the Distribution of an Unstable Signifier.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 169–175; Robert Orsi, *Thinking About Religion, Belief, and Politics. Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012; and Johnson, 2015.

⁶ David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995; J.Z. Smith, 1998; and Bron Taylor, “Introduction.” In *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, edited by Bron Taylor, (pp. vii–xxii). New York: Continuum, 2007.

⁷ For a discussion of the sacred approaches to studying religion, see Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim, “Introduction: The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology,” *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (2001): 1–22; Lily Kong, “Mapping ‘New’ Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity,” *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 2 (2001): 211–233; Webb Keane, “The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute N.S.*, (2008): 110–127. For discussions of religious narratives see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003; Benedikt Korf, “Geography and Benedict XVI,” *Area* 38, no. 3 (2006): 326–329; Johnson, 2015; and Calum Sutherland, “Theography: Subject, Theology, and Praxis in Geographies of Religion,” *Progress in Human Geography*, 41, no. 3 (2017): 321–323. Additionally, see Asad, 1993 and J.Z. Smith, 1998.

⁸ Long, Charles H. *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 7.

⁹ Lincoln, Bruce. *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion after September 11*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, 1–18; also see Peter Hopkins, “Religion,” In *The International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth*,

Environment, and Technology, (Pp.5731-5735), edited by Douglas Richardson, Noel Castree, Michael F. Goodchild, Audrey Kobayashi, Weidong Liu, and Richard A. Marston. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

Lincoln himself also requires working with a formal institution as a distinct step from approaching a religious community. However, requiring a specific institution charged with religious tasks and maintenance maintains a fallaciously limited definition of religion that requires a formal institution that leaves out many important foci for contemporary scholars of religion (Asad, 2003; Taylor, 2010). Consequently, I have collapsed Lincoln's institutional concern into his broader focus on communities.

¹⁰ Doreen Massey, *For Space*, London: SAGE, 2005, 9-12. For an alternative approach to space, see Marcus Doel, "A Hundred Thousand Lines of Flight: A Machinic Introduction to the Nomad Thought and Scrumpled Geography of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari," *Environmental and Planning D: Society and Space* 14 (1996): 421-439. For discussion of religion and space in particular, see Kim Knott, "Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion," *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1102-1116.

¹¹ David Featherstone, "Spatial Relations and the Materialities of Political Conflict: The Construction of Entangled Political Identities in the London and Newcastle Port Strikes of 1768," *Geoforum* 35, no. 6 (2004): 701-711; Massey, 2005, 138-141; and Nicolas Howe, *Landscapes of the Secular*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, especially pp. 3-11.

¹² David Harvey and Neil Smith, "Geography: From Capitals to Capital." In *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship and American Campuses*, edited by Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff, New York: McGraw Hill, 1982, 115. For further discussion of how culture fits into this schema, see Don Mitchell, "There's No Such Thing As Culture: Towards a Reconceptualization of the Idea of Culture in Geography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 1 (1995): 102-116.

¹³ Ibid. See also Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 584-587. For an overview of the Anthropocene, see McNeill and Engelke, 2014.

¹⁴ Harvey and Smith, 1982.

¹⁵ This is not to say that geography meets its theoretical charge, for there are still sharp divides between different branches of geography. Returning to a more unified approach is a massive undertaking that will require a great deal of effort to actually succeed. This is, however, geography's theoretical project.

¹⁶ For recent discussions of religion in geography, see Lily Kong, "Global Shifts, Theoretical Shifts: Changing Geographies of Religion," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 755-776 or Nadia Bartolini, Robert Chris, Sarah MacKian, and Steve Pile. "The Place of Spirit: Modernity and the Geographies of Spirituality," *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no. 3 (2017): 338-354. For the centenary issue of the *Annals* see Audrey Kobayashi, "Region: 100 Years of Human Geography." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 100, no. 5 (2010): 1095-1106. And Karl S. Zimmerer, "Retrospective on Nature-Society Geography: Tracing Trajectories (1911-2010) and Reflecting on Translations." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 100, no. 5 (2010): 1076-1094.

¹⁷ Asad, 1993 and Mitchell, 1995. While many geographers of religion consider themselves cultural geographers, even in more recent anthologies of the subdiscipline religion remains highly marginal—for instance, in Nuala C. Johnson, Richard H. Schein, and Jamie Winders, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography*, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell., 2013, religion is only indexed in four sections throughout a book with over 500 pages of text and there is no chapter where one interested in religion could turn to in order to ascertain its dimensions in geography.

¹⁸ Justin Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions: The Postsuburban Transformation of American Evangelicalism*. New York: New York: University Press, 2012 and Claire Dwyer, "Why Does Religion Matter for Cultural Geographers?" *Social & Cultural Geography* 17, no. 6 (2016): 758-762.

¹⁹ Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, 109-114. See also David Harvey, "Monument and Myth." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69, no. 3 (1979): 362-381. ²⁰ Dwyer, 2016 and Nicolas Howe, *Landscapes of the Secular*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

²¹ For discussions of space, religion, and geography see Kong, 1990, 2001; Chidester and Linenthal, 1995; and Knott, 2008. For additional discussions of geographies of religion in the 1980s and 1990s see Adrian Cooper, "New Directions in the Geography of Religion," *Area* 24, no. 2 (1992): 123-129; Park, 1994; Holloway and Valins, 2002; Robert H. Stoddard and Carolyn V. Prorok, "Geography of Religion and Belief Systems" In *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, edited by Cort J. Willmott and Gary Gaile, 759-767. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; and Stump, 2008.

²² For general discussions about geographies of religion since 2000, see Proctor, 2006; Anne Buttimer, “Afterword: Reflections of Geography, Religion, and Belief Systems,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 197–202; Ethan Yorgasen and Veronica della Dora, “Editorial: Geography, Religion, and Emerging Paradigms: Problematizing the Dialogue,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 10, no. 6 (2009): 629–637; Kong, 2010; and Hopkins, 2017. For discussions of the biopolitics of geographies of religion, see Stump (2008), 239–249; Banu Gökarkınel and Anna J. Secor, “New Transnational Geographies of Islamism, Capitalism, and Subjectivity: The Veiling-Fashion Industry in Turkey,” *Area* 41, no. 1 (2009): 6–18; or David Ley and Justin K.H. Tse, “Homo religiosus? Religion and immigrant subjectivities,” In *Religion and Place: Landscape, Politics, and Piety*, edited by L. Kong, Hopkins P. and Olson, and E., 149–165. New York: Springer, 2013. For an example of the remnants of cultural ecology see Wilbur Zelinsky, “The Uniqueness of the American Religious Landscape,” *The Geographical Review* 91, no. 3 (2001): 565–585. Concerning religion, secularism, and the public square see Howe, 2009; Justin Wilford, “Sacred Archipelagos: Geographies of Secularization,” *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 3 (2010): 328–348; Wilford, 2012; Howe, 2016; and Bartolini et al., 2017.

²³ For discussions of geography and theology, see Catherine Brace, Adrian Bailey, Sean Carter, David C. Harvey, and Nicola Thomas, eds. *Emerging Geographies of Belief*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, especially pp. 30–52; Orlando Woods, “The Geographies of Religious Conversion,” *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 4 (2012): 440–456; Justin K.H. Tse, “Grounded Theologies: ‘Religion’ and the ‘Secular’ in Human Geography,” *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no. 2 (2014): 201–220; and Sutherland, 2017. For discussions of geography and quotidian religion see Holloway and Valins, 2002 or Kong, 2010. See also Wilford (2012) and Howe (2016) for detailed discussions of religion and landscapes. Though Talal Asad has not been as influential in geography as he has in other disciplines, Wilford and Howe both build off of his insights into the relationship between power and religion-as-category to reveal the continued influences of religion on the U.S. public square despite popular notions that religion is generally separate from politics in the United States.

²⁴ See Stump, 2008; Kong, 2010; and Hopkins, 2017. This lack of engagement is not a universal rule (for instance, see Elizabeth Olson, “Development, Transnational Religion, and the Power of Ideas in the High Provinces of Cusco, Peru,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 38, no. 5 (2006): 885–902.) but by far the majority of geographers of religion do not engage with political ecology or environmental geography broadly defined.

²⁵ Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010, 17.

²⁶ For a broad introduction to political ecology see Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology*, 2nd ed. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012 or Gavin Bridge, James McCarthy, and Tom Perreault. “Editors’ Introduction.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, edited by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy, 3–18. London: Routledge, 2015. For discussions of monasticism see Isabel Alfonso, “Cistercians and Feudalism,” *Past & Present* 133 (1991): 3–30; C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2015; and Amy C. Hall, “Neo-Monastics in North Carolina: De-Growth and a Theology of Enough,” *Journal of Political Ecology* 24, no. 1 (2017): 543–565.

²⁷ For discussions of religious communities and environmental conservation/management see Bruce A. Byers, Robert N. Cunliffe, and Andrew T. Hudak, “Linking the Conservation of Culture and Nature: A Case Study of Sacred Forests in Zimbabwe,” *Human Ecology* 29, no. 2 (2001): 187–218; Reed L. Wadley and Carol J. Pierce Colfer. “Sacred Forest, Hunting, and Conservation in West Kalimantan, Indonesia.” *Human Ecology* 32, no. 3 (2004): 313–38; Jodi S. Brandt, Van Butsic, Benjamin Schwab, Tobias Kuemmerle, and Volker C. Radeloff, “The Relative Effectiveness of Protected Areas, a Logging Ban, and Sacred Areas for Old-Growth Forest Protection in Southwest China,” *Biological Conservation* 181 (2015): 1–8; and Carrie L. Woods, Catherine L. Cardelús, Peter Scull, Alemayehu Wassie, Mabel Baez, and Peter Klepeis. “Stone Walls and Sacred Forest Conservation in Ethiopia.” *Biodiversity and Conservation* 26, no. 1 (2017): 209–21. For discussions of religion and social movements see Andrew McGregor, “Geographies of Religion and Development: Rebuilding Sacred Spaces in Aceh, Indonesia, after the Tsunami,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 42, no. 3 (2010): 729–46; Andrew Williams, Paul Cloke, and Samuel Thomas. “Co-Constituting Neoliberalism: Faith-Based Organisations, Co-Option, and Resistance in the UK.” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 44, no. 6 (2012): 1479–1501; and Carl Cassegård and Håkan Thörn, “Toward a Postapocalyptic Environmentalism? Responses to Loss and Visions of the Future in Climate Activism,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 4 (2018): 561–78.

²⁸ See Asad, 1993 for one important take on the relationship between religion and power.

²⁹ See Robbins, 2012, 23 for a common political ecological approach to ideas and beliefs. For a discussion about the materiality of ideas see Miyazaki, Hirokazu, “The Materiality of Finance Theory,” in *Materiality*, edited by Daniel Miller, 165–182. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005. See also Gabriela Valdivia, “Eco-

Governmentality,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, edited by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy, 473-474. London: Routledge, 2015.

³⁰ Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 142-179, and “(Still). Disagreeing About Climate Change: Which Way Forward?” *Zygon* 50, no. 4 (2015): 893-905. For discussions of religion in U.S. environmental movements see Mark R. Stoll, “Green versus Green: Religion, Ethics, and the Bookchin-Foreman Dispute.” *Environmental History* 6, no. 3 (2001): 412-427; Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010; Evan Berry, “Religion, Environmentalism, and Environmental Religion in America,” *Religion Compass* 7, no. 10 (2013): 454-466; Evan Berry, “Social Science Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change,” *Religious Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (2016): 77-85; and Mark R. Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. For discussions of the religious characteristics of environmentalism, see Leslie Sponsel, *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012; Lucas F. Johnson, “Sustainability as a Global Faith? The Religion Dimensions of Sustainability and Personal Risk,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (2013): 47-69; and John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion*, Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014.

³¹ Lynn White, Jr., “Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207 and Yi-Fu Tuan, “Discrepancies Between Environmental Attitude and Behavior: Examples From Europe and China,” *The Canadian Geographer* 12, no. 3 (1968): 176-191. For a recent review of this debate, see Bron Taylor, Gretel van Wieren and Bernard D. Zaleha, “Lynn White Jr. and the Greening-of-Religion Hypothesis,” *Conservation Biology* 30, no. 5 (2016a): 1000-1009 and Taylor, van Wieren, and Zaleha, 2016b.

³² These recent anthologies are Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Grim, John, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, London: Routledge, 2017 and John Hart, ed, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017. For a history of the early subfield see Tucker and Grim, 2001 and Sponsel, 2012. For discussions of various methodological approaches within this subfield see Roger S. Gottlieb, “Religious Environmentalism: What It Is, Where It’s Heading and Why We Should Be Going in the Same Direction,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2007): 81-91; Willis Jenkins, “Review: Religion and Ecology: A Review Essay on the Field,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 1 (2009): 187-197; Joseph Witt, Lucas Johnston, and Taylor, and Bron. “Exploring Religion, Nature, and Culture (Continued): The Growing Field, Society, and Journal.” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 5, no. 1 (2011): 8-17; and Berry, 2013.

³³ Taylor, 2004, 2010. For various reviews that have found this incongruity see Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “Climate Change and Religion as Global Phenomena: Summing Up and Directions for Further Research,” in *How the World’s Religions Are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, 297-315, New York: Routledge, 2014; Taylor, van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016a, 2016b; Matthew T. Riley, “Wicked Problem of Climate Change: Christianity and Environmental Ethics Fifty Years after ‘Historical Roots,’” *Worldviews* 21 (2017): 61-86; and Willis Jenkins, Evan Berry, and Luke B. Kreider, “Religion and Climate Change,” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 43, no. 9 (2018): 1-24. Kong, 2010 has suggested that geographers move deeper into questions of religion and the environment, but heretofore such engagement has been limited.

³⁴ For a broad review of Ivakhiv’s contributions to religion and ecology as a geographer see Adrian Ivakhiv, “Orchestrating Sacred Space: Beyond the ‘Social Construction’ of Nature,” *Ecotheology* 8, no. 1 (2003): 11-29; “Religion, Nature and Culture: Theorizing the Field.” *Journal of the Society of Religion, Nature, and Culture* (2007): 47-57; “Religion (Re-)Turns in the Wake of Global Nature,” in *Religion: Intersections Shaping Society and the Environment*, edited by Catherine M. Tucker, 213-230, Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2012; and “Nature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Stausberg and Stephen Engler, 401-415, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. For an alternative geographic discussion of religion and ecology, see Proctor, 2006.

³⁵ Howe, 2016, 127. For discussions of Bookchin and “Eco-La-La,” see Stoll, 2001, 412-414. For more recent discussions of religion and environmental movements see Hulme, 2009, 2015; Johnson, 2013; Stephen Ellingson, *To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016; and Maria Nita, *Praying and Campaigning with Environmental Christians: Green Religion and the Climate Movement*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

³⁶ Anna L. Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001, 5-8, 17-22.

³⁷ For reviews touching on the “greening” of Christianity see Willis Jenkins and Christopher K. Chapple, “Religion and Environment,” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36 (2011): 441–463; Matthew B. Arbuckle and David M. Koninsky, “The Role of Religion in Environmental Attitudes,” *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 5 (2015): 1244–1263; Taylor, van Wieren, and Zaleha, 2016a, 2016b; and David M. Koninsky, “The Greening of Christianity? A Study of Environmental Attitudes over Time,” *Environmental Politics* 27, no. 2 (2018): 267–291. For discussions of recent engagement by religious communities with environmental movements see Ellingson, 2016 and Amanda J. Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.

Notwithstanding the sociologist Robert Wuthnow’s work collapsing the broad distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism in the United States, such a line is often drawn two by scholars concerned with religion and the environment (Wuthnow, 2013; Taylor, van Wieren, and Zaleha, 2016b). While this thesis methodologically is restricted to the Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, its results suggest further research in the future to address whether a dissolution of this border with respect to ecological theologies—as indicated by the influence Matthew Fox and other theologians have had across various Christian traditions—is warranted. For a dated but still applicable discussion of method in religion and ecology see James Proctor and Evan Berry. In *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, edited by Bron Taylor, 1572–1575. London: Continuum, 2005.

³⁸ Jame Schaefer, ed. *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2011 and “Motivated for Action and Collaboration: The Abrahamic Religions and Climate Change,” *Geosciences* 31, no. 6 (2016): 1–19.

³⁹ For discussions of transformations in U.S. Catholicism see Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004; and J. Patrick Hornbeck II, “Counting Catholics in the United States of America,” *American Catholic Studies* 123, no. 4 (2012): 1–21. If specifically concerned with the politics of U.S. Catholics see Timothy Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991 or Andrew Szasz, “Novel Framings Create New, Unexpected Allies for Climate Activism.” In *Reframing Climate Change: Constructing Ecological Geopolitics*, edited by Suzanne O’Lear and Simon Dalby, 150–170. New York: Routledge, 2015. For discussions about Catholic thought and the environment, see Schaefer, 2011; Michael Agliardo, “The U.S. Catholic Response to Climate Change.” In *How the World’s Religions Are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, 174–192. New York: Routledge, 2014; and William T. Cavanagh ed, *Fragile World: Ecology and The Church*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.

⁴⁰ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, “Believers, Sympathizers, and Skeptics: Why Americans Are Conflicted about Climate Change, Environmental Policy, and Science,” *Findings from the PRRI/AAR Religion, Values, and Climate Change Survey*, Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute/American Academy of Religion, 2014 and Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) 2016: Attitudes about Climate Change*, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016a.

⁴¹ Keith David Warner, “The Greening of American Catholicism: Identity, Conversion, and Continuity.” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 18, no. 1 (2008): 113–142; Agliardo, 2014; Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “Religion and Climate Change: Varieties in Viewpoints and Practices,” *WIRES Clim Change* 5 (2014): 261–279; Cavanagh, 2018, 11–32; Catholic Climate Covenant. *U.S. Catholic Climate Declaration*, 2019.

⁴² Szasz, 2015, though there have also not been studies to confirm whether or not the minimal effect Szasz observed has actually resulted in changes or was just a response to interview questions—more longitudinal work is needed on this front. Also see CARA, 2016a and CCC, 2019.

⁴³ CARA, 2016a; Lynn Vincentnathan, S. Georg Vincentnathan, and Nathan Smith. “Catholics and Climate Change Skepticism.” *Worldviews* 20 (2016): 125–149; and Nan Li, Joseph Hilgard, Dietram A. Scheufele, Kenneth M. Winneg, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. “Cross-Pressuring Conservative Catholics? Effects of Pope Francis’ Encyclical on the U.S. Public Opinion on Climate Change.” *Climate Change* 139, no. 3–4 (2016): 367–380.

⁴⁴ Szasz, 2015.

Chapter 2—Drawing the Blueprints: Paul VI to Benedict XVI

It is one thing to establish the importance of studying the Catholic Church's influences on nature-society relationships but quite another to have that conversation. Founded during the early Roman Empire and currently claiming well over one billion adherents around the globe, the Catholic Church has a long, multifaceted history no matter how you approach it. Yet one element stands out from the rest as perhaps the key to what it might mean to speak about the Church's perspective on any topic, including the environment.

I am talking of course about the papacy. Since the earliest days of the Church, the Bishop of Rome has served as the spiritual authority for those within the Church and many without. Claiming direct descent from St. Peter, the pope also holds among his many titles Vicar of Christ and Supreme Pontiff and is understood by Catholics to be God's choice to lead the Church and help spread the truth of the Gospel so all can receive salvation at the end of days. Serving until death (or the rare voluntary resignation), the pope is responsible for appointing all other Catholic bishops and leaders of religious orders, holds most of Catholicism's teaching authority, resolves doctrinal and legal disputes, decides if and when to legitimize or ban certain preaching or writing, can excommunicate (suspend from Catholic life) those who he chooses, appoints and removes administrators at the heart of the Catholic bureaucracy (the Curia), and shapes the Church even after his reign ends by selecting those who will elect his successor from their midst. He has the final say on matters within the Church, and all ordained Catholics and/or members of religious orders swear vows of obedience to their superiors that ultimately lead to his seat in Rome. When it comes to understanding Catholicism, you must know where the pope is on a given topic if you are going to talk about anything at all. Perhaps in this case as in no other, the buck stops with him.¹

Despite its importance, figuring out the papal position on any issue can be quite tricky. There have been 266 popes (plus quite a few antipopes) over the past two thousand years. Not all of

them have gotten along or agreed at all, and popes frequently reverse their predecessors on matters both mundane and spiritual. Thus to maintain continuity in papal teaching, the pope is assisted in teaching and leading Catholicism by the community of bishops as a whole. Together they form the Magisterium, or teaching authority of the Church, and help stabilize its trajectory and message across history. Fortunately for this thesis it is only recently that this body has developed an explicit interest in the relationships between humans, the environment, and Catholic theology. However, the rapid growth of Catholic thought concerning the relationship between humans and the environment has led many commentators to perceive the Catholic Church as a major ally struggling against environmental and climatic degradation.²

This concern has emerged over the past fifty or so years, but in that relatively short time has grown into a key focus for recent papacies. This subset of papal teaching, I argue, should be considered distinctly as Catholic environmental teaching. This teaching did not appear from a vacuum but originated from a far older approach known as Catholic social teaching (CST). This chapter thus begins with a brief overview of key principles of CST before moving into a discussion of key statements concerning the relationship between humans and the environment by Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, who together reigned from 1963 to 2013 (save for John Paul I's thirty-three-day reign in 1978). This chapter also engages several key Church documents produced by bishops' conferences around the world to support their teaching, both as an exercise of their own magisterial authority and to spark greater concern among other bishops around the world.

Both this chapter and the one following are primarily meant to allow an academic audience unfamiliar with Catholic thought an entry point into the empirical analysis that comprises the latter half of this thesis. It makes little sense to discuss the results of an analysis Catholic environmental teaching's influence to an academic audience, both in geography and beyond, unfamiliar with what it is that is being evaluated. Though initially conceived of with such an academic audience in mind, in

light of the results discussed later in this thesis I also wrote these chapters as a way for non-academics inspired by *Laudato Si'* but unsure how to raise the topic an entry point into the deeper history of Catholic environmental teaching. In both senses, these chapters are principally aimed at framing the empirical sections of this thesis for an unfamiliar but interested audience.

What is Catholic Social Teaching?

Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, translated into English as "Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor," marks as the beginning of papal Catholic social teaching. Moving away from Pius IX's outright rejection of anything resembling modernist thought, Leo XIII argued that the Church needed a way to speak and act in opposition to the abhorrent conditions faced by the working class in the late 19th century. For the next several decades concern about the rights of workers to organize in pursuit of better pay and working conditions became the major focus for Catholic attempts to change social life. Though often opposed by traditionalist and/or politically conservative Catholic leaders, economic justice based on the intrinsic value of each individual person has remained the cornerstone of Catholic social thought since.³

John XXIII's reign (1958-1963) and his organization of the Second Vatican Council (aka Vatican II, 1962-1965) was a paradigm shift for Catholic social teaching. During this period papal leadership began to formally acknowledge that the economic problems and especially poverty the Church opposed were inseparable from secular politics. It was at this point the principle that the Church should react to the "signs of the times" and engage directly with global politics and contemporary events entered papal teaching. Again resisted by traditionalists, Catholic social teaching broadened its scope to include politics as a legitimate area for Catholic critique. This move to formally tie CST to the contemporary world cracked open the door for future papal concerns about the environment and climate change in particular.⁴

Before delving into this environmental expansion, however, it is important to understand the general principles that ground Catholic social teaching. Typically CST is divided into seven distinct topics (Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community, and Participation; [Human] Rights and Responsibilities; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity; Care for God's Creation), though all are deeply interconnected and the latter six are understood as all predicated on the first. Near his papacy's end John Paul II instructed the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to clarify in a single volume what CST actually is. The results of their efforts were published in 2004 as the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (hereafter *Compendium*), which remains the key reference for anyone looking to understand Catholic social teaching today. It argues that the heart of CST is a realization that the Church must use the gospel message to transform material social realities in the world today to advance “salvation, love, justice, and peace.” Conversely, not trying to change the world for the better is a dereliction of the duty each Catholic has during their life.⁵

The *Compendium* begins by explaining what the Church means by the “dignity of the human person” and how the irreducible value of every individual human person is the basis of all Catholic social thought. They argue this stems directly from the Church's recognition of the image of God in every person. Because of this every person is always directly related to God and every other person who similarly bears the image of God, and all people are meant to strengthen these relationships over their lives. However, God is definitionally not part of the world within Catholic thought and thus assessing the character of one's relationships with God directly is practically an impossible task. Thus it is primarily through their relationships with other people that any individual person can demonstrate their relationship to God. No one can reach their full potential and draw close to God without such social relationships. Interhuman relationships are unique in this respect, for they are far closer to God than any other creature. Yet this also means that every single interpersonal

relationship must always aim to advance goodness, for to not do so neglects the irreducible value of each person and distances oneself from God, Catholicism's very definition of sin. To abuse interpersonal relationships is to violate divine commands of love and peace, yet humanity constantly does this. The Church understands this as the font of all violence and suffering. CST seeks to show people how to repair these relationships and allow people to draw closer to God by drawing closer to each other.⁶

The Pontifical Council suggests deploying the "common good," or the need for social relationships to consider all people around the world rather than just a certain subset, as the way to evaluate whether and how any particular relationship should change. Pragmatically they define the common good as peace; a sound State and judiciary; environmental protection; the provision of food, housing, work, and education; access to culture, transportation, and basic healthcare; and freedom of communication, expression, and religion. Relationships that advance these aims are good, while those that do not and especially those that hinder their implementation are bad. Catholic social teaching argues that every person and society as a whole should strive to make each of these goals a reality.⁷

To further help those seeking to change society for the better the Church developed the principle of the "universal destination of goods," or the idea that all that exists in the world is meant to help everyone and not just a select few. The Pontifical Council is at pains to point out that by this they do not mean that private property rights should not exist, but merely that no person should be denied the material support necessary to live a full rewarding life and draw closer to God. Private property rights, understood by the Church as ownership following improvement of some particular thing, are acceptable inasmuch as they support broader, immaterial human development, alternatively called authentic. Yet in the not-uncommon case when private property detracts from the many for the sake of a few it no longer is morally acceptable within Catholic thought and such

property rights should be dismantled. As an example, the *Compendium* focuses on land distribution. They argue that while private property rights can help protect against the degradation of environmental and social services in a case of state failure, these same rights are no longer acceptable if the land is abused and its utility is diminished for others. The Pontifical Council also applies this idea of universal destination to include technology and scientific research, rejecting individual ownership of such knowledge. Profit from research, knowledge, or anything else in the created world is entirely unacceptable if it leads to human suffering.⁸

In making this principle of universal destination applicable for policy leaders, the Church developed the notion of a “preferential option for the poor” they argue should drive policy decisions and the distribution of goods and services. Responding to present conditions where there is a deep imbalance of power and access that reproduces systems of inescapable poverty, the Church argues that societies must constantly work against avaricious accumulation by redistributing such accumulated goods to the impoverished. The Pontifical Council wants to make clear that this is not a question of charity or almsgiving but instead a recognition of the innate and incontrovertible right all people have to material sustenance and development regardless of their status within the material world. To act justly and charitably requires going much further than providing people with the material goods they need to survive that day and must be coupled with efforts to dismantle the social and political structures that maintain systems of poverty. Giving a fish to someone so they can eat today is only truly good when it is coupled with efforts to remove any impediments that prevent people from obtaining fish on their own. Any charity that does not extend to this deeper level is just hollow.⁹

It was similarly out of respect for universal human dignity that the Church refined its perspective on solidarity and brought the concept into Catholic thought. Within Catholic thought there can be no ‘us’ or ‘them,’ only a ‘we’ that recognizes the familial bonds that unify all people. To

fully recognize this requires that people constantly build closer relationships across any differences in identity or geography and seek a unified global community. In practice this means all must be driven by a commitment to fairness, equality, and love in their every action. The good of the few can never supersede universal concerns. No situation where some benefit while many suffer is morally licit within Catholic thought.¹⁰

How the Church imagines carrying forth such solidarity is further elaboration through the principle of subsidiarity, which states that resolving any disagreement or inequity should happen at the most basic level possible, ideally the family. If a problem is adequately resolved at a particular level and the dignity of all people is respected, then those hierarchically superior should not interfere with their solution. What is often forgotten when discussing this principle, however, is that the Church understands subsidiarity to not only justify but require intervention in particular problems at hierarchically superior levels when they cannot be adequately solved by the more basic units. Within Catholic thought is the primary purpose for the existence of the State and other governing bodies, for there are times when families and other units are unable or unwilling to advance the common good on their own.¹¹

If these values are held at the forefront by all when creating and implementing social policy, the Church thinks society will be able to bring people together and support them drawing closer to God. Individuals should constantly reevaluate both their individual and collective actions against these principles to ascertain whether they are morally acceptable. Popes and the broader Magisterium have used these principles to evaluate the morality of particular facets of social life today, including nature-society relationships. The remainder of this chapter will discuss how this specific discussion unfolded from the 1960s until Benedict XVI's resignation in 2013.

Early Whisperings

Developing the environment-society dimensions of Catholic social teaching has taken the Magisterium quite a long time. Interestingly, the U.S. Church was a key early leader in putting Catholic social teaching into conversation with the environment, in large part due to longstanding non-Catholic religious concerns across the United States about human relationships with the environment. Central to this was the development of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) during the 1930s and 40s in the U.S. Midwest. Writing what they then called a “Catholic rural philosophy,” leaders of the NCRLC began arguing that social ills in small towns and farming communities stemmed from poor environmental management and the decline of family farms in the face of industrial consolidation. They drew heavily from liberal U.S. Protestantism in opposing such industrialization as well incongruous with living a moral life if it diminished people’s connections with the God-given world. The NCRLC specifically critiqued the mechanization of farming and the increased prevalence of loans and debt in farming communities as strategies that were used to split people from the land. They argued that these processes further entrenched materialism and consumerism that were driving moral decline across the entire United States and should be opposed wherever possible. The NCRLC sought to remediate these problems through communal environmental management and stewardship implemented by the education of rural communities.¹²

The NCRLC, despite failing to halt the continued industrialization of agriculture as the political influence of rural communities declined following World War II, still was an important genesis for Catholic environmental teaching. After a slow start, the NCRLC was able to attract just under 20,000 attendees to its programs around the United States in both 1944 and 1945, and an essay contest at the close of the 1940s received around 3800 submissions. The program’s high-water mark, a 1949 convention in Columbus, Ohio drew around 30,000 people, many clergy but a large majority of attendees were lay Catholics. They were one of the first white environmental movements

in the United States derived at least in part independently of Protestantism and showed that Catholics had something interesting to say about environment-society relationships as well. At least for a while the NCRLC's message of stewardship in environmental management and the relationship between environmental and social change resonated with many people.¹³

Though while the NCRLC declined during the 1950s, several of its core messages about stewardship, connection to nature, and the immorality of consumerism presaged the resurgence of American environmentalism and the later rise of sustainability as the basis for environmental policy. Even though there is not a direct link between the NCRLC and common contemporary definitions of sustainability, the resurgence of sustainability and stewardship as principles of resource management today is better understood as part of a long intellectual history rather than a recent independent invention. While the specifics are quite different, this focus on using education to address environmental problems remains central to Catholic environmental teaching today.¹⁴

It is perhaps unsurprising that the bishops of Appalachia were also early contributors to Catholic environmental thought. In 1975, 26 bishops from the region issued a statement accusing those who owned coal companies of unjustly profiting from environmental destruction and creating a system hostile both to people and to the earth as a whole. This new element of U.S. Catholic environmental thought was an expansion of earlier nature-society statements from the American hierarchy, for it deepened critiques of capitalism and profit-driven resource extraction. Yet beyond a few local cases, environmental concerns were not important to most U.S. Catholics during the twentieth century.¹⁵

During this period Catholics globally were becoming more concerned with environmental issues. Though far from central to the earth-shaking Vatican II, council documents reveal early thoughts about how the environment might fit into global Catholic social teaching. These primarily had to do with ensuring the prosperity and adequate development of all as an end to global poverty.

Perhaps as expected, these early Catholic forays into environmental thought were strongly anthropocentric and heavily gendered. *Gaudium et Spes*, the major product of council's final year outlines how the Church is to function in the world, exemplifies this as it says that "all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown." The council also proclaimed that "when man develops the earth...he carries out the design of God manifested at the beginning of time, that he should subdue the earth, perfect creation, and develop himself." While it remains heavily anthropocentric, *Gaudium et Spes* strongly rejects dominionist interpretations of Christianity that argue there are no moral limits to human use of the non-human world. The Council Fathers instead interpret the scriptural mandate to rule as a requirement that humanity "govern the world with justice and holiness" for the benefit of all people. Though Lynn White, Jr. would condemn Christianity's dominionism two years later, the Catholic Church had already begun rejecting such purely dominionist understandings of the proper relationship between humanity and the environment. According to Vatican II, people ought to dominate, but only in as much as it advances the good of all humanity now and in the future. The global Catholic hierarchy was for the first time beginning to see nature-society relationships through the lens of Catholic social teaching and writing about the Church's perspective on these relationships.¹⁶

The papacy itself began to engage with environmental issues as an element of Catholic social teaching under Paul VI. Reigning from 1963 to 1978, Paul VI was central to Vatican II's changes to Catholicism and presided over the council's end. In much the same way as secular post-war environmentalism, his early focus with respect to the environment was on the problems posed by nuclear technology and industrial pollution, 'signs of the times' that the Church could little ignore. Paul VI saw these as cases of environmental degradation that threatened the stability of the entire planet and thus must be opposed by the Church and Catholics around the world. He specifically discussed industrialization and unchecked economic growth as major contributors to broader

problems humanity would soon have to reckon with and ought to start planning for immediately. Paul VI proposed responsible stewardship ensuring long-term productivity as a principle as the solution to these problems. Though he remained entirely circumspect as to what such management should look like in practice, the groundwork had been set for future engagement. Yet despite his personal concerns that came to the forefront at a few specific points, environmental matters remained quite marginal to Catholicism around the globe during his reign.¹⁷

Developments under John Paul II

Almost immediately after John Paul II's papacy began in 1978 the new pope took several steps to increase the Church's formal engagement with environmental issues, beginning by naming Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology and ecologists in late 1979. In that same year he published the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, which cemented the Church's rejection of dominionist approaches in favor of stewardship approaches driven by care and love of the non-human world. John Paul II argued that humanity has a duty to maintain global productivity in the future rather than exploiting resource reserves today. Over the next several years the pope made a few broad statements in his homilies and other speeches the environment, mostly focusing on how humanity could not pretend it lived alone in this world but is inextricably tied to all other life. In general, the first decade of his reign mostly followed the same path as his predecessors, with environmental concerns far from central to his ministry or that of others in the hierarchy. By his death in 2005 this had changed significantly and environmental issues became a far greater concern among Catholic thinkers.¹⁸

1988 saw the beginning of major shift for how members of the Catholic hierarchy thought and taught about the relationships between humanity and the non-human world. Several key figures began seeing the relationships people had with the environment as a topic that cut to the heart of Catholic theology. This shift technically began on December 30, 1987 with the publication of the

encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, which emphasizes the requirement for a universal destination of all goods taken from the earth and holds increased pollution as a major problem stemming from profit-driven development. The pope urged assessments of development projects and economic growth not to be limited to solely financial or enumerated concerns but to take a broader view of the ramifications of economic policy. He raised concerns with the health effects of pollution caused by industrial development. Throughout this encyclical John Paul II emphasized the need for more interrogation about whether development projects benefit the poor as well as continued consideration of the moral dimensions of individual's relationships with creation and each other, challenging Catholic leaders to develop them. He called on Catholic leaders around the world to develop these criteria and push those within their churches to help change the world.¹⁹

The national bishops' conferences of both the Philippines and Guatemala responded to this call in 1988 by both issuing statements heavily focused on local environmental crises. The Filipino bishops emphasized problems stemming from environmental degradation--especially deforestation, soil erosion, ocean dead zones--and advocated policy changes based on Catholic social teaching. They criticized those supporting these changes for being driven by fallacious notions that equated authentic progress with purely material accumulation and argued that this misplaced worldview had to change if conditions were ever going to improve. They framed this degradation as sin and a painful offense to Christ and especially Mary since it fails to recognize the beauty of the created and God-given world. The bishops urged all Filipinos to restore environments to a pre-human state of natural beauty through planting trees to prevent soil erosion and adopting ecologically sound farming methods, suggesting that Filipinos can look to indigenous communities as a model of ecological harmony. They also asked Catholic churches around the world to see a healthy global environment as the ultimate pro-life issue and throw their full political weight behind efforts to mitigate environmental change. To underscore the severity of the situation, the bishop's ended with

the scriptural quotation, “today I offer you a choice of life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life and then you and your descendants will live (Dt 30:19-20)”. Evoking a sense of trepidation and imminent danger, the CBCP implored all Catholics to substantially improve their treatment of the environment.²⁰

The Guatemalan bishops similarly condemned the accumulation of environmental goods by a select few. They focused instead on the introduction of land ownership and property rights by European colonists and the control of 64% of arable land in the country by only 2% of the country’s farms. While many in the country suffered from effects of economic and agricultural policies, they did not see any of the benefits those proposing these policies had promised. Drawing on liberation theology to complement Catholic social teaching, the Guatemalan bishops saw poverty in terms of limited resource and land access that continued to trap many across the country in inescapable cycles of deprivation. They too urged people who heard their message to push for a more just distribution of environmental goods so that all rather than a select few were able to benefit from God’s gift of the world.²¹

The Guatemalan bishops crafted a thorough theological critique of private land ownership, rejecting its totalizing dimensions and arguing that no person could morally own land solely for their own use. The land can only belong to God. Humanity is to work it for the benefit of all. This stewardship ethic is a critical step for Catholic thought as it implies a serious change--the dissolution of private land and resource ownership. They consider such control especially vile in cases where it contributes to systems of accumulation, individual profit, and mass suffering. Framing the New Testament message as predominantly a rejection of avarice, the Guatemalan bishops urge those who have accumulated wealth to relinquish it in support of the poor. While the bishops pull back from an absolute collectivism, recalling that the Church has legitimated a conditional right to private property in order to stabilize life, their rejection of private property and centralized power in

agriculture was one of the more radical positions concerning the environment expressed by members of the Catholic hierarchy. Their focus on the problematic consequences of individual environmental property rights continues to be very important in Catholic environmental teaching today.²²

Focusing little on ecological change itself, the Guatemalan bishops especially spoke about poverty and human depravity as the primary problems of environmental degradation. The GBC and CBCP each developed an environment ethic that valued the non-human world primarily in utilitarian terms. For each conference intrinsic value is a unique characteristic of humanity. Even when the Filipino bishops argue for a return to non-human nature, they follow this up by discussing how this will allow the environment to maintain productivity in the long run. They are not concerned with non-human creatures or ecosystems themselves. Anthropocentric solidarity and development for all people rather than just a privileged few forms the core of early Catholic environmental teaching. The environment itself remains in the background.

Continuing along similar lines, John Paul II's 1990 World Day of Peace message applied these regional expansions of Catholic environmental thought to the entire planet. Repeating many of the themes raised by the CBCP and the GBC, the pope raised a few new arguments about what environmental concern should grip all Catholics. In doing so John Paul II further legitimated environmental concern within mainstream Catholicism and brought theological discussion of the environment in from the margins of Catholic intellectualism.²³

John Paul II critiqued humanity for failing to recognize the world's true value and creating chaos by continuously rejecting God's intention for creation to be open to all. Creation is meant for future generations as well as every person currently alive. Short-term progress that impedes the environment's ability to do this is antithetical to God's plan and is thus immoral). The environmental degradation of the present age is understood primarily as a moral failure on the part

of humanity. Despite its low profile, this destruction is important for all to address and crucial if there is going to be peace in the world.²⁴

In his speech the pope framed the disrespect of non-human environments and the resource plundering this led to as a threat to peace similar in scale to the nuclear arms race and regional territorial conflicts. Notably, the pope also stated that God views creation itself as inherently good, drawing on the first creation story in Genesis where God reflects on God's work and said, "it was good." He does, however, retain a weak anthropocentrism by noting that God switched from 'good' to 'very good' following the creation of humanity. Though he recognized intrinsic value in the non-human world, John Paul II continued placing humanity and human concerns before all else in the created world. Yet by also considering aesthetic values alongside the environment's corporeal utility, the pope added nuance to Catholic environmental teaching that focused overall of the world rather than just its constituent parts. To address environmental degradation, John Paul II urged all people to take a serious look at their lives and reassess their ecological impacts. He saw this ongoing crisis as the responsibility of all due to its size and potential ramifications for all future generations. Every person has a duty to education themselves and their communities on their collective responsibility for good environments and push for domestic and international recognition of a "right to a safe environment" as a basic human right that belongs to all and should never be violated. The pope envisioned contemporary environmental crises as potential entry points for greater solidarity within and between states to advance peace on a far broader scale. Thus environmental issues gained a dual importance for John Paul II, for they constitute a crisis in their own right as well as providing an opportunity for humanity to make the world better in a wide range of different ways.²⁵

While it was not until his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* that John Paul II brought the phrase 'human ecology' to discuss humanity's dependence on the non-human world into Catholic papal environmental teaching, this idea already permeated his theological anthropology. In that same

letter the pope critiqued excessive consumption as a fundamental misunderstanding of humanity's proper relationship with nature, particularly when certain powerful people took far more than they had any right to solely because they could. Four years later in *Evangelium Vitae* John Paul II returned to this theme by arguing that humanity had changed from properly envisioning nature as a loving mother to a vision of nature purely as physical matter without any sort of mystery.²⁶

The U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), subsumed into the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2001, was among the first national bishops' conferences to respond to John Paul II's renewed call for Catholic environmental concern through their 1991 statement *Renewing the Earth*. Reiterating many of his themes, the USCC formally brought concerns about global warming into this conversation. Though it would take until 2001 for the USCCB to formally acknowledge the scientific consensus on climate change, concerns about its potential ramifications led the U.S. bishops to support mitigation efforts early in the 1990s. In their rather long letter, the U.S. bishops also provided far more detail concerning why the environment must be considered through moral lenses rather than solely economic or technical ones.²⁷

The USCC envisioned *Renewing the Earth* to underscore the tight relationship between ecology and poverty for Catholics, hoping to inspire them to change their behavior and stand in solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged in order to build a just global community. The USCC also extended notions of authentic development to include a focus human dignity and spiritual improvement alongside material accumulation so often the sole focus of development projects. As with many leaders across the Global North, the bishops adopted sustainability as the practical way to achieve this goal, pairing its principles with environmental justice and theology to further strengthen Catholic environmental teaching. They envisioned humanity as co-creators alongside God and only by extending the same love to each other and to all creatures can humanity move the environment

toward the Edenic condition God commands. Yet again environmental productivity for human benefit formed the center of Catholic environmental teaching.²⁸

Perhaps *Renewing the Earth's* biggest contribution to this new thought happened when it examined how the core themes of Catholic social teaching should influence not just people's interpersonal relationships but also their relationships with non-human creatures and the collective environment. They argued that these relationships, not just those with other people, should be considered formally in discussion so sin, morality, and society. Extending neighborly respect for other people to include all creatures, the USCC broadens ideas about the common good and solidarity to include all life, albeit still valuing humanity more. They also refined the principles of the universal destination of goods and the preferential option for the poor by including natural resource management and long-term sustainability as additional criteria to use when evaluating human manipulation of the non-human world. The bishops wove non-human life into these principles as well, thinking about animal life as feeling subjects rather than just objects to be distributed at a whim.²⁹

Formal Church engagement with environmental thought continued to increase in 1992 with the publication of a new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter *Catechism*). This document is meant to teach anyone who is interested the tenets of Catholic faith and what it means to be a member of the tradition. What this document says about any topic, including the environment, is critical to understanding Catholic teaching and shows the centrality of a topic to the Catholic hierarchy.³⁰

There are two sections of the *Catechism* directly relevant to this chapter, one concerning the creation of all and another about humanity's unique place in the world. Though drawing primarily from Scripture and Tradition, the *Catechism* also reinforces that science as a crucial source for knowledge concerning both creation and perhaps more importantly the Creator. Studying the physical world, if done correctly, allows one to draw closer to God.

The *Catechism* is perhaps never clearer about the theory supporting Catholic environmental teaching than when it lays out which ideas it rejects as heretical. First among these is pantheism, the perspective that the world *is* God or that God's development is linked materially to global conditions. The Church instead teaches that all that exists materially flows from and returns to God while being entirely separate from God. The Church also rejects Manichaeism and Dualism, ideas that the world is in constant tension between universal powers of good and evil, though each person's life is in tension because of Adam's Fall. Evil in Catholic thought is not an active force but instead a lack of Good in a particular instance resulting from human choices. Gnosticism, the idea that matter is evil and truth or salvation is only reachable through spiritual realms, is also firmly rejected, as is its obverse Materialism, which contends that there is no transcendent origin for existence. Similarly Deism, the understanding of God as Watchmaker so popular with many Enlightenment thinkers, is cast off. God is instead understood as an active participant in history. None of these perspectives are considered orthodox ways to think about the non-human world and relationships with it.³¹

The Church instead teaches that the origin and the end of all that is lies in God, though it is fundamentally separate from God. As a result they teach that everything that exists is created ordered and, importantly, inherently good. Humanity can come to know God through the natural world, though such knowledge is superseded by scriptural revelation, and as a result every person's ongoing journey toward reunification with God must not remain ignorant of the non-human world. Communicating God's love and glory to all is the predominant purpose for the non-human world. This is correlated with the idea that the improper treatment or ignorance of the created world is a rejection of God's attempt to communicate Godself to humanity and thus a sinful failure to orient oneself fully to God. Apathy toward the material world prevents a person from fulfilling their

purpose and coming to know God. Such disregard for the non-human world is thus sinful according to the Catechism.³²

It is for this reason that the Church contends that God's place can be comprehended through the created world, not just in scripture. Furthermore, drawing from Thomas Aquinas, every creature in its own unique way is understood to reflect part of God's infinite nature. Thus the more that is understood about the particularities of any one creature the better one can come to know God. This, interestingly, becomes the justification for the value of biodiversity in Catholic environmental teaching as well as the theological support for scientific research. Though the Church understands humanity to be at the peak of creation, it is not the only good in the material world. Since no creature is self-sufficient, people must understand that they cannot reach God alone but need a human and non-human community in order to do so. This is a foundation for Catholic social teaching itself and the key way that the Catholic hierarchy justifies discussing environmental issues. This again requires extending solidarity to all creatures and expanding definitions of society beyond just humanity to envision a community including all life with humanity at the head. Within Catholic environmental teaching the world itself is intrinsically good since it is open to God, and thus its degradation is inherently sinful.³³

The second section of the *Catechism* central to Catholic environmental thought is a discussion of what exactly humanity is. First and foremost the *Catechism* teaches that humans are unique beings with both material and spiritual existence, a status shared by no other. While every creature reflects God in a particular way only humanity was given the gift of rational thought and is thus best able to know and love God. Humanity alone was made in God's image and when Christ became incarnate he did so in human form. Here the Church teaches that all that exists was created to support humanity's journey to living God through loving God's gift of creation. As a result, humanity's

mastery must be driven by love and providence towards others rather than the arbitrary and wanton destruction characteristic of recent decades.³⁴

The final major expansion of Catholic environmental teaching during John Paul II's reign came with the publication of *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* discussed at the beginning of this chapter, for its tenth chapter focuses exclusively on the environment. This document brought together many of the key changes that occurred during John Paul II's papacy in one place. Though it lacks the same stature as the *Catechism*, an encyclical or an apostolic exhortation, it (theoretically) remains a key resource for Catholics around the world who want to understand the Magisterium's position concerning nature-society relationships.³⁵

Central to this chapter on ecology is its message that a person's identity and character is partially constituted through their relationships with the world. Without these they could not be human and would have no chance for salvation, for they would be unable to demonstrate love and fulfill God's call to live lives of peace and caring. Creation is meant to help humanity reach back toward God and thus development is good, so long as it does not diminish the respect each person has for others. Humanity must not abuse its position as the pinnacle of creation, for it has a responsibility to shepherd all creation and lead it to God. Since part of each person's character is formed out of their relationships with the non-human world and other communities, Catholics are obligated to act justly and with love in their environmental actions. To not do so is sinful and will block people from reaching their full potential. Environmental concern is not just recommended for Catholics but required of them if they are to consider themselves moral.³⁶

Yet the *Compendium* recognizes an ongoing crisis in this relationship as the non-human world is often defined solely as a tool worthless apart from its benefits for people. Such reductionism, for which the Magisterium places responsibility at the feet of modernity writ large, drives poor treatment of the environment around the world and threatens its viability for future generations.

They reject profit as a legitimate motive for economic activities and instead urge those in positions of influence to reshape economic systems so they benefit of all at the expense of no one. Virtues of sobriety, temperance, and self-discipline must guide humanity away from its current path of avaricious and gluttonous destruction that is leading all people ever-further from God.³⁷

In saying this the bishops shift their focus to specific pragmatic changes they urge people to make. Focusing not just on present but also future material needs for life, the *Compendium* argues that forests in particular are so important to human flourishing that deforestation should be opposed on principle. They also are wary of biotechnology, particularly as they see so many ways it could be used to profit from people who lack access to healthcare and food. While they hope that it will be used for good, if adequate mechanisms to ensure this are not in place there is a serious danger that it will lead only to change for the worse. It is out of these sorts of concerns that the bishops develop the precautionary principle, an idea that in the face of uncertainty humanity has an obligation to take seriously the risks and benefits posed by any scenario and must act to minimize potential risks even if research is inconclusive or unclear. This is the final key principle necessary for understanding pre-Francis Catholic environmental teaching and unsurprisingly has taken center stage in debates about climate change within the Catholic Church. Though it continued to grow following John Paul II's death in 2005, Catholic environmental teaching's core principle had already been established by the Magisterium as part of Catholic social teaching and Catholic thought more broadly.³⁸

The (First) Green Pope

Catholic environmental teaching's relative importance continued to grow under John Paul II's successor. It may surprise those unfamiliar with the history of Catholic environmental thought actually Benedict XVI was the first pope given the moniker "green pope." Working with the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, the "green patriarch," Benedict XVI helped develop an ecumenical perspective on care for the environment meant to influence all Christians regardless of

denomination. Prior to his consecration in the 1960s, the then Joseph Ratzinger held views common in the Church at that time, envisioning humanity's earthly dominion as stemming from their creation in the likeness of God and seeing nature-society relationships as somewhat ancillary to Catholic thought. Yet by the time he had risen to John Paul II's right-hand and especially after his own election, Ratzinger/Benedict's views had changed and he was far more concerned with nature-society relationships than any pope who had preceded him. As a central figure in John Paul II's papacy and the change that occurred therein, Benedict XVI's reign continued along much the same track. Though his papacy was far shorter, there were a couple key moments when Catholic environmental teaching became a major focus for his attention.³⁹

Benedict XVI's only Catholic social teaching encyclical (*Caritas in Veritate*) was the most significant such moment, as for the first time ecological concerns were given an entire chapter in a papal encyclical. His primary critique of contemporary society was how a few people live in unimaginable excess while so many others lack food, water, and healthcare. Rejecting profit driven economics and consumerism comes up here as it had with his predecessors, as does the need for anthropocentric development rather than profit maximization. Benedict XVI doubled down on the idea that nature-society relationships are part of social relationships, arguing that not considering the environment when discussing society is a major failure.⁴⁰

In *Caritas in Veritate* the pope also launched into a deep critique of narratives that blame environmental degradation on overpopulation, noting that it is precisely the countries with declining birth-rates that are driving contemporary environmental destruction. The earth has far more than enough to support its current population. Its failure to do so is solely a distribution problem as certain powerful interests immorally accumulate what is not rightfully theirs while leaving others to suffer and die. Those who suffer are in Benedict XVI's eyes in no way at fault for the immorality and destruction caused by contemporary economic systems, though they bear the brunt of their

negative effects. Again returning to the principle of authentic development, Benedict XVI urged humanity to recognize the natural environment as an implicit stakeholder too often ignored by contemporary economic systems. All people must foster deeper humility about both their individual and collective positions in the world, remembering God whenever they think themselves to be in charge. The pope stresses that the environment is not an *equal* stakeholder alongside humanity--humanity remains the centerpoint--but without nature humanity will be lost. As such non-human concerns and threats to the long-term stability of environmental systems should not be dismissed. The weak anthropocentrism that forms the core of Catholic environmental teaching is further entrenched in this encyclical.⁴¹

Benedict XVI did not focus on environmental issues just as part of social teaching but rather as key to Catholic theology as a whole. Nature and society are linked as two parts of one creation where existence in only one of these spheres is impossible. There is thus a need for all people to open their hearts and listen to creation's voice in order to understand the beauty and the mystery of existence by moving beyond the human. In doing so the pope presaged Francis's call in *Laudato Si'* for people to listen to the "cry of the earth." For Benedict XVI God's kingdom something all should try to create in the material world as much as they can. God's love can be found in every dimension of the world, and since humanity's primary reason for existing is to uncover and experience this each person must reflect on the wonder of the world and find a space of worship in creation. Benedict XVI argued that without these experiences the value of redemption is severely diminished, for a person who could not experience the love around them in their life on earth could not truly value the gift of salvation and union with God's love. Benedict XVI saw any definition of humanity as incomplete if it did not recognize humanity's deep connections to nature.⁴²

The pope repeated many of these themes in his 2010 World Day of Peace Message, devoting one of his key speeches that year to arguing that the degradation of the earth is "no less troubling"

than inhumane treatment in any other form. Intergenerational global solidarity was also a key part of his speech, as was the need for temperance and sobriety when consuming the gifts of creation. In an interesting line that parallels earlier work in development studies, Benedict XVI also discusses how “In addition to a fairer sense of intergenerational solidarity there is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of *intragenerational solidarity*.” In the pope’s eyes every human person is joined together in a community that crosses all time and space. If the benefits of a relationship do not extend universally and interfere with other’s lives then that relationship is immoral and should be rejected.⁴³

Shifting to more pragmatic suggestions, Benedict XVI also said that alternative energy was an urgent necessity everywhere. The pope had already taken this suggestion to heart, for under his watch the Vatican installed solar panels on its roofs and committed to severely cutting its carbon emissions from transportation. The pope further emphasized the need to dramatically alter powerful political and financial institutions around the globe so they advance the common good rather than the interests of a select few. He blamed these systems in particular for the destruction of environments and people around the world.⁴⁴

Due to his key role shaping John Paul II’s papacy, Benedict XVI’s reign introduced few new concepts to Catholic environmental teaching. What did change, however, was the emphasis given to these teachings. His encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* pushed environmental ideas far more to the center of the Church’s social message. His papacy also saw the increasing repetition of several themes-- integral and authentic human development, rejection of accumulation that perpetuates poverty, emphasis on stewardship, the links between interpersonal and nature-society relationships, the need for lifestyles not driven by consumption, and the duty of all to treat the environment with the utmost love and respect. Far from recent inventions, such Catholic critiques of contemporary nature-society relationships have developed over the course of the past fifty years with deep roots in John Paul II’s and Benedict XVI’s papacies. Rather than inventing something new, when Francis

was elected and made the environment one of his central foci he was building directly on the foundation laid by his two most recent predecessors.

¹ As with any streamlined summary the actual situation is far more complicated than what I have presented here. The pope's influence has historically waxed and waned in response to European politics and internal Church intrigue-- in practice popes often were significantly constrained by historical context. As with any global institution the pope delegates most of these tasks to others and in fact is often in direct tension with the Curia or other Church leaders. However, apart from rare figures such as Martin Luther, the pope does have the most influence on the direction of the Church, and a powerful pope can shape perceptions of the Church and Christianity as a whole around the world. Moreover, unlike a multinational corporation or other international body, there is no clean legal mechanism for others in the Church to depose a pope, for as an absolute monarch he exercises significant power.

² For further discussion on the history of the papacy, see Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (4th ed.), New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.

³ See Keith David Warner, "The Greening of American Catholicism: Identity, Conversion, and Continuity," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 18, no. 1 (2008): 113–142 and Ian Linden, *Global Catholicism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

⁴ *Ibid.* See also John XXIII, *Humanae Salutis*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1961, §4 for his call for the Church to respond to the signs of the times.

⁵ Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, "Presentation" and §60-104. See also United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching," usccb.org, 2019a.

⁶ Pontifical Council, 2004, §107-116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, § 166-170.

⁸ *Ibid.*, §171-181. See also Benedict, XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009, §1.

⁹ Pontifical Council, 2004, §182-184.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, §192-196.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §185-188. See also Francis, *Laudato Si', or On The Care Of Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, §157-158.

¹² For discussions of non-Catholic religious influences on U.S. environmental thought see Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990; Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010; or Mark R. Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. For discussions of Catholicism, the NCRLC, and U.S. environmental thought see Christopher Hamlin and John T. McGreevy, "The Greening of America, Catholic Style, 1930-1950," *Environmental History* 11 (2006): 464–499 and William T. Cavanagh, ed., *Fragile World: Ecology and The Church*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018, 11-32.

¹³ Hamlin and McGreevy, 2006; Stoll, 2015, 239-253; and Cavanagh, 2018, 11-32. For a broader discussion of American Catholicism's changes over the twentieth century see Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 and Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

¹⁴ Hamlin and McGreevy, 2006; Stoll, 2015, 239-253; and Cavanagh, 2018, 11-32. See also Lucas F. Johnson, "Sustainability as a Global Faith? The Religion Dimensions of Sustainability and Personal Risk," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (2013): 47–69 for the relationship between religion and contemporary environmental thought.

¹⁵ John Hart, "Care for Creation: Catholic Social Teaching on the Environment," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (2002): 120-145 and Joseph D. Witt, *Religion and Resistance in Appalachia: Faith and the Fight against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016.

¹⁶ Specific quotations are from Catholic Church, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965, §12, 57, and 34 respectively.

¹⁷ Warner, 2008; Linden, 2009, 85-86 and 279-281; Francis, 2015, §4; Peter Cardinal Turkson, "Words of Welcome," *International Conference on the Third Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*. Vatican City, 2018. For

discussions of the secular post-war environmental movement, see Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation*. New York: Hill & Wang, 2013, especially pp 22-26.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979; Warner, 2008; Jame Schaefer, ed., *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette: University Press, 2011, 365-388; and Francis, 2015, §10-12.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987, §34. See also Hart, 2002.

²⁰ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. *What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* Manila, Philippines: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1988. Additionally, such language idealizing a pre-human state of nature and indigenous nature-society relationships is, as the Jesuit Gabriel Lamug-Nanawa ("Jesus, Evolution, and the Environment: A Critique of the CBCP's Statement on the Environment. *Landas* 18, no. 2 (2004): 244-264) noted, a manifestation of the pristine nature, wilderness, and noble savage myths environment scholars have rejected over the past several decades. Lamug-Nanawa also critiqued the Filipino bishops for what he saw as an overly anthropocentric focus, arguing instead for a softer anthropocentrism such as the theologian Denis Edwards's proposal that Catholics should acknowledge direct relationships between God and non-human creation rather than positioning humanity as the necessary intermediary. Yet the CBCP certainly did not advance such perspectives in 1988 and instead reinforced these myths. Their statement remains one of the earliest major Catholic hierarchical documents primarily focusing on the environment. Moreover, the global hierarchy has continued advancing arguments similar to the CBCP's in the decades since, further establishing this statement (and its flaws) as a foundational Magisterial text for Catholic environmental teaching.

²¹ Guatemalan Bishops' Conference. *The Cry for Land*. Mixco, Guatemala, 1988.

²² Ibid.

²³ John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990.

²⁴ Ibid. It is important to note that at this point John Paul II was not speaking about climate change or global warming, at least not by name. He was instead critiquing systems of extraction and pollution that degraded environments for the benefit of a very select few. Though climate change later became a central focus for Catholic environmental thought, it did so as a particular manifestation of this broader problem of social disparity and human mismanagement rather than as a new topic altogether.

²⁵ Ibid. Additionally, for a discussion of the difference between weak and strong anthropocentrism see Robin Attfield, "Beyond Anthropocentrism." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 69 (2011): 29–46. Most simplistically this distinction recognizes that even if a certain philosophical approach argues that there is non-human intrinsic value this does not inherently mean the system does not still place humans at the center. Rather than think of the value of the non-human world in terms of one-note anthro-, eco-, or bio-centrism, Attfield presents a more nuanced approach I find useful for thinking through Catholicism.

²⁶ John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991; Schaefer, 2011, 365-388; and Jame Schaefer and Tobias Winright, eds. *Environmental Justice and Climate Change: Assessing Pope Benedict XVI's Ecological Vision for the Catholic Church in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013, 61-82. Such personification of nature as feminine is quite common within Catholic and broader Christian thought. Though heavily critiqued by feminist scholars, such gendered personification remains prevalent within Catholic thought to this day. Particularly given the politics of gender in Catholicism, assigning creation femininity in Catholic environmental teaching has severe consequences that extend far beyond environmental issues themselves. While there are other ways that Catholics could and have gendered their personifications of the world, such as Francis of Assisi's fluctuations between using Brother and Sister as a way to talk about various parts of the non-human world, these are quite uncommon within Catholic environmental thought. For further discussion of the politics of gender in the Church see Aline H. Kalbian, *Sexing the Church: Gender, Power, and Ethics in Contemporary Catholicism*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005 and for gender and environmental politics, see Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1980, especially pp. 1-41.

²⁷ United States Catholic Conference. *Renewing the Earth*. Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1991.

²⁸ Ibid. See also Stoll, 2015, 239-253.

²⁹ USCC, 1991.

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993.

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

³¹ Ibid., §285-286.

³² Ibid., §287-294.

³³ Ibid., §283-284. See also Francis, 2015, §62-64. This is by no means to say that everyone advancing Catholic social teaching or even Catholic environmental teaching adopts this view. However, the logics advanced by this teachings lead toward these theoretical conclusions. Whether such perspectives or anything similar are actually held and taught by Catholics in practice is another conversation entirely (and one central to the latter half of this thesis). For further discussion of knowledge of God via the created world see Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, Translated by William Dych, SJ, 1968.

³⁴ *Catechism*, §355-379. Whether one sees this section as incongruous with the Catechisms elucidations on Creation as a whole is not a debate that I will enter here. Again, this chapter is meant as an introduction to what Catholic environmental teaching *is*, not a treatise to solve its internal inconsistencies. These are both sections of the Catechism and thus both important for understanding what Catholic environmental teaching is, despite potential perceptions that there exists a large gap between them.

³⁵ *Compendium*, 2004 §451-488.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., §469; Francis, 2015,

³⁹ Lucia A. Silecchia, “Discerning the Environmental Perspective of Pope Benedict XVI,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 4, no. 2 (2007): 227–269; Schaefer, 2011, 365-388; Schaefer and Winright, 2013; and Mary Rezac, “The Green Pope Isn’t Who You Think It Is,” *Catholic News Agency*, 2017.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, 2009, §43-52.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid and Francis, 2015, §49. Also Silecchia, 2007; Schaefer, 2011, 365-388; and Turkson, 2018.

⁴³ Benedict XVI, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, Vatican City, 2010 (emphasis in original, §8). His language here is remarkably similar to Sudhir Anand and Amartya Sen, “Human Development and Economic Sustainability,” *World Development* 28, no. 12 (2000): 2038, though whether he was driven by these same arguments or arrived independently at this argument is unclear.

⁴⁴ Benedict XVI, 2010. See also Philip Pullella, “Vatican Set to Go Green with Huge Solar Panel Roof,” *Reuters*, 2008. Schaefer, 2011, 365-388.

Chapter 3—*Laudato Si'*: Pope Francis Sets the Cornerstone

The papal focus on the relationship between humans and the environment rose to a new level with Francis's installation as pope in 2013. Elected after Benedict XVI resigned, the first pope to do so in almost 600 years, Jorge Bergoglio is the first pope to choose Francis as his regnal name. By naming himself after Francis of Assisi, made patron saint of ecology by John Paul II, Francis wanted to emphasize the importance of humanity's relationship to the poor as the main earthly duty of all Catholics. Francis devoted his first social encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, to expanding the Church's ecological perspectives on the relationship between poverty and ecology, cementing this as a key area of focus for Catholics (and all others) in the twenty-first century. Keeping in mind previous Catholic social teaching and the signs of the times, by focusing on the environment Francis is not doing something new but is part of a continued progression of Catholic teaching. This is not to say Francis did not add anything new--he certainly has--but that these new perspectives were added to an ongoing conversation and built from the blueprints developed by his two immediate predecessors.¹

Despite the widespread coverage that *Laudato Si'* received from commentators in the academy and beyond, these discussions often barely scratch the surface of what Francis actually wrote. As will also become clear in the following chapters, very few Catholics are either reading or finishing Francis's encyclical and thus do not know what he says. Consequently, this chapter is largely a close reading of *Laudato Si'* particularly attuned to his comments about how people should think and act toward the environment and thus toward each other. It is as such a good introduction for readers who have not seriously engaged with recent Catholic environmental thought. While not a substitute for reading the encyclical itself, this chapter provides enough of an understanding of Francis's contributions to Catholic environmental teaching to contextualize later chapters.

Laudato Si'

Francis's encyclical is rather long compared to previous encyclicals, containing 246 sections covering a wide range of topics related to humans and the environment. Available on the Vatican's website in thirteen languages, *Laudato Si'* has the potential to reach around the world.

Beginning by referring to the earth as his sister, Francis opens his encyclical with a review of Catholic social teaching over the past fifty years. He then shifts into a discussion of St. Francis of Assisi's Cantic of the Sun, holding him as an ideal model for proper human-environment interactions. Pope Francis implores people not to dominate or exploit the natural world and not to wantonly consume resources, arguing that the world is not "an object simply to be used and controlled." He defines the core message of his encyclical as one where humanity can come together as a single family to protect the common home shared by all. This requires a new dialogue that rejects not only active denial or ignorance of the ways human actions influence the environment. But the pope is just as critical of passive indifference and blind trust in human technological solutions to environmental problems. Francis sees the purpose of his encyclical as emphasizing the linked fragility of the poor and the planet stemming from the deep relationships between all that is, critiquing unbridled technological and economic power and growth by pushing for new forms of global and local policy to mitigate improper environmental treatment, and driving people to pursue a new way of life independent of the consumerist throw-away culture of modernity.²

To underscore his conclusions, Francis spends the first chapter of his encyclical discussing different problems that stem from ongoing environmental change in the world, beginning with a focus on pollution and climate change. It is here that Francis writes one of the most oft-quoted lines from the encyclical, "the earth, our home, is looking more and more like an immense pile of filth." He criticizes contemporary economic systems not just for the large quantities of chemical and industrial waste produced through these processes but also for foisting pollution onto others.

Francis considers the climate a common good that carbon pollution degrades while fossil-fuel use benefits a select few. In his view, those in power degrade the climate and he urges them to develop appropriate policies to mitigate the effects of climate change. He is especially concerned with how the poor suffer from a degraded environment and their lives become more precarious as the world warms. In sum, Pope Francis see climate change as the principal threat facing humanity today.³

Yet despite the encyclical's reputation as a document focused primarily on integrating concern with climate change into Catholic thinking, Francis is troubled by a broader lack of morality in far more human relationships with the non-human world. He sees water and especially its pollution as perhaps one of the most important problems facing the world today. Francis is not just worried about cleanliness but also about cost, strongly condemning attempts to privatize water around the world as a practice incongruent with human dignity and the right to life. Without stable access to safe water, the poor around the world are severely harmed while those responsible benefit from this violence.⁴

Though it dominates his encyclical, Francis is not solely concerned with human welfare. He also highlights the threats to biodiversity and in doing so starts moving away from a purely anthropocentric ethic. While he begins by bemoaning declining biodiversity since it will negatively affect humans, he also argues that such a utilitarian approach is insufficient. Instead, he recognizes an innate value within all species, megafauna and otherwise, as they each give glory to God through the mere fact of their existence. Species decline and extinction destroys something irreplaceable to leave behind a diminished world yet so often comes about as a result of human greed. Humanity is responsible for the care of all creatures and their habitats yet is failing this task miserably.⁵

After this brief sojourn away from humanity Francis returns to discussing how humanity suffers from environmental degradation. The pope is particularly concerned with the global unevenness of such processes as they predominantly affect those who contributed nothing to them.

He firmly rejects explanations of environmental change that based on population, for he sees these as merely legitimizing contemporary systems of accumulation and consumption causing these problems. The pope instead thinks food waste and the unequal ways the modern economy distributes goods are to blame for global hunger, echoing and deepening earlier critiques about humanity's failure to respect the universal destination of goods. Catholic social teaching advocates. He also critiques the growing use of air conditioning as an often-unnecessary self-destructive behavior indicative of ongoing failures to act morally based on scientific knowledge. It is out of this that Francis elaborates on the differential responsibilities held by the powerful and those lacking influence to respond to in the face of environmental degradation. Instead of continuing in the paths first laid during the Industrial Revolution, Francis urges all people to develop a new culture and take a different approach to human relationships with the earth more harmonious and focused on every individual person as a being of invaluable worth, for at present "humanity has disappointed God's expectations."⁶

This shift toward discussing God's plan marks a key transition for the encyclical as God is mentioned only three times in the first chapter and is mostly ancillary to Francis's critique of nature-society relationships. It is in the second chapter that God appears as Francis shifts focuses on theological dimensions of the planet by discussing the gospel, or good news, of creation as a message directly received from God. Central to this chapter is the idea that creation has good news to share with all, for Francis argues that no Catholic can ignore the insights gleaned from science. He reiterates John Paul II's emphasis on the change from 'good' to 'very good' in Genesis following the creation of humans. In doing so Francis reasserts a hierarchy of value that, though it recognizes intrinsic value in the non-human world, sees such value as far less than that of humanity.⁷

Delving into Scripture, Francis derives several moral pronouncements from the Old Testament texts. He first notes that human life is grounded in three relationships--with God, with

neighbors, and with the Earth--and that neglecting or breaking any one of these relationships is sin. This was the key problem in the Noah story, which Francis reads in an intriguing way as a story that does not emphasize the power of God but instead how human sin can have ramifications for all life, rejecting arguments quite common amongst conservative Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists that humanity could never cause planetary change. The pope contends that such a fracture is the source of our current woes, for when humanity presumed to take the place of God by abusively exercising dominance over creation it cleared the way to its own destruction.⁸

Francis continues by rejecting absolute dominion over the earth, using scripture (Ps 148:5-6; Dt 22:4-6; Ex 23:12) to argue that direct relationships with non-human creatures must concern people just as their relationships with others do. He thus argues that humanity's responsibility is limited to "cultivating, ploughing, or working...caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving." In doing this, the pope rejects claims to absolute ownership and control over land or creatures since all truly belongs to God. Working the world responsibly means that no one can morally let food go to waste or hold it in excess if anyone is starving. Christ, mentioned in this chapter for the first time in the encyclical, is understood to have lived fully in harmony with creation without despising the material world or his physical body. Francis draws from this to reject the dualism between spirit and matter quite common in many strains of Christian, especially Protestant thought, which frames matter as evil or at best a distraction from God. Theologically as well as pragmatically, Catholic environmental teaching views the material world as intrinsically good.⁹

Yet Francis notes that all too often these perspectives do not influence material behavior. Abuses occur and humanity compounds its sinfulness, moving further and further from God. Consequently, it is the duty of all good people to act in accordance with these principles and actively seek to return to all that has been unjustly taken by humanity, reiterating Benedict XVI's extension

of the universal destination of goods to all creation. People must actually do something to change the material world, not just believe what Francis preaches, if they are to bring good into the world.¹⁰

Nature's gospel is not only one of distribution and the value of non-human nature as God's gift, for Francis understands the gift of creation to extend beyond the material world to spiritual realms as well. Returning to God's teleological plan, Francis underscores that it is all of creation, not just a select human few, that moves towards fulfillment in God--though again humanity occupies a unique position. He argues that though humans recognized nature as a window to the divine, with the gift of Scriptural Revelation Judeo-Christian thinkers were able to demythologize nature, seeing not just its benefits but also uncovering humanity's duties towards the non-human world. Yet this demythologization can go too far, for the universe itself, not just humanity, is open to God's presence, an idea earlier proposed by the theologian Karl Rahner in his reflections of the Incarnation. To remain ignorant and solely focus on humanity when reflecting on God is to falsely close off a way of knowing the divine, a mistake the pope thinks too often occurs and contributes to contemporary ills.¹¹

Again rebuking many strains of Protestant thought, Francis argues that when the divine is only recognized reflected in humans people miss the broader picture, for no creature's existence is superfluous. In establishing this, Francis draws not only on his fellow bishops and St. Thomas Aquinas's justification for the existence of all creatures--also the theological justification for biodiversity's value--but also on Francis of Assisi's mystical reflections on creation. He quotes most of the Canticle of the Sun, St. Francis's most well-known work, remarkable as the only quote longer than a couple lines in the entire encyclical. While Francis takes pains to separate himself from pantheism and similar approaches that equate God with the world, he does argue that nature is a key locus for God's presence to often ignored by Catholics.¹²

Moving forward in the encyclical, Francis brackets theology off from his environmental critique. Though one of the encyclical's shortest, *Laudato Si'*'s third chapter contains many of Francis's philosophical rebukes of contemporary discourse concerning the relationship between the environment and religion, beginning with its title. The pope directly copies the title of Lynn White's highly influential article (*The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*) that blamed Christianity for environmental degradation, but crucially Francis swaps 'historical' out for 'human.' By doing this Francis implies that the problem of ecological degradation is part of human nature rather than a particular problem originating in Western Europe, a bold signal to those more ensconced in this literature.¹³

Francis reiterates many points made in the previous chapter concerning humanity's proper role in the world yet frames them in philosophical rather than theological terms to reach an audience beyond Catholicism. In doing this, he focuses on an anthropocentrism valuing nothing but humanity and a Promethean vision of total human power itself common over the past two centuries of Western thought. The pope states that the problems the world faces right now must be understood as nature's rebellion against human abuse, firmly rejecting relativistic, technocratic, or profit-based economics he equates with modern secularism as the roots of ongoing environmental degradation.¹⁴

Perhaps a more appropriate, or at least more descriptive, title for this chapter would be *The Technological Roots...*, for technology bears the brunt of Francis's concern over environmental degradation. He spends a great deal of this chapter focusing on a false equation between affluence and progress central to many economic analyses, arguing that too often do the powerful forget that they should be constrained more by morality than by their ability to act. When anything other than humanity becomes the end of action, as technology and profit often do, Francis argues that the system is doomed to fail. He argues instead for an approach to technology and science that sees them only as tools meant to support what truly matters--people themselves. Technical decisions are

never solely technical but “are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build” and thus fundamentally political. He then moves to explicitly reject the mechanization of factories and the ever-increasing accumulation of economic productivity in the hands of the few. Pushing against monopolies of power, Francis urges the creation of economic systems that allow smallholders access to enough economic power to achieve authentic development and stability rather than only barely meeting the metrics set forth by international development agencies.¹⁵

As with previous chapters, Francis narrows from these broad statements to select a few examples he sees as particularly egregious. The first of these is abortion, which Francis argues is the central way humanity upends the natural order and casts aside God’s plan. The pope here links the right to life movement to environmental concerns, arguing that these movements are effectively the same.¹⁶

Francis also critiques genetically modified organisms (GMOs). He sees them less as health risks, though he invokes the precautionary principles and suggests that people take care while awaiting further scientific research, but instead criticizes the control of resources critical to food production through GMO patents held by a very few motivated by a notion of profit over all. This is the core of Francis’s economic message, as he rejects the private ownership of resources needed for human survival and consequently sets himself at odds with many leaders, especially in the West, concerning environmental governance and the acceptability of declining growth rates and profit margins.¹⁷

Throughout this chapter, the pope’s ire continues to fall on self-centered or individualistic approaches to life that deny the deep relationships that exist within humanity and between people and the non-human world. Such mindsets, no matter their genesis, are for Francis the main reason why environmental degradation occurs. Consequently he sees all who can having a duty to speak against individualism, educating and pushing others toward communal solidarity. Teaching proper

ethics and addressing the root of the problem of degradation, rather than applying a temporary, limited technological fix to a particular problem, is the only real way to solve this crisis instead of merely transforming it.¹⁸

The fourth chapter, Francis's expansion of the integral ecology proposed by earlier Magisteriums, is the core of *Laudato Si*'s contribution to Catholic environmental teaching. Underlying this entire discussion is a call for the development of a new ecological understanding of humanity and a consequent shift in the behaviors of all. In this chapter, the pope rejects any vision of society or social thought that does not consider environmental contexts and relationships. Such approaches he sees as far too prideful and narrow. The way Francis connects society to the natural world is crucial for understanding how he sees their relationship, for he subsumes environmental and ecological crises *within* a broader critique of society. Francis urges researchers to focus on these relationships, calling for the study of an economic ecology that unites environmental problems with human, family, work, and urban contexts, seeing ecosystems as a central dimension for social interaction. As environmental systems deteriorate so too do the social systems that have developed in relation with them, causing chaos and destruction for many people around the world. This is the crux of the environmental problem for Francis.¹⁹

The pope does shift away from a focus on corporeal relationships between humans and the environment for a brief discussion of the ways in which so many groups' cultures and worldviews, especially indigenous communities, are intertwined with their environments. The environment functions as a key way for these groups to express their identity. Degradation of these environments thus threatens to destroy such cultures, a sin the pope says is entirely unacceptable. Human culture is incredibly important to Francis, as he says, "the disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal," again deploying an anthropocentric hierarchy to environmental concerns (Francis, 2015: 145). He sees environmental

degradation as a multipronged form of violence against these communities, not just undercutting what little material stability they have in contemporary global economic systems but also destroying whatever remnants of their culture and identity may have remained (Francis, 2015: 145). This loss of not just land but homeland for these communities is incredibly tragic and sinful form of devastation that all must fervently resist. Francis lauds these communities for their recognition that the land each person uses to live is a personal gift from a loving God. Such gifts should be treasured not neglected, and indigenous communities are for him an example all should use to change their own lives.²⁰

As a consequence of linked corporeal and cultural roles the environment fulfills, Francis turns to a far more pragmatic discussion about how to construct personal dwellings and cities in line with this message of integral ecology. He rails against overcrowding and extreme population density, especially in areas without public spaces left open for gathering and community building. Additionally, the lack of secure housing rights, whether through the destruction of informal settlements or by cutting these communities off from into the broader city, continues processes of division and violence among what should be a single loving human family. Stressing the importance urban design and architecture can have for people's lives, he urges those involved in such planning to reflect more carefully on how their projects will influence people's quality of life. Francis focuses especially on the need for urban planners to create a sense of belonging and feeling of home in cities, making them emotionally positive places for the people living amongst them. The pope displays a keen awareness of the influence place has for people's personal notions of meaning and identity, a dimension he thinks is often forgotten in more formal economic or scientific analyses of urban environments. For Francis these affective dimensions of environments are no less important than their corporeal materiality for they help people fulfill spiritual needs as well. If those who seek

to solve these crises continue fracturing it rather than approaching any problem holistically, he does not see them reaching a solution.²¹

Francis's integral ecology highlights the ways human problems such as poverty are only compounded by environmental devastation, destroying social harmony and threatening to increase exploitation. Yet Francis does not see only darkness when looking through this lens, for he talks also of the beauty of human resilience and creativity stemming from these tenuous and brutal situations. Though perhaps overly valorizing poverty, a charge historically levied at the Church, he does not want *Laudato Si'* to inspire only fear but to provide people, especially those with very little power, hope for a dignified, good life in the face of existential terror. He contends that if people orient their lives towards the common good of all and hold solidarity across all time and space as a criterion when making any decision, then they will do good through their actions and live a moral life. This applies not just to people individually but collectively as society and especially the state—all must transform and incorporate these values.²²

This call for an integral ecology should sound familiar to anyone with even a vague idea of political ecology as a field of academic study. His arguments for focus on the intersection between humanity and the non-human as part of a single system and the need to radically reorient society's relationships with the non-human world are not that far in practice from the general statements many political ecologists make, though they are theoretically very far apart. Similarly, his rejection of population explanations for environmental degradation and scarcity as well as his insistence that the technical is never solely technical but also tied to politics parallels political ecology. As in many approaches within political ecology poverty and the plight of the oppressed is at the center, though Francis's approach is out of step especially with feminist political ecology in conceptualizing the breadth of interlocking oppression in the world today. Methodologically there are also deep similarities between Francis's approach and how political ecologists often approach the world. The

pope tries to put people and their daily lives first in order to humanize processes of degradation and destruction often discussed only in the language of economic policy. He identifies many of the problems and general solutions that political ecologists do, though there are important distinctions (particularly in terms of gender) that might be points of tension between Francis and contemporary political ecology.²³

The pope wants the world to look different—that much is certain. In terms of specifics, however, Francis has less to offer in many places beyond broad platitudes. At times he rejects markets and market-based solutions as fundamentally flawed processes that cannot produce the necessary changes, but at the same time he clearly signals his affinity with contemporary sustainability frameworks that are deeply influenced by these same markets. Francis continually urges radical change to reorient all of society with the virtues and individual people at its center, but because the pope does not offer many specifics himself, he instead draws many of his suggestions for how to embody Catholic environmental teaching from contemporary hegemonic institutions. As will become clear in Chapter Five especially this has been an obstacle in actually incorporating *Laudato Si'* into parish life, for clergy and parishioners alike are unsure how to live in line with Francis's encyclical.²⁴

This could become a key area where political ecologists could contribute to Catholic environmental teaching through a process of productive critique to discuss what different strategies for actually accomplishing Francis's broad goals would look like. The pope is clear that he does not think the Catholic hierarchy should come up with specific solutions as they lack the technical training to do so, but he also indicates that it is a moral duty of all who have such training to attempt to devise programs that are able to make his broad vision a reality. Political ecologists could help delve into specifics and craft programs or suggestions for Catholic communities that want to make changes. Providing more details and concrete steps might be one-way political ecologists could help

communities see how they might be able to actually live in a world constructed on mutual solidarity and a focus on the common good. Particularly given that Francis has rejected the ‘purely technical’ fixes often proposed as solutions for environmental problems, working with Catholic environmental teaching suggests one way that political ecologists could share their insights with not just other academic disciplines but those beyond the academy who are searching for practical steps yet do not know where to look.

There is another related reason why political ecologists should engage with Catholic environmental teaching. Francis received widespread news coverage for his most recent encyclical and more Catholics than not knew the pope had something to say about Catholicism. And there are a lot of Catholics, both in the United States and globally, and in many countries Catholic communities and leaders have significant political influence. Even though this thesis demonstrates that in practice Francis has not been able to convert people to an ecological Catholicism, this did not (and does not) have to be the case. If there is a way to connect these audiences to Catholic environmental teaching and foster greater concern for the environment, particularly a concern similar in many broad theoretical terms to political ecology, political ecologists should examine ways people can connect with these approaches.²⁵

There are certainly disagreements between Francis’s integral ecology and many political ecologists, just as there are deep divisions between different approaches to political ecology. However, there are also several key points of agreement between these approaches that political ecologists can use to connect with audiences they may not frequently have the chance to speak with. Conversion to an ecological worldview and/or set of practices will not happen automatically or on its own. If this is something political ecologists or others want to see happen, options such as Catholicism cannot be neglected from the outset. They may not work in all ways or provide *the* final answer to environmental crises, and there are likely going to be significant points of tension and

disagreement that create an uncomfortable coalition. Yet it is difficult to see how the United States or the world could change without forging such uncomfortable coalitions, especially with self-identifying religious communities given their importance and size in the world today. Catholicism and Catholic environmental teaching can be a key part of these efforts and an important way for scholars committed to change to build it.²⁶

How one reacts to Francis's proposal for an integral ecology depends in large part on what value one ascribes to the non-human world. By focusing on the deep connections between humans and the environment, and especially the ways stable, healthy environments benefit society, the pope continues to value the environment through a utilitarian lens. In this approach he considers future generations rather than just focusing on the present, a calculus similar to those advanced by some of the more extreme sustainability approaches. Francis extends this valuation beyond purely corporeal use to include the spirituality utility landscapes have for allowing people to draw closer to God, but humanity remains key. While non-human creatures are seen to have some minor worth not comparable to humans, intrinsic environmental value is otherwise absent, both here and in Catholic social teaching more broadly. Though Francis pushes past traditional notions concerning nature-society relationships and the purpose of the non-human world, his ethics unsurprisingly remain solidly anthropocentric.²⁷

Francis continues discussing such recommended actions in his next chapter. While throughout *Laudato Si'* the pope stresses that religion cannot make pronouncements on the specifics of economics, politics, or science, he has maintained the Church's ability to respond to decisions from these arenas through their moral dimensions. Francis goes furthest along this vein in the encyclical's fifth chapter, arguing that any development whether economic, techno-scientific, or otherwise is meaningless if it does not benefit all of humanity.²⁸

In his effort to change people's worldviews concerning relationships between humans and the environment, Francis argues for engaging in various dialogues with decisions-makers around the world. He begins by imploring government officials and others who make policy to think of one common world when evaluating projects rather than focusing only on their own people or territory. All decision makers should ask questions about who benefits and who bears the costs of any intervention in the environment, expressly rejecting any model that relies primarily on profit maximization. He calls on governments to craft legislation that advances the common good rather than the interests of only a few no matter the scale. In doing this politicians must accept without trepidation potential electoral consequences they may face as they are duty-bound not to put their personal interests before those whom they govern.²⁹

Not content with such general statements, the pope digs deeper in his prescriptions for social change in response to environmental crises. Francis pushes for a new, ethical economy, arguing that the current system should be allowed to burn out when it collapses as a result of placing financial concerns ahead of people. The environment cannot be adequately protected by market forces. The pope again draws on sustainability by arguing that constrained development is necessary to alleviate the ills of poverty, repeating part (though by no means all) of the oft-criticized arguments common among policy-makers and environmental activists alike. Francis does address these critiques that see sustainability as entirely ineffective by warning against half measures or quick fixes that only delay destruction and still do not fully respect the dignity of each human person. In his eyes economic transformation must be all encompassing, rejecting profit-motives and growth maximization in favor of redistributing goods taken from the material world for the benefit of all. Yet to do this he calls on those living lives of luxury to cut back their standard of living and give up much of the wealth they have accumulated, living a far more temperate lifestyle for the benefit of humanity. While he calls at times for radical change in economic and political structures, the pope

provides no specifics other than the need to protect the common good, especially the environment and the most vulnerable.³⁰

Interestingly in this discussion of economic transformation Francis returns to the thinnest dimension of Catholicism's anthropocentrism--the value of biodiversity. Francis warns against approaching the multiplicity of species "with no serious thought for the real value of things, their significance for persons and cultures, or the concerns and needs of the poor." While this 'real value of things' suggests an intrinsic value of species, it only does so by reducing them to the status of *thing*, implying a distance between humans and non-human life. These other, deeper valuations of biodiversity Francis positions as superior to resource-only views still focus on how species can benefit humanity, albeit in a spiritual rather than corporeal fashion. Anthropocentrism continues to hold sway even where biodiversity is concerned.³¹

Briefly skipping to the sixth chapter, Francis again talks there about the importance of biodiversity. The pope understands humanity's earthly vocation as protecting God's handiwork, a task that is not justly relegated to secondary status. It is in this section that Francis discursively moves the furthest from anthropocentrism in *Laudato Si'*, for he critiques understandings of human superiority that place more value in humanity than in other creatures. Instead he argues that superiority established in Genesis and held throughout the history of Christian thought is only a recognition of the differential capacity various creatures have, not a difference in their value. Whether this is enough to move away from the anthropocentrism central to Church teaching over the past millennia is a question left open, but it does hint at a potential future shift in Catholic thought about intrinsic value, conflicting with other more classically anthropocentric sections.³²

While Francis does commend the international community for its progress in mitigating problems associated with hazardous wastes through the Basel Convention and the protection of the ozone layer achieved through the Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol, on the whole the

relationships between nature and society on a global scale has been “one of the most irresponsible in history.” Biodiversity, desertification, the world’s oceans and anthropogenic climate change are each critical issues that the twenty-first century must quickly respond to. While he does find hope that conditions will change, he is deeply critical of the current situation.³³

Laudato Si' is also deeply concerned with contemporary energy production. Francis strongly opposes fossil fuels, urging their replacement while chastising the international community for its lack of meaningful progress in transitioning away from such energy sources. Intending to inspire change at Paris Climate Conference scheduled for the end of 2015, the pope urges the international community to develop binding and enforceable international regulations designed to protect the global commons and the poor who rely on them. In doing this, Francis draws on Benedict XVI’s hope for a powerful global political authority, arguing that it will be impossible to deal with the climate crisis without one.³⁴

It is in this discussion of how best to pragmatically transition from fossil fuels that the pope makes a startling statement. He argues that fossil fuels are an unacceptable form of energy production given their consequences for the present. Yet rather than claim moral absolutism in rejecting fossil fuels, Francis embraces arguments that natural gas can serve as a bridge fuel away from coal and oil. This is particularly interesting given Francis’s rejection elsewhere of half measures when it comes to addressing environmental degradation. While he recognizes that there is a lot of work necessary to facilitate an energy transition, his willingness to accept natural gas as a legitimate solution in the short-term is a remarkable concession toward pragmatism from a moral authority who otherwise stands so ardently opposed to compromise, especially in a situation as precarious for the poor as the global climate crisis.³⁵

Francis’s pragmatic concessions do not extend to other solutions proposed as a fix for the climate crisis. He is especially wary of strategies that place the impetus for a solution equally on the

shoulders of all, such as the “internationalization of environmental costs” requiring all countries to make significant cuts in their emissions regardless of historical and contemporary development, as they absolve those responsible for climate change. Similarly, Francis opposes carbon credit schemes as likely to only perpetuate global power disparities where economically poor countries are forced to sell their allotment in order to provide food for their people. The pope instead urges the international community to embrace differentiated responsibilities, again calling on the powerful to lower their standard of living to allow all people to survive and eventually thrive. Developing solar energy is an important component of this, yet the financial burden of installing such infrastructure must not be borne by poor countries. Instead, those responsible for the degradation of the climate must fund this transition. Though climate change is a global issue for Francis, it is not an equal problem for all who live on the globe. Whatever the solution, the pope argues that it must not be used to perpetuate global disparities. If inequity and abuse persist the crisis has not been solved but merely changed form.³⁶

The extent to which any of the pope’s pronouncements, specific or general, are likely to change behavior is a fascinating question, surely one the pontiff has spent a great deal of time considering. Through this encyclical Francis calls for all people to drastically change their orientation toward their individual lives and the world as a whole. *Laudato Si’* calls Catholics and non-Catholics alike to seriously change their lives, contending that no person who seeks to be good can stand by while devastation happens. Not only must all people know about the numerous ways in which environmental degradation threatens the core fabric of human life, but all must be deeply and personally concerned that this devastation is occurring and increasing. Every person must combat climate change and other environmental degradation, changing their lives and the lives of those around them as much as possible to mitigate coming disasters. Whether *Laudato Si’* has inspired such

behavioral shifts is a question best left for later chapters in this thesis. What is clear is that Catholic environmental teaching requires such changes.

Yet while these shifts are necessary, Francis does not imagine that conversion to an ecological consciousness will happen easily. His sixth chapter directly addresses this, turning to focus on the duty informed Catholics clergy and lay share as members of the Catholic Church concerning environmental crises. Developing a new self-perception that breaks the cycle of consumerism will be difficult, but the pope thinks it is possible if people realize that every action has eternal moral consequences. Nothing anyone ever does is independent of questions of morality. Central to facilitating this shift is the need for a renewed commitment to moral education, which Francis sees as the only way to address the current ecological crisis. This education certainly must happen through schools and catechesis, but the pope also focuses on the family unit as the primary space for this project. If families can teach their children to live better lives more open to the world and to other people, Francis expects that not just environmental problems but a wide range of social ills will be remediated. Church leaders and clergy are obligated to facilitate such education, both through raising baseline awareness of the issues and by making these concerns personal for individual Catholics.³⁷

While Francis would like knowledge of impending devastation to suffice in changing people's behaviors, he does not expect an education solely based in scientific knowledge to be adequate for this task. The pope focuses instead on linking science to a moral education and spiritual conversation. Such a joint approach should involve Catholic teaching about creation and emphasize solidarity between all creatures, human and not. This education should focus on teaching people to enjoy a simple life at peace with oneself and the world, finding joy in the wonders of creation rather than turning towards material consumption and physical things for satisfaction.³⁸

Francis hopes understanding every single moment someone is alive as a divine gift of immeasurable worth will inspire kindness and love in interpersonal relationships, letting people draw closer to each other and fundamentally to God. Rather than pridefully trying to individually make the drastic changes the world needs, he urges people to embrace the world in a personal way, truly loving all that lives. Each person should embrace with love as much as of the world as they can, fostering the flowering and flourishing of all that lives. This love must extend past little actions and include “macro-relationships, social economic, and political ones,” shaping national and international policy. While the pope refrains from discussing what this would be in practice, he is clear that people collectively are far from implementing these necessary changes. Society must transform at every level.³⁹

It is with this push for deeper education about love, peace, and good relationships that Francis ends *Laudato Si'*, discussing the love of God and of Mary as inspirational models for humanity to emulate. He offers two prayers at the end, one for the Earth itself and one showing the union between humanity and the rest of creation. The first asks God to change the hearts and minds of those focused on personal gain to instead focus on wonder, justice, peace, and love in every action and “discover the worth of each thing.” The second prayer echoes St. Francis’s Canticle of the Sun, praising God alongside all creatures while asking God to teach humanity humility about their place in the world.⁴⁰

What then to make of such a long document that raises so many different concerns, ranging from the purely quotidian pragmatic to those all-encompassing theological questions about the purpose of humanity and the earth as a whole? Several key themes cut across *Laudato Si'* and comprise the core of contemporary Catholic social teaching concerning human-environment relationships.

Principally, Francis develops an idea of integral ecology that links environmental degradation with violence against the poor, holding that environmental problems are firstly social problems because of how they effect the poor. This relationship cannot be ignored, and as a result the environment must take a central place in Catholic social concern. This extends beyond effects for those alive today to include future generations yet unborn or conceived, drawing on the Catholic principle of human dignity to push for a solidarity that cuts across all divisions of time and space. If all actions are evaluated with these principles in mind, the actions undertaken will be good and may help humanity avoid environmental devastation.

Yet the pope does not see such goodness in the contemporary world, for it is instead overrun by a consumerist, throwaway culture that spoils environments across the globe. He argues that this is underpinned by an individualistic worldview preoccupied with economic profit and techno-scientific power unconstrained by morality or values. The planet is in crisis.

To correct this, Francis proposes a renewed focus on moral and spiritual education that emphasizes the value of humanity and all life. Only through reorienting humanity to its eschatological purpose does the pope think that humanity will be able to correct the course of the planet and overcome the devastation it currently wreaks upon all creation. Making wonder, love, justice, and peace the aim of every single action will accomplish this, and it is the duty of all people to work toward this. For Francis it is only through incorporating each of these positions into every person's actions that humanity can fulfill its vocation to help all that exists come closer to God.

One of Francis's key aims with this encyclical is to develop a heightened awareness of the affective bonds between humanity and the environment and make environmental degradation personally emotional. In geographic terms, this is an effort to give the entire world the affective qualities often only ascribed to localized place. For the pope the relationship people have with the world is meant to be deeply personal and emotional. The environment should not remain a static

backdrop but instead be understood as central to human identity. Francis hopes that establishing such a relationship with the world will alter the ways in which people treat the planet. Without this intellectual bond, Francis does not believe the world will successfully cope with climate change or alleviate poverty.

Cardinal Peter Turkson

Though comprehensively ascertaining who and what influenced Francis's teaching is a futile task, any discussion of his teaching is would be incomplete without mentioning Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, a major contributor to *Laudato Si'*. Turkson has held a central role throughout Francis's papacy as one of his chief subordinates, promoting and expanding upon even Francis's contributions to Catholic thought and furthering Catholic social teaching, especially across Africa. Though obviously not the pope, Turkson is a major figure in the current Catholic hierarchy whose perspective on Catholic social teaching concerning the environment reveals a great deal about potential directions for papal teaching moving forward. While not the captain, Turkson often is at the helm.⁴¹

Writing about his key takeaways from the encyclical, Turkson (2016) emphasizes familial links that cut across generations and neighbors, arguing that there should be no separation between any people. The destruction of the earth or violence against a neighbor is consequently violence against oneself, which is why love and caring need to guide every relationship rather than only a fraction. He pushes beyond material stewardship, promoting an ethic of care and compassion to close the distance between humanity and the rest of creation. He interprets Francis's call to care for a creation as something virtuous in its own right, pushing beyond only caring for the environment due to its influence on the poor to recognize a true underlying value in the created world.⁴²

Through this interpretation Turkson offers several practical examples for behavioral changes those inspired by the encyclical can take. He has quite a few suggestions: avoiding plastic, reducing

water, recycling waste, cooking no more than needed, using public transport, planting trees, turning off lights, repurposing unwanted things, relying less of HVAC systems, and caring for other living creatures. Each of these proposals is primarily an individual change, likely to draw of the ire of those who see the only solution to contemporary environmental crises as systemic change. Yet viewing these individual efforts in opposition to systemic change would be a mistake. It is more accurate to view them as a complement to the encyclical's calls for systemic change in economic systems by offering a way for all people to take part and increase the love in the world in some small way, especially if they otherwise lack substantial power to make meaningful change. Making individual changes does not excuse someone from pushing for systemic change in whatever ways are available to them. These two types of change are intertwined, not separate, competing proposals.⁴³

Turkson has challenged U.S. parishes in particular to incorporate *Laudato Si'* into parish life more than has been done so far. The cardinal pushed parishes to hold press events about the encyclical and bring in high profile environmental speakers to parts of the United States where they might not otherwise travel. He also wanted parishes to, within the bounds of U.S. law, press policy makers to take concrete action to ameliorate environmental change. He suggested the Catholic Climate Covenant, an U.S. based NGO set up in 2006 that connects parishes to educational resources and other support, as a key partner in this effort helping parishes move forward with the encyclical in mind. Turkson also urged parishes and Catholic schools to work closely with their diocesan bishop and the USCCB itself to develop strategies for bringing environmental teaching into their homilies, providing additional printed materials and video messages to distribute among their communities, and logistical support to organize these efforts. These concrete steps are central to how the papacy currently envisions *Laudato Si'* to influence parish life.⁴⁴

2018 Vatican Conference

The most recent major event concerning the hierarchy's perspectives on the relationship between humans and the environment was a conference at the Vatican in July 2018 concerning environmental degradation. The conference brought together academics, Church leaders, and activists, especially children, from around the world to discuss the moral dimensions of nature-society relationships. Of the dozens of speeches and presentations given, three stand out as particularly germane to this thesis.

The first of these was given by Cardinal Peter Turkson, who offered the personal words of welcome to begin the conference. He focused not just on the sinfulness that is environmental degradation and overconsumption but also on how the planet is currently falling into ruins and if this generation fails, there will be no next attempt. Turkson was convinced that humanity could rise to this challenge so long as it acted together. Real global solidarity is for him the only true way out of this mess is urgently needed.⁴⁵

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, spoke next, offering an official welcome on behalf of the Holy See. He emphasized the messages of integral ecology and the familial bonds connecting all life. Current environmental crises are for him a product of a misplaced anthropocentrism that envision humans as lord over creation rather than respecting the role of God. After summarizing *Laudato Si'*, Cardinal Parolin discussed the need to view the world not as an accident but instead as an intentional gift from God to all as a demonstration of God's love. Devastation and destruction make a mockery of this gift and must not happen, for humanity needs to work to save creation with *Laudato Si'* as a guide.⁴⁶

The final key speaker concerning the Catholic hierarchy's views was Francis himself, who spoke near the conference's end. Francis implored all people to understand the relationships connecting all that exists, mentioning a need to understand this in order to avoid the terrible future

that looms ahead. Quoting several of his predecessors, Francis urged all to make concern for the future a key part their lives. He mentioned the need for the international community to better implement the 2015 Paris Agreement. Civil society too has a role to play alongside political leaders in resolving environmental crises. Francis did here make a concession to pragmatism, stating that those seeking to solve these problems needed to work with financial institutions, especially in the short term, even though they have been part of the problem itself. Though he acknowledges that this task is difficult, Francis focuses on the need for it to happen in order to make a better future for the children and grandchildren of those alive today. In doing so he uses a common argument among Catholic intellectuals as well as environmental movements, making children the reason for action rather than any other cause.⁴⁷

The Foundation Is In Place

Although some commentators saw *Laudato Si'* as an entirely novel form of Catholic teaching, it did not come out of nowhere. It builds upon a long history of Catholic papal teaching about the environment. What the pope did was add far more nuance to teachings on authentic development and integral ecology, frame climate change as an imminent threat all must work against immediately, and further cement the Church's insistence that environmental degradation is always social and political, never just technical. Most importantly Francis added gravitas to this ongoing conversation in order to move it beyond the walls of the Vatican into the pews of Catholic churches around the world. This is not to say the encyclical or its specific text were predetermined. Yet the past half-century has seen a constant increase in papal concern about relationships between humanity and the environment.

Pope Francis set the cornerstone on a foundation laid by his predecessors. Paul VI made environmental degradation a topic worthy of concern by a Catholic pontiff. John Paul II continued this approach both by naming Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology and increased focus on

the ways those concerned for the poor cannot ignore environmental conditions, mentioning the environment in several of his encyclicals. Benedict XVI further expanded the papal focus on the environment in several ways, partnering with the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I to develop ecumenical Christian approaches to this problem, shifting the Vatican to renewable energy and urging all Catholic dioceses and parishes around the world to do the same as resources permitted, and including a full chapter in his only social encyclical on the importance of the environment for human fulfillment. During all of this national bishops' conferences from around the world wrote alongside the popes, supporting them to the degree that Francis was able to reference key insights from sixteen such conferences in *Laudato Si'*.

Francis deepened this papal concern about nature-society relationships. In devoting an entire encyclical rather than just a chapter to the environment, Francis tried to make these topics resonate with Catholics across the globe and inspire them to change the world. By deepening integral ecology through incorporating a wide range of theological perspectives and applying general ideas to specific cases, Francis shows how Catholic environmental teaching should influence daily behaviors. He also discusses the importance of the environment for humanity beyond just social teaching, focusing as well on how personal relationships with God can be deepened through one's relationship with the environment, drawing especially on St. Francis of Assisi to broaden the scope of Catholic papal environmental thought. *Laudato Si'* inspired many outside the Catholic Church to discuss environmental change through a moral lens and provided language and institutional support for those already doing so. Perhaps most importantly, by receiving widespread media coverage Francis helped reveal the environmental dimensions of Catholic teaching to many around the world. Though he did not create the Catholic focus on nature-society relationships, Francis was better able than his predecessors to broadcast this message and get people to think about Catholic environmental teaching.⁴⁸

Laudato Si's most novel contribution to Catholic environmental teaching happens should be particularly interesting for geographers and reveal how in practice incorporating the study of religion into geography strengthens the discipline. By highlighting the emotional ties between humanity and the non-human world as well as characterizing the world as a living, created subject Francis seeks to radically transform the meanings people attach to the world and how they interpret it in their lives. People should not just interact with environments when they want food, water, energy, or some other material good, but they should also turn to it in order better know and understand God. He does not envision this as just using the created world as a path to God but instead a way for people to join with the created world in an ongoing process of divine worship and praise. In short, Francis wants to transform the entire world into particular kind of place filled with love, positivity, connections, and opportunity.⁴⁹

This is not to say the development of ecologically minded papal teaching was universally accepted by Catholics. Some theologians rejected Francis's focus on non-human intrinsic value. They also saw the pope's celebration of human's ability to experience God in nature as heretically pantheistic. Reception was quite mixed among lay Catholics as well. Though a third of U.S. Catholics had a positive reaction to the encyclical a year after its release, about half that number deeply disagreed with the pope while the majority did not know enough to form an opinion. The encyclical also received pushback from Catholic U.S. political leaders, with presidential candidates such as Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, Bobby Jindal, Marco Rubio, and Rick Santorum each opposing the encyclical, often by rejecting his standing to speak on issues of science or economics.⁵⁰

Yet the popes have long ignored such criticisms, drawing on widespread scientific consensus where it existed and the precautionary principle where results were inconclusive to show the need for moral concern at all levels of decision-making concerning the environment. The popes also drew from a large corpus of theology that was developed over the past millennium to help them remain

firmly within Catholic Tradition even when responding to contemporary events. They collectively each teach that one cannot be a good Catholic and sit idly by in the face of degradation that threatens the poor at any scale, whether climate change or highly localized increases in toxicity. Papal teaching contains a strong moral imperative for action, not just urging but requiring Catholics around the world to do what they can to mitigate such threats and resist any further degradation.

¹ Francis, *Laudato Si', or On The Care Of Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

² Francis, 2015, §11-16.

³ Francis, 2015, §21. See also Nicolas Howe, *Landscapes of the Secular*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, 153-159 and Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 49-55.

⁴ Francis, 2015, §27-31.

⁵ Francis, 2015, §32-42.

⁶ Francis, 2015, §43-61.

⁷ Francis, 2015, §62-65. See also John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990.

⁸ Francis, 2015, §66. For discussions of the prevalence of alternative perspectives among other Christian communities, see Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009, especially 109-141; Bernard D. Zaleha and Andrew Szasz, "Keep Christianity Brown! Climate Denial on the Christian Right in the United States," in *The World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-Delay, 209–228. New York: Routledge, 2014; and Lisa Vox, "Why Don't Christian Conservatives Worry about Climate Change? God," *Washington Post*, 2017.

⁹ Francis, 2015, §67-92, especially §67-68 and 89-90. For discussions of Protestant dualisms, see Mark R. Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1997, 27-28 and 39-41 and Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015, 29-34, 103.

¹⁰ Francis, 2015, §93-95.

¹¹ Francis, 2015, §96-100. For a reading of Karl Rahner in light of ecological thought, see Michael W. Petty *A Faith That Loves the Earth: The Ecological Theology of Karl Rahner*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996, especially pp. 120-135.

¹² Francis, 2015, §69, 87, 91. The Canticle of the Sun, also known as the Canticle of Creatures, was St. Francis of Assisi's attempt to join the rest of creation in praising God for the glory of existence and creation. See also Stoll, 1997, 13-14, 39-41, and 106-108 and Berry, 2015, 150-153.

¹³ Francis, 2015, §101 and Lynn White, Jr., "Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207.

¹⁴ Francis, 2015, §102-117. See also William Meyer, *The Progressive Environmental Prometheans*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

¹⁵ Francis, 2015, §107-109, 127-129.

¹⁶ Francis, 2015, §120.

¹⁷ Francis, 2015, §130-136.

¹⁸ Francis, 2015, §111, 122-123.

¹⁹ Francis, 2015, §137-142. See also Peter Cardinal Turkson, "Family and the Environment—Caring for Our Common Home: The Holistic View of Pope Francis," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 13, no. 2 (2016): 167–174.

²⁰ Francis, 2015, §143-146.

²¹ Francis, 2015, §147-155.

²² Francis, 2015, §156-162.

²³ For a comprehensive introduction to political ecology see Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari, “Gender and Environment: A Feminist Political Ecology Perspective,” in *Feminists Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Perspectives*, edited by Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Ester Wangari, 2-23, London: Routledge, 1996 and Gavin Bridge, James McCarthy, and Tom Perreault, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, edited by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy, 3-18, London: Routledge, 2015. For a more applied discussions of feminist political ecology and the importance of gender to understanding relationships between humans and the environment see Ellis Adjei Adams, Luke Juran, and Idowu Ajibade, “‘Spaces of Exclusion’ in Community Water Governance: A Feminist Political Ecology of Gender and Participation in Malawi’s Urban Water User Associations,” *Geoforum* 95, 133-142.

²⁴ One point where this affinity with sustainability comes through quite clearly is his section heading to Chapter Four: “Environmental, Economic, and Social Ecology (Francis, 2015, §138),” directly paralleling the language used in post-Brundtland report sustainability as a way to conceptualize what sustainability means in practice. See also Andrew McGregor, “Sustainable Development and ‘Warm Fuzzy Feelings’: Discourse and Nature Within Australian Environmental Imaginaries,” *Geoforum* 35, no. 5 (2004): 593-606; Lucas F. Johnson, “Sustainability as a Global Faith? The Religion Dimensions of Sustainability and Personal Risk.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (2013): 47–69; or Trent Brown, “Sustainability as Empty Signifier: Its Rise, Fall, and Radical Potential,” *Antipode* 48, no. 1 (2015): 115-133.

²⁵ Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) 2016: Attitudes about Climate Change*, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016a. See also J. Patrick Hornbeck II, “Counting Catholics in the United States of America,” *American Catholic Studies* 123, no. 4 (2012): 2-4.

²⁶ For a discussion of the commitment many political ecologists have to actually inspiring change (and some of the problems associated with this) see Bridge, McCarthy, and Perreault, 2015, 4-8, and Alex Loftus, “Political Ecology: Where is Political Ecology,” *Progress in Human Geography* 43, no. 1 (2019): 172-182.

²⁷ For a typical example of sustainability, see Subhes C. Bhattacharyya, “Energy Access Programmes and Sustainable Development: A Critical Review and Analysis,” *Energy for Sustainable Development* 16, no. 3 (2012): 260-271. For recent critical reviews of sustainability see Anita M. Chaudry and Michael Perelman, “Human Development with Sustainability: Are Good Intentions Enough?” *Development and Change* 44, no. 3 (2013): 813-822; Brown, 2015: 115-133; or Neville R. Ellis and Petra Tschakert, “Triple-wins as Pathways to Transformation? A Critical Review,” *Geoforum* in press (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.12.006>.

²⁸ Francis, 2015, §163, 199-201.

²⁹ Francis, 2015, §164-198, especially 178-181.

³⁰ Francis, 2015, §190-198. Additionally, for discussions of sustainability’s prevalence see McGregor, 2004; Chaudry, 2013; and Mikael Bergius and Jill Tove Buset, “Towards a Green Modernization Development Discourse: The New Green Revolution in Africa,” *Journal of Political Ecology* 29, no. 1 (2019): 57-83.

³¹ Francis, 2015, §190.

³² Francis, 2015, §216-221.

³³ Francis, 2015, §165-169.

³⁴ Francis, 2015, §172-175. See also Turkson, 2016.

³⁵ Francis, 2015, §165.

³⁶ Francis, 2015, §170-171.

³⁷ Francis, 2015, §203-215.

³⁸ Francis, 2015, §216-221.

³⁹ Francis, 2015, §222-232. Francis draws the quotation itself from Benedict XVI, 2009 when the now pope-emeritus spoke not just of individual relationships people had with God but of the collective relationship between humanity and God often neglected and dismissed.

⁴⁰ Francis, 2015, §238-246.

⁴¹ Turkson, 2016; Celia Deane-Drummond, “Laudato Si’ and the Natural Sciences: An Assessment of Possibilities and Limits,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2016): 392–415; Peter Cardinal Turkson, “Words of Welcome,” *International Conference on the Third Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’*, Vatican City, 2018; and William T. Cavanaugh, ed., *Fragile World: Ecology and The Church*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018, 33-48.

⁴² Turkson, 2016 and Cavanaugh, 2018, 33-48.

⁴³ Turkson, 2016, especially 172-174. For a discussion of the limitations of these sorts of changes see Ted Steinberg, “Can Capitalism Save the Planet?: On the Origins of Green Liberalism,” *Radical History Review* 107

(2010): 7–24 or Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, especially pp. 64-106 and 239-257.

⁴⁴ Cavanaugh, 2018, 33-48.

⁴⁵ Turkson, 2018.

⁴⁶ Pietro Cardinal Parolin, “Opening Remarks: The Importance of *Laudato Si*’ Today,” *International Conference on the Third Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si*’, Vatican City, 2018.

⁴⁷ Francis, “General Audience,” *International Conference on the Third Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si*’, Vatican City, 2018.

⁴⁸ Bill McKibben, “Global Heating, Pope Francis, and the Promise of *Laudato Si*” In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, edited by John Hart, 457-459. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 2017 and Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

⁴⁹ This is not to say Francis always pushes for this transformation—his encyclical packs several different perspectives into its 246 sections that are not always easy (or possible) to read in complementary manners. He does not always carry themes throughout or link his abstractions to practical suggestions and at times, such as with sustainable development and natural gas, Francis’s approach to concrete actions seems to be directly in tension with his call to never prioritize some over all. Yet his attempt in certain sections, especially Chapters 2 and 6, to transform the world into a radically new kind of place is a significant shift in hierarchical Catholic environment teaching that draws not just on Catholic social teaching but also more ecocentric and affective approaches often associated with St. Francis of Assisi. Here more than anywhere else Francis novelly contributes to Catholic thought.

⁵⁰ James V. Schall, S.J. (“Concerning the ‘Ecological’ Path to Salvation,” *Catholic World Reporter*, 2015) exemplifies this negative theological reaction to Francis’s teaching. For less polemical and more academic discussions of some of the discord between Catholic theologians and Catholic social teaching see Patrick Allit, “American Catholics in the Environment, 1960-1995,” *Catholic Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (1998): 263–280 or Michael Agliardo, “The U.S. Catholic Response to Climate Change,” in *How the World’s Religions Are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, 174–192. New York: Routledge, 2014. For the Church’s own polling data on reactions to *Laudato Si*’ see CARA, 2016a. Jeb Bush actually made these statements on the first official day of his campaign, and though he cited Catholic teaching to support his policy decisions when governor of Florida, concerning *Laudato Si*’ he stated that “religion ought to be about making us better as people and less about things that end up getting in the political realm” (Suzanne Goldenberg and Sabrina Siddiqui, “Jeb Bush Joins Republican Backlash against Pope on Climate Change,” *The Guardian*, 2015). Cruz and many of the others similarly rejected the existence of a moral or religious dimension of climate change or environmental degradation more broadly, instead framing them as technical or economic issues where the pope had no standing (Seth Heald, “The Pope’s Climate Message in the United States: Moral Arguments and Moral Disengagement,” *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 58, no. 3 (2016): 4–13). For further examples of reactions from conservative U.S. politicians or media outlets see Brian Fraga, “Political Role Reversal: Democrats Praise Encyclical, While GOP Remains Cautious,” *National Catholic Register*, 2015 and Edson Tandoc Jr., Bruno Takahashi, and Ryan Thomas, “Bias vs. Bias,” *Journalism Practice* 12, no. 7 (2018): 834–49.

Chapter 4—Setting Up The Scaffolding: What Do Clergy Think?

Previous chapters show that the Catholic hierarchy has reflected deeply on the relationship between people and the environment. In recent years, the Pope and other prominent Catholic bishops and theologians have urged political and economic leaders around the globe to reduce pollution and grapple with climate change. For these Catholic leaders the ongoing failure to address these problems is a sin. Yet despite this work, many Catholics are either unaware of this teaching or do not think environmental topics are relevant to them or their faith. Though a central pillar of Catholic social teaching, these environmental insights remain marginal to Catholic life. But why?¹

An apocryphal story often about the Protestant reformer Philip Melancthon, later given the epithet “teacher of Germany,” but sometimes with reference to others, speaks to this dilemma. (Witte, 1995: 178). He is said to have wanted to gather the opinions of the everyday German clergy to ascertain how the Reformation was influencing daily life for those who were not participating in the vigorous theological debate characterizing Western Christian theology during the sixteenth century. He wanted to know if their movement was working.²

To do this, he sought out clergy beyond the universities and city centers, observing their celebration of the mass and asking for their perspectives on the Reformation. What he found horrified him. Far from the debate about these ideas Melancthon thought was occurring, he found practices he was hesitant to even call Christian. Many clergy lacked a rudimentary theological education; some were unable to read any Latin whatsoever. Melancthon returned from his journey driven to improve theological education, for without this he did not think the Reformation could succeed in transforming Christianity. The major Reformers could not reshape Christianity on their own. Something more was needed.³

Whether this literally happened or is myth is beyond my ability to say. Yet this story’s message--that intellectual and theological debates may not directly influence the behaviors and views

of most people--still rings true. The insights and debates among theologians and academic may not filter down to ordinary people and fail to change the world. Given the threat of climate change and continued environmental degradation, this is a serious problem. *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teaching hope to address this, particularly through their emphasis on living Catholicism rather than just preaching it.

To better understand how Catholic environmental teachings such as the *Laudato Si'* affected Catholics, I interviewed Catholic priests and deacons who do the hard work of teaching Catholicism. This is not to suggest that the broader situation today is what Melancthon found, for in the intervening centuries the education of Catholic clergy has significantly improved. I merely suspected that the lack of almost any knowledge about Catholic environmental teaching or consequent behavioral change among many lay Catholics--those not involved in formal religious orders or members of the clergy--might have a similar explanation.⁴

From the late spring until early fall of 2018 I spoke with Catholic clergy to find out how and if Catholic parishes and their clerical leadership were engaging with Catholic environmental teaching. The parish is the primary scale for everyday Catholic life, typically made up of one or two churches with anywhere between 100 and 10,000 members. While bishops or nuns are commonly the public face of Catholicism, especially outside of the tradition, for practicing Catholics much of their day-to-day interaction with the institutional Church will happen through their local priest(s) and deacons.⁵

This chapter and those that follow are focused on relaying the experiences and perspectives concerning Catholic environmental teaching in order to understand how parishes interact with the current of institutional teaching on the environment discussed in preceding chapters. The primary driver for the remainder of this thesis is a focus on assessing the material and lived dimensions of Catholic environmental teaching, as well as their lack. In doing so these chapters help underscore the distance between the institution and the individual within Catholicism, even when the individual is in

a position so often and easily conflated with the broader institution. Whether the texts, including the widely-praised *Laudato Si'*, actually come alive and have an influence beyond the armchair or the conference room depends in large part on whether people interact with them.

Framing this in a manner that speaks conceptually to the intended primary audience of academic geographers, these chapters help show the ways in which the global does (and does not) transform and influence the local while highlighting the depth to which contemporary ideologies and worldviews are entrenched even among the clergy in a fashion that hampers movement toward the radical changes Francis proposes. Moreover, it shows the constraints limiting the effectiveness of local community leaders in pushing their communities in directions, in this case a far more symbiotic relationship with the non-human world, in which the community does not want to go. This helps us rethink not just Catholic parishes, where clergy are often conceptualized as the driving force, but also calls into question the degree to which local leadership even when it supports action against a particular problem can independently drive systemic change in their communities.

Catholic clergy have a few specific duties with respect to those who live within their parish borders. Parishes are the basic territorial unit in Catholicism and as such the most tangible manifestation of the Catholic Church and the locus for Catholicism in practice. In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, a parish and its pastor's decisions determine how Catholicism unfolds in practice in their parish and should not be overruled except when absolutely necessary. Catholic life is parish life and occurs at this scale far more than any other.⁶

Under the code of canon law that governs Catholicism, parishes and their associated clergy are charged with leading all who live within a parish (their parishioners) toward God and salvation. This should happen not just by observing ritual sacraments and gathering for communal worship but also by seeking to improve the material world. This should happen both by helping the poor and sick in the immediate term by providing them necessary sustenance--returning to them those

resources which under Catholic social teaching are rightfully theirs--and through educating all people in a parish so they can live in line with Catholic moral thought.⁷

Education, in fact, is the primary canonical duty for a parish's clerical leadership. Canon 528 instructs them to preach, promote, and enact the gospel with special attention to questions of communal justice. Correlated with this duty is a right all parishioners have to a full Catholic education about morality and their lives. Such catechetical education about Christian life should not be split from the material world but instead must teach people to act morally in order to make the faith "living, explicit and productive." Canonically, parishes are first and foremost educational institutions, and parish clergy are teachers trying to convert the hearts, minds, and actions all to morality and justice.⁸

As such, if there is any communication between the intellectual wings of the Church and lay Catholics it is because priests and parishes are the conduit. This holds for environmental issues just as for any others, and so if the Catholic Church actually was becoming more ecological this transformation must happen in its parishes. This more than anything else drove me to research the process of building an ecological church at the parish scale.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven priests from across the Diocese of Syracuse supplemented by four with deacons, a lower order of clergy who assist priests with the sacraments and in running the parish.⁹ Prospective participants were primarily recruited in-person either after they celebrated a mass or during their scheduled office hours, though a minority were contacted over email or telephone, especially at the beginning of the project until this method proved ineffective. All interviews were conducted in person and lasted anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. At the choice of the participant were either recorded as an audio file I later transcribed or by handwritten notes during the interview itself. Participants were each assigned a pseudonym and have been anonymized as much as is feasible; all references to interviewees by

name in this thesis are made using these pseudonyms. I reviewed and coded interview transcriptions and notes over the fall and winter of 2018 and used them to outline the remainder of this thesis.

While under my research protocol I cannot reveal any specifics about the demographics of those who I interviewed (and conversely those who I did not), I can make a few general observations about the demographic profile of clergy across the Diocese of Syracuse. The first and most obvious is that priests and deacons in the institutional Catholic Church are required under canon law to be men, and thus the voices speaking in this thesis, including my own, are men's. As a result, this study must be taken as partial and not as a representation of all Catholic perspectives on these issues or even the perspectives of all within the Diocese of Syracuse. Yet I have chosen to focus on these voices as a consequence of their position and Catholic canon law, for priests hold most *de jure* institutional power within the Catholic Church and are often the only voices heard in its churches. My focus exclusively on the voices of these men is a consequence of these institutional conditions and should not be confused in the slightest with support for a gendered clergy or the exclusion of women's voices. This thesis, after all, does not seek to be the final word on U.S. Catholic environmental thought and behavior. It simply illuminates voices often left out of academic conversations concerning these issues yet critically important to how Catholicism is actually lived.

Apart from their gender, priests across the Diocese of Syracuse share several other characteristics. The first of these is their high levels of education as compared with others in the United States, for before ordination priests must finish an undergraduate education, including a substantial focus on philosophy, and three years of seminary training in pursuit of a graduate degree in theology. Priests also have relative economic stability as given the shortage of priests in the United States those who remain clergy in good standing are assigned to work in parishes by their bishop and are never in danger of un- or under-employment save for forced retirement or expulsion. Even when they retire, however, they often do so to retreat communities with other older priests

paid for and funded by the Church. Within their parishes, priests are provided with housing and frequently an automobile as well as vacation days and discretionary pay for their own use. Catholic priests are in so many ways part of the ‘white collar middle class.’

Most (though certainly not all) priests in the Diocese of Syracuse are also typically older than fifty and descended from Western, Central, or Southern European immigrants. Many grew up somewhere in the diocese and have lived in Central New York for most of their lives apart from seminary, though a fair number have come from around the United States and the wider world. As a result, while this study is largely about priests in the Diocese of Syracuse, it is at the same time a study predominantly about older white middle-class men and their perspectives on environmental challenges and climate change. There are certainly important distinctions--predominantly ordination--that hinder applying broad quantitative studies that suggest such a demographic might be less receptive to these issues in the United States, but at the outset this demographic profile should lower expectations about their engagement.¹⁰

In addition to interviews I attended either Sunday or daily mass at thirty-one parishes, some though far from all celebrated by people whom I interviewed. After each mass, I returned to my car to take notes on the general functioning of the parish with attention to whether environmental themes came up during the mass. These notes, especially when they involve capital projects or particular facets of parish life, cannot in practice be anonymized, and as such the few direct references to these notes use the actual name of the parish. Even when this happens, however, any references to clergy from that parish who I may or may not have interviewed are entirely separate.

I also gathered parish bulletins to search through to get a sense of parish life and events and examine whether environmental topics were mentioned. I searched for and collected any documents concerning the environment from these parishes, though for the most part this was a frustrated method for collecting data.

This thesis examines solely environmental concerns and does not address other dimensions of what I found at times to be quite vibrant communities. Catholic parishes and their clergy are juggling many different obligations and it would be entirely unfair to focus just one without acknowledging the work they do elsewhere that is important to the lives of their parishioners and surrounding communities. Similarly, while the personal lives of Catholic priests are a complex topic that falls beyond the scope of this thesis, the difficulty of contemporary Catholic clerical leadership is important to recognize at the outset. While this thesis is a critique of the lack of engagement with ecological and environmental issues by many clergy and their parishes across the Diocese of Syracuse, I am in no way assessing their ministries as a whole.

I similarly do not intend this thesis as a story about the Diocese of Syracuse in particular, for there is little reason why this diocese would be an outlier. Among the English-speaking U.S. Church, there is little reason for the Diocese of Syracuse to be treated as a wholly distinct case. Many other dioceses share similar challenges with low numbers of clergy, fewer parishioners, and shrinking donations. In the research design phase I even debated anonymizing the diocese yet determined that I could not effectively do so as a few diocesan-specific programs do exist and should not be written out of this thesis. While I certainly am not claiming that this study speaks for U.S. Catholicism as a whole, I suspect that especially among demographically similar Catholic dioceses further comparative research would support such broader claims. Though such research has yet to occur, it is my hope that moving forward scholars will take up this task and help develop a comprehensive understanding of how Catholicism and environmental thought intersect.

Diocesan Particulars

The Diocese of Syracuse has little public information about Catholic environmental teaching. One of the few is a short statement written by the current bishop, Robert Cunningham, following the encyclical's publication that is still available on the diocesan website. He chose to frame *Laudato Si'* as a document not primarily about the environment but instead about human relationships to nature and to each other, emphasizing the human dimensions of Francis's integral ecology as the important lesson taught by the encyclical. He briefly mentioned the destruction of natural resources, the threat of climate change caused by the moral failures of consumerism, and the need for all to live less destructive lives. Pollution, waste, and a lack of water were also brought up in passing, as was the need for more compassion toward the poor. In doing this in only a few paragraphs Cunningham hit on many of Francis's key points. However, when it came to changing behaviors, the bishop only asked Catholic communities to read the document and use it to begin talking about these topics in their communities. He offered no more guidance on how to find more information about Catholic environmental teaching or ways Catholics could become more involved in environmental projects in their communities. This is his only publicly available statement about the encyclical thus far.¹¹

This statement is not the only engagement the diocese has had with *Laudato Si'*. To even find the few documents that exist on the diocesan website is a challenge, as there is nothing on their homepage or within the first level of tabs that mentions creation, the environment, *Laudato Si'*, or any other similar such topic. Environmental topics can only be found on a single page three levels deep into the website under Being Catholic→ Pope Francis→ *Laudato Si'*. On this page there are links to several different documents, most produced by the United States Conference for Catholic Bishops, that discuss the encyclical's main points. There are also links to groups such as Catholic Relief Services or the Catholic Climate Covenant that focus on these issues. Yet among all of this, the only document from Syracuse was the short statement by Bishop Cunningham. All other

information is external and there is nothing available about environmental issues in the Diocese of Syracuse or efforts to remediate them.¹²

This is not to say that the diocese has entirely brushed off *Laudato Si'*, for the diocesan Social Action Ministry has attempted to raise the profile of these issues across Central New York. This office works to increase engagement across the diocese with each of the seven pillars of Catholic social teaching including the environment. They produce between one and three bulletin inserts each year on CST and distribute these and other materials to parishes and other organizations around the diocese. At the time of writing, the available materials on their webpage involve a push towards more welcoming U.S. immigration policies and a critique of the use of armed drones in warfare. No information about the environment, other than a cursory mention that it is a pillar of Catholic social teaching, is available through the website. In the interviews, however, many clergy noted that this office and the diocese as a whole was pushing environmental issues internally, often by sending emails to parishes and clergy suggesting preaching about particular topics of diocesan concern. Several also mentioned that the relevant diocesan officers appear to actually be concerned with these concerns and are working to increase awareness about them across the diocese. Yet creation and the environment remain quite marginal to the diocesan public profile. Even the Social Action Ministry is not successfully spearheading these efforts at the diocesan level, even though the group indicates it would help with such projects. In short, within the diocese there is little institutional support or impetus for integrating Catholic environmental teaching into parish life.¹³

Laudato Si' and Broad Concepts

If Catholics across the Diocese of Syracuse are going to engage with Catholic environmental teaching to bring about the deep changes Francis calls for in *Laudato Si'*, those “in the trenches,” to quote Fathers Alex and Sebastian, must lead the way. To better understand the views of these

parochial clergy I started my interviews with questions about their knowledge concerning *Laudato Si'* and the entire body of Catholic environmental thought.

When I asked what they knew about *Laudato Si'*, four priests admitted immediately that they had not had the chance to even begin reading it. Eight others said that they had only skimmed the document or read some sections. Even among those who had read the entire letter, most had not picked up the document or thought about it since the months immediately following its release. A few clergy brought a copy to our interview, yet only three of these appeared in less than mint condition. For a sizable subset of priests across the diocese, *Laudato Si'* as a text did not make much of an impact even on its arrival and the insights that enthralled many commentators within remained hidden behind its cover.

Contextually, however, *Laudato Si'* affected the perspectives of clergy across the diocese, including those who had not picked up the encyclical. Though only a few of those I interviewed fall into this latter category, I suspect that they represent a far larger group of clergy across the diocese who chose not to participate in this project due to their disengagement or disinterest in Catholic environmental teaching. Interestingly, I found discussions with these clergy to often be the most candid and useful in thinking about *Laudato Si'*'s influence in the Diocese of Syracuse.

The two shortest interviews, with Fathers Jose and Earl, lasted fewer than sixteen minutes as both priests had barely engaged environmental thought in any format, Catholic or otherwise. Though neither had read *Laudato Si'*, both knew it mentioned Francis's concerns about how humans were harming the environment, the effects of this degradation on humanity, and the unjust distribution of goods and resources in favor of the powerful. These concepts are certainly central to *Laudato Si'* and even the most disengaged clergy have a basic understanding of Francis's teaching. The brevity of our conversations and each priest's admitted lack of any further involvement with these issue in their ministry suggest that, at least in their parishes, efforts to build an ecological

church in practice have made no progress. Yet even they understand the underlying principle at the heart of Catholic environmental teaching--that Catholics must care for the world beyond themselves. This suggests that a targeted effort to inspire clergy who had not read the encyclical to bring environmental issues into their parish would not start entirely from scratch, though it would certainly be a massive undertaking.

Indeed, the potential for such a shift among clergy who had not read the encyclical became clear through my conversation with Father Harvey. He had not read the encyclical yet gave one of the longest interviews, beginning by speaking uninterrupted for forty-five minutes in response to my first question and became more and more engaged as the interview continued. After the formal interview concluded he spoke about how he had never really thought about the relationship between Catholicism and the environment but saw the need for Catholic environmental teaching. He said, at least to me, that over the course of our conversation he realized how much he and others like him needed to read more, especially about topics historically marginal to the Church, in order to grow in their ministry. Speculating about what *Laudato Si'* might contain, Harvey expected that the encyclical might say creation was a gift that humanity is responsible for maintaining; that humanity is failing to adequately do so; that society needed to change not just its day-to-day behaviors but also underlying systems of power; and that the culture of consumption dominating the United States and the world today is unacceptable. Francis raises each of these points as central tenets of his message, though he speaks about far more in his encyclical. As Harvey drew on his own education in Catholic social teaching he began speaking quicker and more freely, saying the Church perhaps could help make progress on these issues and that he was interested in working with these issues more.

What is perhaps most interesting about his case, especially for scholars and environmental activists, is that Father Harvey self-identified as politically conservative and highly skeptical about climate change. Since judging science fell beyond the scope of what the Vatican could pronounce

true or false, he was adamant that there was room in the Church for legitimate debate about whether climate change was actually happening. Issues of food injustice, waste, and pollution are clearly problems in his eyes. Over the course of our hour-and-a-half discussion, these kept coming up as things people should work address. *Laudato Si'* could serve as a path for constructive engagement between environmental activists and at least some clergy--once the door was opened. Yet it took someone else actively raising this topic in a face-to-face conversation to get the ball rolling. *Laudato Si'*, at least for Father Harvey, is by itself nowhere near enough to spark engagement or lead him to bring these topics into his parish.

The fourth priest not to have read the encyclical, Father Philippe, is in many ways different from the other three yet in practice shares crucial similarities. He had a copy of the encyclical and three times in the interview mentioned that he wanted to get around to reading it. He was deeply knowledgeable about Catholic social teaching and its intersection with the environment over the past forty years through the universal destination of goods, the responsibility of all to steward and care for creation, and the need for the Church to be at the forefront of discussions about these issues that form the core of Catholic environmental teaching. Philippe knew a great deal about the theology grounding these topics and wanted to fulfill his perceived duty to raise these issues in his parish.

However, he did not want to do so before reading the encyclical and has not found the time to do so as of yet. Despite his deep concern with these issues, his parish was doing no more than those of Fathers Harvey, Earl, and Jose to implement Catholic environmental teaching. His knowledge and awareness of the encyclical and his agreement with Francis's environmental message and those of previous popes was not enough to shift even his own behaviors. There are simply too many other demands on his time for this to be a priority for him. At least in this parish *Laudato Si'* has not made a noticeable impact.

Such discursive agreement with Catholic environmental teaching coupled with a minimal effect on behaviors was how many priests who have read the encyclical, in part or even in full, have reacted. These are people like Father Richard. He had not finished the encyclical before our interview but read enough of it that he was comfortable saying that it requires humanity to respect the environment and use God's creation justly rather than abuse it for the benefit of a select very few. He mentioned Genesis, the Gospels, and St. Thomas Aquinas's work as sources that show how the ordered universe is good, often repeating that there was a lot in the tradition while avoiding discussing any more specific points of Catholic environmental teachings or examples of how it influenced his own life.

Richard spoke broadly about the beauty of the world and how reflecting on that beauty helped people draw closer to God. Though a poor facsimile of God's wonder, nature can still completely overwhelm human emotions and leave people awestruck and amazed. In his eyes the beauty of nature means that the divine must be so much more awesome--this was his approach to valuing the non-human world. Yet the material world itself is not important on its own. It is instead valuable because it allows humanity to understand and grow closer to God. For Richard, the environment that matters to people is the one in front of their faces, the one they can see and use to better know God. The middle of the oceans, the depths of deserts, and anywhere else that people do not see or interact with never entered our conversation. Their degradation was entirely unimportant to Richard when we talked about the moral dimensions of nature-society relationships. He imagined the world as no more than a stepping stone.

Each time I asked about how environmental issues came up in his ministry and his parish, Father Richard within the first two sentences of his response shifted to a discussion of redemption, salvation, and heaven beyond. Talking about the world for him was really to talk about heaven and immaterial God. He thought interacting with the physical world could help one in this journey--

indeed it greatly had for the monastic orders--and as a result he favored preserving natural beauty untainted by a humanity he saw as deeply sinful. It is the journey's end that holds his focus. All other parts of *Laudato Si'* and Catholic environmental teaching did not interest him.

Richard was not particularly concerned about delving into the specifics of climate change or environmental degradation because he was not going to be around in a century. What instead was important is that he lived a respectful life towards the world around him as he hoped that a generation or two down the line people would improve and solve the problems that face humanity today. His personal actions mattered far more than any other. If people respected themselves, he thought they then could respect other people, and if that happened everything else would fall into order. For Richard the environment will sort itself out if humanity sorts itself out, for God created a world with enough for all so long as no one overuses it. While he recognized that sometimes destruction occurred due to technology, this to him was a part of progress that would be fixed in the future. The environment was entirely secondary and there was no need for him to focus on environmental concerns in particular, for God would take care of it. Because of this approach to the world, Richard was perhaps the priest I spoke with least likely to seriously engage with Catholic environmental teaching and its call for large-scale behavioral change, even though he had read most of *Laudato Si'*. He did not think that it mattered to him, and so he had no interest in doing more. The construction of an ecological church had not even begun in his parish and I doubt he would ever get involved.

Fortunately, however, Richard's perspective was quite uncommon--at least among those clergy who I spoke with. Many of those who halfheartedly engaged with *Laudato Si'* or Catholic environmental teaching did not think that environmental issues were not at all important. Father Don was one such priest, and his experience encapsulates how most priests I spoke with have engaged with Catholic environmental thought. He had read large portions of the encyclical once it

came out but had not come back to it since then. Don saw creation as something more than just a repository of tools for humanity--for him it was something sacred to be nourished and protected. Glacial retreat in particular concerned him and felt that sinful greed drove people to destroy the world for their own benefit. The environment was important to all humanity and could not be allowed to degrade--in that he said he agreed with Francis. For Don, stewardship must win out and the Church should help in this process as much as it can.

And yet when we spoke about how he and his parish were doing with respect to treatment of the environment or whether they could do more, his immediate response was to say, "you know, I never thought of it in that way." He spoke briefly about recycling in his parish and about how respect for the environment comes up in youth education, but he almost immediately repeated that he did not know what else his parish should or even could do. At the church building some parishioners volunteer to keep the grounds looking nice, mulching and gardening as needed, and they ban balloons, confetti, and rice from their weddings so as not to litter. Parishioners spent a little time talking informally about the encyclical after it came out, but they had not done anything with it over the past couple years. At times Don said environmental topics crept into his preaching, but he had not given a homily on recycling or other environmental topics. Moreover, he had no plans to and would be surprised if others did.

He ended our conversation by talking about how he wished he had done more research before we began the interview. As opposed to Father Richard, Father Don thought that if humanity did not deal with them all people would be in serious trouble. In his eyes one could sin against the environment. He just did not know how to engage his parish in work that protected or bettered the environment. Don expressed a desire to do more, or at least thought that it would be a good idea for someone to do more. Yet he had not done much else or even gotten around to researching what suggestions others had made for implementing *Laudato Si'*.

Father Gert reacted to the encyclical in much the same way. Thinking that *Laudato Si'* set the tone for the Church in a way previous documents about the environment had failed to, he agreed that environmental degradation should be a concern for Catholics. Greed and a presupposition of human dominance were the roots of these problems, especially pollution and litter. Yet he too would not preach a whole homily about it, and apart from the few times that he brought it up when talking about creation, environmental concerns did not consciously effect his ministry. Nor did he want them to, for he had a lot on his plate and there were things that he thought as a priest should be higher priorities. The environment was important within Catholic thought and for Catholics who sought to live morally, but he did not view educating people about these issues as his professional concern. Though he declined to specify more, other topics were more important to his ministry.

As far as the technical and theological aspects of human-environment relationships Francis raises in *Laudato Si'*, Gert's immediate reaction was to wonder "what the hell is he talking about." Rather than responding to hierarchical directives, whether from the Vatican or the diocesan office, in his ministry or preaching Gert saw preaching the Gospel and helping people understand Scripture as his predominant duty. To him, this had little to do with the environment or other political issues. As a result, he tried to stay away from them in his ministry, even though in his personal life he is deeply concerned with environmental degradation and avidly reads about these issues. Though a moral issue that greatly troubles him, the environment is not something that he thinks is his problem to solve as a parish priest. For Gert that task is beyond his capacity and is something best addressed by others.

While many clergy who read the encyclical reacted similarly to Fathers Gert and especially Don, not all of them did. There were four or five priests who were each deeply affected by *Laudato Si'* and had made environmental concerns a central part of their ministry. These were people like Father Nathan, who showed up to our discussion with a well-worn copy of the encyclical filled with

tabs, notes, and folded corners. A far cry from the pristine copies of *Laudato Si'* most others brought to our meeting, if they brought anything at all, Nathan's copy by this point may have had more annotations scribbled in the margins than text on the page.

Father Nathan spoke of how his interest began with his astonishment when Cardinal Bergoglio took Francis as his regnal name following his election, awestruck that someone wanted to make the intersection of science, religion, and the plight of the poor the central concern not just of his ministry but of the entire Church. He immediately knew that this pope was going to bring something the Church sorely needed. Nathan read *Laudato Si'* immediately after its release and was struck by how it clearly synthesized insights from a host of perspectives to call for a drastic change in not just the Church's orientation and practice but the whole world. He was especially struck by passages about throwaway ideologies that envision the world entirely at the disposal of humanity. He was deeply affected by the second chapter's focus on the need for spirituality and ecology joined together and wholeheartedly embraced this move in his own ministry. Not just a facsimile as it was for Richard, for Nathan the world reveals something of God directly, and where humanity misses it is simply because humanity fails to understand, not because God is absent.

What struck Nathan most after his first reading of *Laudato Si'* was the need to incorporate its themes and the broader Catholic environmental teaching the encyclical led him to in all parts of his ministry. Rather than something that could be put back on a shelf, *Laudato Si'* would always teach him something new no matter how many times he read it as he continued to do. He has made environmental themes central part of the faith formation process for teenagers before confirmation and brought Catholic environmental teaching into his homilies, as he now thinks a preacher can always find a way to connect with the environment if they take the time to reflect on it. He also talked about how landscaping, both in his parish and at others he was aware of, had shifted over the

past two years as people began to realize how important spaces outside of the building itself are to the parish and surrounding community.

Interestingly, Father Nathan and the few like him who had deeply engaged with the encyclical were among the least likely to say that they had really implemented *Laudato Si'* or met the challenges set forth by Catholic environmental teaching. The document calls for a deep shift in the behaviors of all who read it, requiring them to act to implement it and try to change the world.

Nathan had several different ideas about possible programs, but so far he had been able to actually do very few of them. To him teaching parishioners about this encyclical is only the start to implementing the encyclical and something all clergy, even the least engaged, need to attempt.

Nathan's perspective stands in sharp contrast to someone like Father Earl, who when pressed about what he and his parish could do to better implement *Laudato Si'* said that that there really was nothing more they could do. The gulf in environmental thought between a priest who had not picked up the encyclical and one who had almost worn his away is vast, all the more so given Nathan's continued insistence that his concern as a Catholic priest was inspired and driven by a pope who began reigning less than six years ago.

After I finished my prepared questions, Nathan ran into his office and returned with an overstuffed manila folder he had used to direct an interfaith study group on the encyclical. This group was able to attract between thirty and forty participants from the community over about a month or so, making it quite successful as far as Catholic adult educational programming goes. Nathan started pulling out pamphlets and other notes he had taken from the USCCB or elsewhere as he tried to figure out what his parish could actually do to meet the encyclical's challenge. He also spoke about the deeper history of Catholic environmental teaching, including the USCCB's *Renewing the Earth*, the ways various popes since John XXIII have brought up these themes (with references to specific documents), and the Catechism as something he now saw in a new light. Nathan dipped

back into his office again and brought a copy of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, flipping to its chapter on the environment bookmarked in a similar manner as the encyclical.

Catholic environmental teaching had clearly found a home in his heart.

Father Nathan and the few others who are enraptured by the encyclical in their parishes are, however, by far the exception within the Diocese of Syracuse. While they have read *Laudato Si'* multiple times, gone beyond its pages to find other supporting texts, used it as part of their ministry, and organized parish activities around it, far more have not finished or even begun reading the encyclical. Yet these few exceptions show how, if the priests do engage seriously with the text and take the time to reflect on its connections with their ministry it can drastically change how they think about the relationship between humans and the environment. Those who actually engaged with *Laudato Si'* as text rather than just seeing it shift their context thought quite differently about the world afterwards. Such a potential ecological conversion exists for others. While not all priests may embrace this as fully as Father Nathan once they actually read and reflected on the encyclical, others may. Realizing that potential is not necessarily that far away, though on its own *Laudato Si'* will not get the clergy there.

Specific Elements of Catholic Environmental Teaching

While many clergy said they read some of document and agreed with its general statements, this still leaves unanswered the question of what it was that resonated with them. Over the rest of this chapter, I will discuss specific points clergy raised during our conversations. No priest or deacon referred to every one of these points, but each one kept coming up during my research and comprise the core beliefs of clergy across the diocese concerning human-environment relationships and their knowledge of Catholic environmental teaching. Individual priests and deacons certainly may disagree with certain of these precepts but collectively the clergy are interested in not just the broad strokes

but the specifics of Catholic environmental teaching. They know a great deal and at least among them the intellectual project of building an ecological Church has begun making headway.

One of the main specific points priests emphasized was that while *Laudato Si'* often is covered and thought of as a document specifically about climate change it actually speaks to far broader questions about the moral dimensions of nature-society relationships. None of them saw the encyclical as restricted just to climate change--some never even brought up the topic--but instead as a document that speaks to concerns across all of life. The clergy understand Catholic environmental teaching and *Laudato Si'* in particular as aiming to install an ethic of stewardship and love for creation in all people. This stems from a partial relational ontology at the heart of Catholic thought that is deeply concerned with how an individual's relationships change that person at their very core.

In emphasizing this relational approach, Father Colin saw Catholic environmental teaching as a reminder to Catholics that they are related not just with other people but with all life. When I asked him whether human-environment relationships were a moral issue, he paused by responded affirmatively (as did all but a small handful of priests). He thought this reminder was necessary since when sin is discussed as breaking of relationships people's non-human relationships are, though important, rarely considered. To actually call the mistreatment and degradation of the environment sinful, which Francis does, was in Colin's eyes a major step in Catholicism given the centrality of sin to the tradition. To be sinful is to turn oneself away from God is the worst thing a person can do and thinking of the environment in this manner is a significant change.

Building from this focus on relationships, several priests discussed how the Catholic notion of sinfulness relies on notions that an individual's character is constituted by three sets of relationships--with oneself, with neighbors, and with God. The priests and deacons I spoke with thought the main criteria when evaluating the morality of any action is whether it broke or weakened

any of these relationships. If so, the action is by definition sinful. When thinking about the relationship between the environment and sin, clergy often raised the requirement to treat one's neighbors properly and urged people to conceptualized caring for the environment as one such neighbor.

While he agreed that Francis tried to link sin with environmental degradation, Father Nestor was careful to point out that in doing so the pope was not inventing a new concept but instead reminding people of dimensions of sin the Church has recently failed to emphasize. From his perspective this systemic or corporate sin has problematically fallen to the wayside as the Church, especially in the United States, has concentrated on individual sin. Father Nestor thought that by incorporating the concept of systemic sin--a view that says the consequences of political and economic structures and systems can themselves be sinful even if the people involved within them try to act morally in their day-to-day lives--Francis returns the Church to broader moral critiques of not just people's behavior but underlying social structures. This sin is no less important or problematic than individual sin and has no less consequences, for if one is part of a system that breaks bonds of love all people should have with others then one also breaking these bonds with God. Father Nestor thought this is frequently how the environment is treated, especially in the United States, as people profess love and care for the environment as the same time that they destroy it through global systems of consumption. To repair this morally reprehensible situation people must not just step away from their participation in these systems but actively work to bring about their dissolution. Father Nestor thought Francis was able to put this problem clearly and critique the collective sinfulness of the world that cannot be fixed simply by individuals making small changes in their day-to-day lives.

What this change means in practice is a somewhat more divisive question. Though one of only a small handful of priests sharing this perspective, Father Lee took this concern about the

world as neighbor the furthest. In his view, Francis called people through *Laudato Si'* to consider the environment itself one of those 'others' individuals must consider when evaluating their relationships. Rather than thinking just of human neighbors, people are called to think of non-human creatures and even perhaps non-living world as persons with whom each person has important relationships. This pushes beyond just caring about the effects of environmental degradation on humans and is a perspective that resonates strongly with post-human movements in the academy.¹⁴

Far more clergy were more restrained than Lee. Many such as Father Karl thought that to love and properly treat one's neighbor requires that you support and care for everything that they rely on, including their environment. Neighbors, however, were for these clergy only human. If one did not provide adequate water, food, shelter, clothes, and stability while challenging systems that prevented people from accessing these basic needs, one could not love one's neighbors no matter how much charity one gave. Conversely, to degrade something such as the air through pollution is sinful because it negatively affects people's ability to surviving. For these priests loving the world as one's neighbor is to ensure that one's human neighbors have access to all they need to survive.

While there is certainly room for theologians and other Catholic intellectuals to clarify what exactly the command to love neighbors requires as far as the non-human world, in practice they lead to almost identical ends. Whichever way Francis is read, the clergy extended the command to "love one's neighbor as oneself" often taken as the central moral message of the Gospel to include protection of environments. Degrading the environment is sinful.

Beyond purely environmental degradation, systemic sin is also understood within Catholic tradition as a key driver of poverty, especially given the current state of affairs where there is so much inequality around the planet. In my research this was typified by Father Alex. In his eyes callousness towards the environment legitimizes callousness towards humanity and the treatment of

other people as tools or objects. For him, the environment is a moral issue “because it affects people at the most fundamental level of their lives and livelihoods.” Alex as with most priests concerned with poverty views the environment not as important on its own but because its destruction harms the poor. Catholic environmental teaching cannot be split from other tenets of Catholic social teaching as for these clergy it is still entirely about humans. By linking these concerns together, many priests’ approaches to the environment mirror concerns expressed by environmental justice movements far more than mainstream environmentalism. This suggests a potential fruitful intersection between Catholics and an environmental justice movement frequently already more open to religious concerns than mainstream environmentalism.¹⁵

Valuing the environment for its support of humanity is perhaps clearest in the framing of the material world as a gift commonly deployed when priests spoke about the creation stories in Genesis. Father Rene spoke at length about the problem with how people today, especially in large corporations, take the goods of the earth for themselves rather than allowing it to benefit all humanity. Speaking about degraded water systems, a common concern among these clerics, Rene thought that the main problem with water pollution was that the wealthy could buy filtration systems or bottled water while the poor could not and were forced to drink tainted or poisoned water. The gift of creation for him is a gift in a utilitarian sense to be used to better humanity’s life. It is not something valued in and of itself. The task of stewardship for Rene is to use all that exists to support all humanity in perpetuity. Clergy across the diocese echoed this vision of a non-human world kept in a productive state for the benefit of all. The sinful behavior humanity currently engages in is not interfering with the environment but doing so only for the benefit of a few. As long as the harm is minimal and the benefits extensive, these clergy have little problem with environmental degradation. What this might look like in practice is not something they were

particularly clear about. Humanity is at the heart of how the clergy think about Catholic environmental teaching.

The clergy see the sin of greed as the root cause of environmental mismanagement by the few who take what should belong to the many. Quite a few priests expressed a strong distaste for those who value money above humanity by claiming profit motives as the basis for their activity. They saw such a focus on maximizing profit as the root of both environmental degradation and the oppression of the poor. In this they echoed Catholic social teaching's condemnation of unfettered capitalism and profit driven economics. Such valuations are sinful because they attempt to diminish the value of human life and quantify it, a process abhorrent to the notion of human dignity at the heart of Catholic thought. Greed and profit motives objectify what cannot in Catholic thought be objectified. For many clergy these are the root cause of many social and environmental problems.

Such hatred of greed and subordinating human life to financial interests lead clergy across the diocese to reject approaches to environmental degradation that blame overpopulation instead of greed. The clergy were adamant that the problem of poverty or hunger was a distribution problem. The world did not have too many people. Rather, greed kept food and other necessary resources out of the hands of people who need them. Those such as Father Nestor pointed towards outsized environmental degradation and pollution from countries and corporations in what is often called the Global North as the root of environmental problems. His ire was directed towards those who, because of their power, use creation to satisfy their individual wants at the expense of the far more important needs of others. Even Father Harvey who had not yet read *Landato Si'* wanted to make clear at the outset of our conversation that from the point of view of the Catholic Church, the number of people was not a problem for the environment. God created a world that could healthily sustain all those who live in it. The clergy hold the perspective that distribution and accumulation,

not the sheer size of the global population, is at the heart of human suffering. Focus on population pressure and similar such neo-Malthusian arguments have no support among the Catholic clergy.

Of course, clergy do not just reject overpopulation arguments because they think the data does not support them. They are also predisposed against these approaches because some of the frequently proposed solutions within such frameworks involve increased access to contraception and/or abortion, both processes deemed anathema by the Church. This is one of several links between Catholic environmental teaching and anti-abortion movements, as is Francis's focus in *Laudato Si'* on keeping the environment productive for future generations.¹⁶

Father Karl discussed these links as the need for many more Catholics "to be pro-life across the board" rather than just focusing on abortion. For him being pro-life meant going deeper to consider quality of life and promoting the dignity of each individual person. Karl thought that emphasizing this is the central beauty of Francis's teaching, as Catholics have not often thought at all about the environment within anti-abortion and other pro-life movements that occupy much of Catholic activism. Whether opposing abortion, the death penalty, environmental degradation or supporting healthcare access, pro-life logics stemming from irreducible human dignity underpin Catholic moral and social teaching. While some differed with Karl in the importance they gave to certain issues, such as Father Richard who thought no progress could be made if abortion and divorce continued, many priests relied on this pro-life logic to ground their concern with the environment and environmental degradation.

The clergy also thought that surprise many people experienced where hearing this was one of the biggest issues with the contemporary pro-life movement in the United States. The Church's pro-life movement is not just about abortion but a far wider range of issues. In many ways Karl and others saw this as a major gap between the clergy and the laity, as the latter did not understand that environmental issues and others deemed progressive are often supported in Catholic thought by the

same logics as those used to oppose abortion. This in turn stands in the way of making progress on building an ecological church.¹⁷

Interestingly, the pro-life dimensions of Catholic environmental teaching are quite clearly present in the supporting documents that I gathered from various churches. Inside of each church there are usually between one to two dozen pamphlets, notecards, and other similarly sized documents parishioners and visitors are meant to pick up to learn more about some facet of Catholicism, though given the age of some of the pamphlets it is unclear if this is at all effective. Frequently these documents deal with questions about relationships, Church teaching on the sacraments, or questions about grief. The environment was not often mentioned.

However, in the few cases where I did find something, it often was a pamphlet titled *Serene Attentiveness to God's Creation* (Appendix A). What is most interesting about this pamphlet, especially for one unaware of the pro-life logic underpinning Catholic environmental concerns, is that this pamphlet was published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities. This is even more interesting given that within the USCCB environmental issues typically fall under the umbrella of the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development. Yet the materials that they produce, of which there are a substantial amount available online, are not the pamphlets that lay Catholics in the Diocese of Syracuse are likely to find if they find anything at all.¹⁸

Serene Attentiveness as a result presents a very particular view of Catholic environmental teaching revolving around human life. The pamphlet only quotes *Laudato Si'* when Francis wrote about humanity's "particular dignity above other creatures" (Appendix A). Though it mentions and affirms the need to be concerned with pollution, waste, and a lack of clean water, *Serene Attentiveness* spends far more time discussing how abortion and contraception are unacceptable solutions to environmental problems. The pamphlet ends by discussing the need to respect creation at all levels and not to treat humanity as disposable.

What exactly the pamphlet means by ‘creation,’ however, is not entirely clear. The four images in the pamphlet each contain one or two children, sometimes accompanied by presumptive parents, from diverse backgrounds. Three of these photos were taken outside, though in one the trees in the background are out of focus and clearly the reader is meant to focus on a laughing child in a wheelchair. The fourth photograph is of a newborn in the arms of their presumptive mother still in hospital dress. Combined with the focus on the future, opening with a story about a newborn, and a shift over the pamphlet’s latter half towards abortion and contraception, the pamphlet appears to equate creation (and consequently the care thereof) with children. The pamphlet forms a central part of the environmental teaching that exists in churches in the Diocese of Syracuse even though it engages with only a small fraction of *Laudato Si’* and other Catholic environmental thought. The rest of Francis’s encyclical with its myriad of concerns about greed, climate change, biodiversity, water and food access, and beyond is entirely absent from this pamphlet.

In many ways, this strong connection with pro-life movements frequently dominated by the topic of abortion helps explain why many priests think of environmental issues as youth issues that will only have influences among future generations. This remains the case despite recent national and international climate assessments showing that climate change is already having an effect, not even to mention ongoing concerns with localized pollution that have dominated environmental discourse over the past fifty years. Though a minority view, a few such as Father Richard thought that environmental problems were concerns for younger generations simply because they were likely to live through the consequences of environmental change while most other adults were not. Most, such as Father Sebastian and Father Van, thought that only the youth in their parish could be reached, though this often grew from a pragmatic realization that the Church is often only able to reach children before confirmation with education about any topic.¹⁹

Priests and deacons typically saw implementing Catholic environmental teaching and *Laudato Si'* as a long-term project that would take decades and thought it made more sense to focus their limited resources on the youth whose minds they might actually change. A few such as Fathers Alex and Colin thought this should happen through partnerships with youth organizations such as the Boy Scouts that could engage members in practical service projects to complement their education. Regardless of what reason they gave, however, it was clear that environmental teachings are for the young. Perhaps children would succeed in addressing these issues; adults in the present had already been lost. This focus on the youth held almost uniformly across the diocese despite Francis's (and many scientist's) urgent calls for change today if environmental problems can be mitigated.²⁰

Through their focus on poverty and pro-life arguments clergy reveal their commitment to weak anthropocentric approaches to environmental value. While priests and deacons could have drawn on ecocentric Catholic ethics such that hold humanity only as part of the universe in which all creatures have their own irreducible value, they justify Catholic concern for the environment as it supports human life. This support need not be through the provisioning of food or other goods and may instead involve opening eyes to aesthetics and beauty, humanity still takes center stage as the key to environmental value. Catholic environmental thought and moralism, at least among the clergy of the Diocese of Syracuse, is driven human needs.²¹

As such Catholic environmental thought continues to be based on a dualistic division between humanity and nature. For many Catholic clergy environmental issues are human issues. Far from being disconnected or opposed as some might suspect, pro-life messages, whether anti-abortion or anti-capital punishment, and the push for environmental protection within the Catholic Church are closely intertwined. The environment is important in to the Catholic clergy because it sustains and supports human life, and its degradation hurts communities around the world.

Even when the clergy spoke about stories of creation that show humanity created alongside all else as part of a single, coherent universe, humanity was still discussed as unique. This division between humanity and nature continues to form a key part of these clergy's anthropologies and their view of the material world as fundamentally non-human. Whether they have carefully read *Laudato Si'* multiple times or do not even own a copy, the clergy uniformly discussed humanity as distinct and separate from the rest of the world and human society as wholly split from nature. Those such as Father Richard use this division to argue that humanity is better and more valuable, but even most who do not explicitly say this still value the environment through a utilitarian framework. Though Father Philippe noted Catholicism often retains a more connected and positive view of the material world and non-human life than many Protestant traditions, within the Diocese of Syracuse a dualistic vision of humanity remains.

The consequences of this anthropocentrism within the broader Catholic environmental movement are unclear. On the one hand, human-focused environmental stewardship may distance Catholic environmentalists from other facets of the environmental movement, a process scholars have already observed when other religious traditions attempted to get involved with environmental activism. This is particularly likely with regards to the pro-life logics underpinning mainstream Catholic environmental thought, this position is seen as a disqualifier by many secular environmental activists. At the same time Catholicism's firm rejection of population explanations for environmental crises in favor of a focus on greed and accumulation of resources by the powerful lines is similar to arguments by environment-society scholars who see corporate power and capitalism as the root of environmental problems, especially climate change. Catholic environmental teaching presents a major challenge for those who disagree with pro-corporate and neo-Malthusian environmentalism yet also oppose the anti-abortion movement, for activists of all stripes will have to determine whether or not they can work together with a clear moral conscience.²²

On the other hand, by drawing on pro-life and anthropocentric arguments that already ground a large, robust activist movement within the Catholic Church, Catholic environmental activists and clergy may be able to graft their concerns onto an experienced movement that holds considerable sway, especially among conservative communities where most environmental movements have not had much influence. Whether this integration will happen successfully is impossible to say at this point, but there is certainly a possibility that Catholic environmentalism may succeed in engaging these communities. Alternatively, because of Catholic environmental teaching's major focus on justice and equity issues that mainstream environmentalism has frequently neglected, Catholic environmental movements may be able to expand the environmental justice coalition. They share many goals with these movements, yet English-speaking U.S. Catholicism and the pro-life movement is far whiter and more conservative than those often involved in environmental justice activism. While the future of this thought and its correlated movements is undetermined, understanding and studying whatever happens should be a verdant area for future scholarship.²³

Many clergy across the Diocese of Syracuse have a lot to say about the relationship between humans and the environment that stems from their Catholicism. Many are aware of the Church's environmental teaching, mostly through Pope Francis but from a few other sources as well. They are also knowledgeable about some of the more detailed parts of this teaching, particularly when it intersects with central principles of general Catholic social teaching. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, many priests and deacons across the diocese are concerned about the present state of the environment and its influences on human populations both today and in the future. While there certainly are significant gaps in their knowledge and some know a lot more than others, collectively and in many cases individually the clergy know something about nature-society relationships, likely more than many of them actively realize. The overwhelming majority think that the degradation and abuse of environmental systems is a serious problem, and they want to do something about it.

Actually acting on these ideas and trying to change the minds and behaviors of others--the topic of the following chapter--is far more difficult.

¹ For recent quantitative work on *Laudato Si*'s reception across the United States see Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) 2016: Attitudes about Climate Change*, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016a for an internal Church source. Lynn Vincentnathan, S.Georg Vincentnathan, and Nathan Smith, "Catholics and Climate Change Skepticism," *Worldviews* 20 (2016): 125–149 and and Nan Li, Joseph Hilgard, Dietram A. Scheufele, Kenneth M. Winneg, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Cross-Pressuring Conservative Catholics? Effects of Pope Francis' Encyclical on the U.S. Public Opinion on Climate Change," *Climate Change* 139, no. 3–4 (2016): 367–380 have each conducted quantitative studies that substantiate CARA's findings.

² For further discussion of Philip Melanchthon's contributions to pedagogy and education see Mihai Androne, "The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on Education," *Procedia–Social and Behavioral Sciences* 137 (2014): 84–85 and Sachiko Kusakawa, ed., *Philip Melanchthon: Orations on Philosophy and Education*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, xi–xxxii. Additionally, Kusakawa, 1999, xxxiii and John Witte Jr., "The Civic Seminary: Source of Modern Public Education in the Lutheran Reformation of Germany," *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1 (1995): 178, 184, 195, 202–203, and 218, Melanchthon's reference church and school visits that influenced his belief that education was crucial if the Reformation was to succeed.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For a comprehensive discussion about various framings of climate change and especially the potential role religion might play in addressing climate change see Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009, particularly pp. 142–176.

⁵ For discussions about parish size see Bryan T. Froehle, "Catholic Pastoral Sociology in the United States since Vatican II: Making a Path by Walking It." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25, no. 4 (2007): 91–95.

⁶ For a history of parishes in Catholicism, see James A. Coriden, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition: History, Theology, and Canon Law*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996.

⁷ For discussion of the canonical responsibilities of parishes and their clergy see Coriden, 1997. Also see Edward A. Sweeny, *The Obligations and Rights of the Pastor of a Parish According to The Code of Canon Law*, New York: Alba House, 2002.

⁸ For a discussion of the canonical rights and duties of a parish see Sweeny, 2002, 66–67, 102. Also, the *Code of Canon Law*, c.528, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983.

⁹ Of course, any qualitative and especially interview-based project raises the question of whether or not participants changed their answers to suit the interviewer, and whether there was a bias among those who chose to participate vis a vis those who declined. Ensuring this did not happen was the principal purpose of supplementary methods. Yet due to the candor and in some cases critical perspectives expressed by many participants, the high response rate, and participant interest in the topic, I fully trust the interviews. I expect self-selection bias influenced participation. However, had those who self-selected out of the study due to their discomfort or disengagement with ecological concerns participated they would only have reinforced the argument that little is happening with regards to a Catholic ecological conversion at the present within the Diocese of Syracuse.

¹⁰ For discussion about climate change perspectives among various social cohorts, especially those demographically similar to most clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse, see Wouter Poortinga et al., "Uncertain Climate: An Investigation Into Public Scepticism About Anthropogenic Climate Change," *Global Environmental Change* 21, no. 3 (2011): 1015–1024; Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, "Bringing Ideology In: The Conservative White Male," *Effect on Worry about Environmental Problems in the USA* 16, no. 2 (2011): 211–226; Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, "Cool Dudes: The Denial of Climate Change Among Conservative White Males in the United States," *Global Environmental Change* 21, no. 4 (2012): 1163–1172; and J. Tom Muller and Lauren E. Mullenbach, "Looking for a White Male Effect," *Generation Z: Race, Gender, and Political Effects on Environmental Concern and Ambivalence* 31, no. 8 (2018): 925–941.

¹¹ Robert J. Cunningham, "Statement from Bishop Robert J. Cunningham Following the Release of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*," Diocese of Syracuse, <https://syracusediocese.org/news/show/220>.

¹² There is a tab in the middle of the page titled “Safe Environment” under which there are ten subheadings. However, environment here refers to diocesan efforts to counter the abuse of children in the Church about which startling and horrifying revelations continue to come forth. This page cluster discusses steps for training and continuing certification to prevent such abuse as well as providing survivor/victim assistance and information for those concerned about these topics. These programs are collectively grouped as “Safe Environment.” This program appears to be a major diocesan focus and rightly occupies a significant portion of diocesan resources, though I hesitate to say anything more at this point as New York’s Attorney General opened an investigation into this crisis in September 2018 (Zauzmer and Boorstein, 2018).

¹³ Diocese of Syracuse, “Social Justice,” 2018b. <https://www.syracusediocese.org/offices/advocacy/social-justice/>

¹⁴ For an overview of post-human or more-than-human geographies see Bruce Braun, “Environmental Issues: Writing a More-Than-Human Urban Geography,” *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 5 (2005): 635–650 and Jared D. Margulies and Brock Bersaglio, “Further Post-Human Political Ecologies,” *Geoforum* 94 (2018): 103–106.

¹⁵ For further discussion about the history of the environmental movement and its limited focus see Ronald D. Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzulo, eds., *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007, 1-19. Concerning the relationships between religious organizations, mainstream environmentalism, and the environmental justice movement see Mark R. Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 233-249; Stephen Ellingson, *To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016; and Amanda J. Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.

¹⁶ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1968. See also Francis, 2015, § 50.

¹⁷ At least among the Catholic bishops, the pro-life movement opposes violence, abortion, assisted suicide, capital punishment, and the destruction of human embryos for research, within the hierarchy, at least, these are all central parts of the pro-life movement (though pregnancy and abortion are indisputably at the forefront). For further information see United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life,” usccb.org, (2019b).

¹⁸ A scan of this pamphlet and a few other relevant documents gathered from around the diocese is available in Appendix A. Concerning the organization of the USCCB concerning environmental issues see United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Environment,” usccb.org, (2019c).

¹⁹ For summaries of recent climate assessments, see Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, 2014 and U.S. Global Change Research Program. *Fourth National Climate Assessment: Volume II. Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States*, 2018, 26-32.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For a discussion of strong versus weak anthropocentrism, see Robin Attfield, “Beyond Anthropocentrism.” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 69 (2011): 29–46. For discussions of various Catholic ecocentric approaches to the world, see Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1983; Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*. New York: Belltower, 2000; John F. Haught, “Christianity and Ecology,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 2nd ed., 232–247, New York: Routledge, 2004; Jame Schaefer ed. *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette: University Press, 2011 and William T. Cavanaugh, *Fragile World: Ecology and The Church*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.

²² For a particularly insightful discussion of the divergence between secular and religious environmental movements see Nita, 2016. For a few key academic overviews of the intersection between capitalism, power, and climate change see Joel Wainwright, “Climate Change, Capitalism, and the Challenge of Transdisciplinarity,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 100, no. 4 (2010): 983–991; Christopher Wright and Daniel Nyberg. *Climate Change, Capitalism, and Corporations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015; or Jason W. Moore, “The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017): 594–630. For an alternative reading of this intersection, see Timothy J. LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 311-328. Concerning religion and environmental social movements see Marian Nita, *Praying and Campaigning with Environmental Christians: Green Religion and the Climate Movement*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016; Ellingson, 2016; or Baugh, 2017.

²³ Stoll, 2015, 239-254 and Baugh, 2017.

Chapter 5—Stalled Construction: What Do Clergy Do?

The Catholic clergy across the Diocese of Syracuse know quite a lot about Catholic environmental teaching. However, knowing what clergy know means very little without understanding what they (and their parishes) do in response to Francis's calls to build an ecological Church and radically change the world. The clergy can agree with Francis's propositions as much as they want, but at the end of the day what matters whether behaviors actually change. Unfortunately, this is the area where I can make the most definitive conclusions and say that, with a few exceptions concentrated around the encyclical's release in 2015, practices are not changing, at least in this diocese.

I do not want to suggest blaming the clergy for the present state of affairs but note what little is happening in the diocese with respect to Catholic environmental teaching and highlight opportunities for change. Yet it is critical to keep in mind that these changes are the few positive highlights, and, if parishes are going to implement this teaching, far more must be done. As the general lack of meaningful action is easily evident, this chapter is interspersed with suggestions for how clergy and others interested in fostering Catholic environmental teaching could shift their behaviors to begin this process of transformation. In conceptualizing this chapter, it made little sense to note a lack of action with speaking about what a parish or community that did engage with *Laudato Si'* might act.

Day-to-Day Parish Life

One of the first suggestions the Catholic hierarchy has for implementing Catholic environmental teaching is setting up "Care for Creation" teams and/or designating a point person in the parish to lead these efforts. Parishes often have several different committees, so logistically a "Care for Creation" team would not be that out of the ordinary for many parishioners. They would hopefully bring Catholic environmental teaching into ongoing conversations and projects in the

parish. This group would also be tasked with exploring ways to change the parish in response to Catholic environmental teaching, either by starting new educational programs, setting up an energy audit, or partnering with outside organizations engaging with these issues. The hierarchy these groups to form and thinks that they will be crucial for the success of any effort to implement Catholic environmental teaching in parishes.¹

However, of all the clergy I spoke with and all the parishes I visited across the diocese, only one publicized that they had a Care for Creation team. Clergy made frequent references to an overworked diocesan team from the Social Action ministry that focused on these issues alongside many others. It is little surprise that this parish is involved with recycling efforts, has rethought its landscaping, held workshops and book studies on *Laudato Si'* and other books related to issues of poverty and water justice, brought environmental concerns into homilies, utilized bulletin inserts, made a concerted effort to teach about the environment on Earth Day and St. Francis of Assisi's feast day, and tried connecting with non-Catholic organizations around them focused on environmental and other justice issues. Like so many others, this parish was working within a tight budget and had not pursued environmentally-related projects, such as installing solar panels, even though it wanted to. However, they were excited that these topics continually came up in conversations and thought that when renovations were needed, they could make these changes to the campus. This parish had done far more to incorporate environmental teaching than any other in the diocese and set the high bar for engagement with these issues.

While I am by no means suggesting a causal relationship between the Care for Creation team and each of these changes, they were broadly able to raise awareness about of environmental teaching among parishioners that facilitated each of these shifts. Moreover, the group has played a leading role in organizing several of these specific changes, especially educational efforts. Though there is still quite a lot to do, they had changed this parish a great deal. As with any similar shift

questions remain about the broader efficacy of each of these changes and the degree to which they help stem environmental degradation and especially climate change, but the Care for Creation team was the clearest attempt to make such changes in any parish I went to in the Diocese of Syracuse. Having an active group specifically charged with raising environmental concerns and thinking about the impacts of parish activities across a range of scales was a large part of making any change at all. A Care for Creation team, while rare right now, should be a key early step for any parish seeking to incorporate environmental teaching.

In contrast to this one community doing so much many were doing nothing to very little in their day-to-day operations. Parishes are often far more active communities during the week than many people realize, regularly hosting dinners, meetings, and other events for parishioners and other community members. Most clergy highlighted their recycling programs as the best example of how their parishes were responding to *Laudato Si'*. Of the thirty-one clergy I spoke with, fifteen mentioned recycling in their parish as a key step that they were taking to reduce environmental impacts. Several, such as Father Earl, thought this was the most important thing that could be done to combat environmental degradation within their parishes.

Recycling projects are the primary method clergy and parishes used to “care for creation.” However, their efficacy in actually responding to Francis’s call is highly questionable. On its face, recycling, or transforming waste products into usable material, appears to be a clear win for the environment. However, a deeper examination reveals that recycling may not necessarily be an ideal focus for parishes trying to better engage with Catholic environmental teaching, and they certainly should not be the only step a parish takes.

The history of recycling shows why the practice might not be an effective a strategy to reduce consumption. This is particularly the case given the clergy’s rejection of profit motives discussed in Chapter Four. Recycling programs were in many ways created as a way for corporations

to increase their profit margins and avoid regulation. As the production costs of plastics, glass, and aluminum declined following World War II, they became more and more common in widespread single-use consumer products, especially across the beverage industry. However, because they were single-use rather than reusable (as, for instance, bottles of milk were historically), industries did not collect products after they were used. This contributed to litter becoming a widespread problem in many communities across the United States. In response, governments began debating policies to deal with litter, often considering using bottle deposits to discourage consumption or requiring industries to take a larger role in the disposal of their products.²

It was at this point that beverage corporations stepped into the fray, often under the guise of proxy non-profits such as *Keep America Beautiful (KAB)*. This group sponsored many popular public service announcements that sparked interest in recycling during beginning in the 1970s. *KAB* especially was quite effective in changing how people thought about waste and recycling and one of their advertisements--the "Crying Indian"--was one of the non-Catholic texts clergy most often referenced by clergy in interviews. Beverage industry groups hoped recycling programs funded by someone else, often local governments, would be a way to solve the litter problem. This also enabled the beverage industry to privately realize all of the benefits from single-use containers without paying their costs--the sort of approach to environmental externalities Francis rails against in *Laudato Si'*. Without assessing whether recycling programs were economically or environmentally effective, governments and environmental organizations across the United States made it the banner of environmentalism while allowing beverage corporations and others using single-use packaging to accrue large profits by passing environmental costs onto the public. Recycling appeared to be an environmentally friendly thing to do, but its widespread acceptance as a solution to litter was driven largely by corporate self-interest than scientific study. Moreover, given that recycling is often

contaminated and ends up in landfills or incinerators rather than being properly recycled, the entire process is far more virtue signaling than any meaningful change.³

Even when it manages to happen, recycling may not actually reduce environmental impacts. The efficacy of recycling is difficult to assess, both because of rapid changes in technology and as a result of the decentralized approach to recycling that dominates the United States with many counties setting their own different policies. Plastic recycling is an energy-intensive process that requires highly specialized technology. Food contamination can also taint potentially recyclable material. As a result, much of the plastic waste produced in the United States is not processed by recycling centers. Plastics that do manage to get recycled are often contaminated with heavy metals, including lead. Though this contamination often falls below legal limits, it still poses a potential health risk to those using these recovered plastics and casts doubt on the long-term efficacy of recycling programs to provide a continuous stream of plastic to maintain contemporary consumption habits. The efficacy of recycling paper and glass is also quite complex and not always as environmentally friendly as it may first appear.⁴

Even for more valuable materials, recycling is not necessarily a good way to address high levels of consumption. Metals recycling is highly constrained both by the material properties of the metals themselves, as thermodynamic principles mean that significant amounts of energy are expended in the process melting and reshaping recycled metal, and from technological limitations that limit what can be recycled to begin with. This results in many a single unit of many common metals, including copper and iron, only being used three times before that unit is lost to inefficiencies in the recycling process. Recycling may diminish the environmental impacts of extraction, especially in the immediate term, but the bill for consumption eventually comes due.⁵

Another problematic dimension of recycling has to do with the negative health effects recycling has on people involved in these processes who at times work in places that “parallel

conditions in global sweatshops.” Across the United States workers sift through hazardous materials in frequently unregulated and nonunionized worksites, often for low pay with few benefits. Francis spends much of *Laudato Si'* rejecting frameworks that position care for the poor at odds with care for creation, yet with in recycling programs (and in waste treatment more broadly) this frequently is the case. Recycling, while likely better than dumping things directly into a landfill or river, is not *the* solution to environmental degradation on its own or always a process that is congruent with a holistic ethic of care for creation. This does not mean that recycling does not have important symbolic importance within a community, but to realize that its benefits are predominantly in that sphere rather than in the reduction of environmental impact as many practitioners believe.⁶

Not all priests and deacons who mentioned recycling were as enamored as Father Earl by recycling programs. This smaller group saw recycling as only a small part of their parishes' changes and were generally well attuned to the limited influence that recycling could have. It may help get people on board, but it will not solve deeper problems associated with mass consumption and greed. Those such as Father Nestor shared this view, for they imagined publicizing the small changes their parishes could make so that community members with more power outside of the parish would make larger, more meaningful changes. “The power of good and small changes [to] have repercussions” was central to how Father Nestor justified promoting recycling programs and other sustainable shifts--such as to compostable coffee cups or using ceramic dishware instead of disposable plates--that he knew were unlikely to have any major effect. It was beyond his power to directly cause systemic change, but it was his constant hope that he could indirectly by influencing others. Movements to change the world cannot happen solely within a church or parish, but he hoped they could start and flow from there.

Such an approach also drove parish adult education programs. These were another major idea clergy had for bringing environmental teaching to the people. For adults the clergy often

thought this would involve a book study of *Laudato Si'* or some other text that related to the intersection between Catholicism and the environment. Although he had not yet tried to do so, Father Matthew was a proponent of this approach as he thought it would be the most effective way to get Catholic environmental teaching into his parish. He was not as optimistic that as many people would attend as he would like, as he and other priests typically thought somewhere between fifteen and twenty people might attend, though in some cases (as with Father Nathan) more than double that participated in a six-week program. Matthew also pointed to the Jesuit-run LeMoyne College in Syracuse as somewhere that could also be a good opportunity for community study, especially for those who already had some knowledge but wanted to get more deeply involved.

Even more than adult education, however, clergy thought working more closely with youth education independently in a parish and in conjunction with local Catholic schools would be a good way to incorporate Catholic environmental teaching. This was not just because they thought children would be more interested than adults, though many certainly believed this would be the case, but in large part because far more children and teenagers were involved in Catholic educational programs and therefore possible to reach. Many clergy thought that working more with the stories of creation in Genesis would be a good idea, focusing really on what it meant to live a good and moral life. Several also thought that this was a good opportunity to return to questions of science and Catholicism that might allow teenagers especially to understand how the Church teaches that these two areas are entirely compatible rather than watching another generation of Catholics leave the Church in university. Typically, these priests also mentioned service projects, such as cutting hiking trails or cleaning trash from along the highway, as a way to instill environmental values among the young. Beyond that, there are a myriad of materials available through the USCCB and other Catholic organizations to support these processes and help design lesson plans and activities, though few clergy knew of these documents. Most clergy thought that youth education was a good idea and the

most effective step they could take to actually change minds, but few if any parishes were doing this, at least to the knowledge of their priests, and they did not have concrete plans to start. With both adult and youth education there is again significant potential yet to be realized.

Food is another area of day-to-day parish life that both intersects with Catholic environmental teaching and is already a large part of many parishes. Efforts to improve food access and limit hunger are at the heart of Catholic social teaching about respecting the dignity of every person, and food more broadly is a central part of Catholic thought. A few key dimensions, however, stand out as particularly relevant with respect to Catholic environmental teaching.⁷

The clearest way this appears is with food pantries, which many parishes run directly out of their facilities. Regardless of whether I was in the heart of cities like Utica or Syracuse or in small towns surrounded by fields and farms there was frequently a parish program to provide food to those who have trouble with food access. These pantries often provided food and other essentials without question, either as a hot meal or as unprepared ingredients people could take elsewhere. In one case when I visited a parish on a weekday morning there was a line of about a dozen people waiting for one such pantry to open. These are important parts of many parishes and a major way they try to give back to their broader communities.

Even if they did not run food pantries directly many parishes held ongoing collections or asked for donations during specific food drives. A handful of parishes had even begun looking into what it would take to start community gardens on their grounds, sometimes as a way to incorporate ongoing youth service projects in their parish. Not infrequently I saw boxes of vegetables or piles of cans in the front of parishes ready to be sent to centralized hubs for distribution to communities. Many priests were proud of the effect that these efforts had and the support they provided to their communities, for they helped many people with food access.

As helpful as these programs are avenues for improvement with respect to Catholic environmental teaching remain. The first of these is to probe whether these efforts to address immediate food insecurity are also engaging the root causes of that problem. If engagements with food access and hunger do not question why it is that they are needed and work to address underlying systems that continue to reproduce food insecurity then these programs are only temporary patches rather than actual solutions. Few clergy I spoke with engaged with this question. Several wanted to do far more to address these broader problems, but they had not been able to thus far in their communities. This is not at all to suggest these communities stop what they are doing but instead to challenge them to ask what more they ought to do. *Laudato Si'* asks parishes to interrogate whether they are doing enough or have only taken the beginning steps in addressing these often deeply-rooted problems. Taking this step further is key to fully incorporating Catholic environmental teaching into parish life rather than just scratching the surface.

Accomplishing this involves orchestrating more sustained reflexive conversations in parishes about their activities, for based on my observations these are rarely actually discussed in depth. For instance, rather than just stating that a food drive is happening, clergy and other parish leaders could take the time to ask parishioners to reflect on the specific challenges that cause this insecurity in their communities and think about whether they could do something to work against these as well. Emphasizing the relationships between food issues parishes also engage in and other environmental and social justice concerns rather than approaching them as disconnected issues could also provide an avenue for bringing more Catholic environmental and social teaching into a parish. Beyond focusing on these topics internally, *Laudato Si'* and Catholic environmental teaching has affected other religious groups. Environmental issues have been important topics for interfaith efforts over the past several decades with a wide range of religious leaders and adherents coming together with this common purpose. While ecumenical and interfaith work always brings a litany of concerns and

potential pitfalls, environmental pollution and climate change have created common concerns across religious groups. Engaging with this work more as parishes and as individual clergy is another good option for Catholics who want to get involved but are unsure of how to best do so while also fostering ecumenical relationships with other religious communities. This could also be a way for Catholics to help the wider community they are members of and address concerns at a broader scale than just the parish.⁸

While few parishes are doing much of anything substantial to integrate *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teaching into their day-to-day operations there are many ways this could happen. Much of this involves starting conversations and doing something new, which certainly may be uncomfortable. When environmentally related topics are already present, such as with issues of food, more work needs to be done to link the specific instances they are addressing to larger, deeper problems that cause food insecurity. The specific options I discussed here are but a few off the changes that can help shift everyday behaviors in a parish. Though they certainly are not enough to independently change the world, the aim and hope of many of the clergy was to be part of the solution by making small behavioral changes that lead to far larger ones. Whether this will happen, either in the Diocese of Syracuse, elsewhere in the U.S. Catholic Church, or around the world, remains a mystery. As of today, however, such changes are not happening.

Within the Mass

The central ritual of Catholic religious life is the celebration of the mass. Every Catholic is technically required to attend mass once a week, though a sizable majority do not, and its priests must celebrate the mass every day (Catechism, 1997: §2182). The ritual is heavily scripted and meant to be uniform no matter when or where it is celebrated, theologically allowing all Catholics to become members of a community connected across all of time and space (Catechism, 1997: §2182).

As a result, there are very few opportunities for alterations in order to incorporate Catholic environmental teaching into the mass.⁹

As such maximizing these opportunities when they crop up is critical to the successful implementation of Catholic environmental teaching in a certain parish. While attendance can vary significantly depending on the particular church and the time of year, for Sunday mass in the Diocese of Syracuse during my research period frequently between 100 and 120 people attended each mass, and most parishes offered between two and five such masses per weekend. The fewest congregants at any Sunday mass was sixty, while on several occasions between 250 and 300 people showed up. Many congregants appeared to be over fifty and white, though for weekend masses there were always a significant number of families with young children in the pews. Daily mass, which can be celebrated at any time during the day (and often is), typically attracts far fewer people, usually between twenty and thirty even if mass was at six in the morning. The fewest I ever saw was ten, while a few churches drew more than ninety for a weekday mass. With 127 parishes across the Diocese of Syracuse, there are simply a lot of people going to Catholic mass. If clergy can effectively bring Catholic environmental thought into these spaces throughout the diocese, they will be able to reach thousands of people across Central New York.

There are four points during the mass that stand out as times when priests and deacons have enough flexibility to incorporate environmental themes: in homilies, through the hymns, during the Eucharistic prayer, and more tangibly in the materials used to organize the mass and parish. Of these, the most obvious is during the homily (sometimes called a sermon). Homilies are up to fifteen-minute speeches typically given by the parishes' priests or deacons reflecting on the day's readings. On Sundays they often last at least ten minutes while during the week some homilists speak for no more than sixty seconds. Given their regularity and large audience, homilies are a central part of any clergy's ministry.

Yet as any priest or deacon will tell you, giving a good homily is no easy task. In a congregation of one hundred people ages will range from young toddlers to those in their eighties and nineties, their educational, economic and experiential identities will cut across most social cleavages in the United States, and their relationships with the Catholic Church, the day's topic, and with the individual homilist may vary drastically. Whoever is preaching must speak about the assigned readings for the day in a manner that engages as many people as possible while also being clear about complex topics without speaking heretically or saying anything that could cause parishioners to complain about them to the bishop. As difficult as this is, however, the homily is also the part of their ministry where many clergy believe that they are actually able to communicate with parishioners and talk about their most important concerns to the widest possible audience.

Father Walter was one of those most in favor of using homilies to promote Catholic environmental teaching. Over the past several years or so, Father Walter has tried to broadly incorporate "social science stuff" into his preaching by discussing what daily life was like for people mentioned in the day's scriptures and highlighting different structures of power and injustice they had to deal with. He wanted to use Scripture to show that the same issues that troubled him in the contemporary world were criticized by Jesus and other Biblical figures. Rather than arguing presenting Scripture as timeless ahistorical documents, Walter preferred looking back to historical conditions surrounding the biblical texts, what scriptures said about them, and how those same issues are present today. He found that approaching power, poverty, war, and famine through both historical and scriptural lenses allowed him to engage his congregation in a process of historical scriptural analysis often distant for many lay Catholics. After he started doing this, Walter realized that more of his parishioners were engaging with his sermon after the mass and said they appreciated learning about the historical context of the Bible, how it was produced, and exploring its

messages. Approaching scripture as partial historical text was far more successful than his previous attempts to get parishioners to pay attention.

As a result of his success with social topics, Walter thought that a similar strategy would be a good way to approach Catholic environmental teaching. However, he was personally far less comfortable actually doing this, for he did not think he had enough knowledge to speak about environmental issues. To successfully implement environmental themes alongside his generally successful social science approach, Walter wanted a companion for the lectionary (the book that lists the daily readings assigned by the Church) that went through the scheduled readings over the three-year cycle and helped provide context to various readings. He thought that with such a resource he might be able to engage with parishioners by talking about any of a large number of biblical passages that use animals and plants as key characters. Though it might initially surprise his listeners, by reframing stories that they already knew rather than trying to create new connections between past and present, Father Walter saw a fruitful path forward to talk about something he knew he had to engage with more. He just did not know how to do it or what to say.

Father Nestor also thought homilies were a crucial strategy for teaching people about Catholic environmental thought. His method for preaching is quite different, for he does not start with scripture and would first identify a small action or service that someone could do, such as mowing a neighbor's lawn or picking up trash in a public park a week before he wanted to preach on Catholic environmental teaching. By giving "people the opportunity to do what was right," Father Nestor hoped preachers could capture their listeners' attention before launching into a theoretical discussion about how caring for the environment might apply to other areas of their life. For him, the most important topic for this deeper critique was a focus on investment decisions and pushing people to prioritize morality over their pocketbook. Rather than just maximizing profit, he would implore people to think about the behavior of any company and whether they want to bear

responsibility for that behavior, for if they chose to invest they bore responsibility for whatever potentially sinful behavior that company engaged in. Father Nestor thought similarly about construction, for he thought that if people were actually asked whether they could accept that saving \$500 might mean children in their community were poisoned because of improper waste disposal most people would be unable to go through with this. He expected to raise some parishioners' hackles, but he thought these were problems that needed to be addressed regardless of what discomfort this might cause. Father Nestor thought that if clergy hoped to change behaviors in a meaningful way, they would need to employ this sort of approach. He did not think clergy had any other way to influence the powerful who need to change the most.

However, while most (but not all) priests thought homilies were a good way to communicate with parishioners, not everyone agreed that this was an appropriate time to raise environmental issues. Many clergy said that they might mention the topics if they came up organically but that they would not seek them out or commit an entire homily to environmental issues. There were far more important topics to discuss. While not uncommon, this position is quite interesting given that they raised it *after* we had spent up to twenty minutes talking about how Francis had written a rather long encyclical on the environment and clearly saw it as important. They did not share the pope's concern for environmental issues or think that they were worthwhile for them to talk about during the mass. Yet because almost all other parts of the mass are scripted and unchangeable, if environmental or other social themes do not come up in the homily, it is difficult to see another way to raise them in the celebration itself.

There are a couple of secondary options for incorporating Catholic environmental teaching during the mass. A few clergy thought the selection of hymns, the songs sung in praise of God as a key part of Catholic worship, was one such clear opportunity. Father Sean was particularly keen on using hymns to evangelize about environmental concerns. He had asked the parishes choir director

to compile a list of hymns on the topic before our meeting and they came back with a list of nine to which he added a couple as his personal favorites--"Morning has Broken" and "For the Beauty of the Earth." These hymns thank God for creation, emphasize its aesthetic dimensions, and frame human worship as joining the rest of creation in God's praise rather than leading or speaking for it. Each of these hymns present the world as innately good and where humanity plays only one part (albeit a leading role). By placing creation and the environment at the center of a worship practice, Sean thought that hymns could effectively open not just parishioners' minds but also their hearts to the world around them.¹⁰

Despite the strong connections between hymns and at times almost ecocentric environmental thought, I expect that the actual effect of this shift would be quite minimal on its own. While the choir and a few members of the congregation may think about the words they are singing, across the diocese most people did not sing along with the hymns or even look at the text at all. This does not necessarily mean that hymns will be ineffective at promoting Catholic social teaching but using them for this purpose will require additional work. Clergy or some other parish leader, perhaps the choir director if the parish has one, may find it helpful to publicly reflect on the hymn and/or formally tie it to a specific project or service opportunity. It may also be useful to repeat a hymn several times over the course of a season so congregants begin to recognize some of its words. Whatever method is chosen, hymns cannot stand alone as a way to incorporate environmental teaching into the mass.

Another point during the mass that is similarly circumspect and would require further discussion to fully realize its effect. The consecration of the host and its transformation into Christ's body and blood is the pinnacle of the mass and the reason for the ritual. During this process, the priest celebrating the mass recites one of typically four Eucharistic Prayers, though there are others that can be used when appropriate. Taking this step would like the hymns support an ongoing

ecological conversion within a parish rather than demonstrate that such a conversion had occurred. However, the text of the Eucharistic prayer is far more authoritative than the hymns and is written and authorized by the Vatican as a licit way to perform the most important part of the mass.¹¹

Of the four main Eucharistic Prayers the fourth is both the most connected to environmental themes and one of the least frequently used. This prayer, as with all Eucharistic Prayers, is predominantly focused on acknowledging Christ's sacrifice. However, in certain sections it diverges dramatically from others by praising God-as-Creation and not just God-as-Redeemer. Prayer IV's emphasis on Creation at the heart of Catholic ritual provides an opportunity for clergy to reflect with their congregation on the meaning of the Eucharist. While the prayer as a whole carries more meaning than the sum of its parts, a few specific quotes stand out as possible foci for discussing the intertwined relationships between God, humanity, and the rest of Creation.¹²

“With them we, too, confess your name in exultation, giving voice to every creature under heaven as we acclaim” (*on the role of humanity*)

“You formed man in your own image and entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving you alone, the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures” (*on the purpose of creation and humanity's role in the world*)

“We offer you his Body and Blood, the sacrifice acceptable to you which brings salvation to the whole world” (*on the purpose of the mass and salvation for not just Catholics or even humanity as a whole but all that is*)

“[In Heaven] with the whole of creation, freed from the corruption of sin and death, may we glorify you through Christ our Lord, through whom you bestow on the world all that is good” (*on salvation for all and the value of creation*)

There is a lot in Prayer IV that points to people's' relationships with the non-human world, though far more than the hymns it emphasizes an anthropocentric concern for the environment in line with mainstream Catholic environmental teaching. Yet in doing this Prayer IV shows creation's centrality to Catholicism--it is not something ancillary to the faith. Moreover, because this prayer is one of a

very few licensed by the Vatican helps clergy know that they are on firm theological footing when using it to speak about relationships between humans and the environment. Clergy will have to take time to actively speak with their congregations about why they are using this prayer on a particular day, for without this break from the routine it is unlikely that parishioners will pick up on these underlying themes, but there is a clear potential to begin changing the tone in a parish.¹³

Despite this potential, only Father Sebastian brought up Eucharistic Prayer IV as a way to incorporate Catholic environmental teaching into the mass, and even he had not done anything in this vein. For everyone else this was not something they considered despite this prayer's clear concern for nature-society relationships. This is an easy step clergy could take in the blink of an eye, yet it goes unrecognized. Reflecting on text used in rituals is difficult and does not happen on its own. However, thinking about this single prayer and what it means to recite it during mass may be a good point for clergy who not know what to do to start.

The fourth point where Catholic environmental teaching might appear in the mass is far more a shift in logistics beforehand than in its celebration per se. Almost every parish distributes bulletins ranging from two to eight pages either before or immediately after the mass as a way to let congregants know about ongoing parish activities and events during the upcoming week or so. Parishioners often took a few minutes before mass began to read through their bulletins, as there is not much else to do and, in most churches, very few people move from their seats after they sat down. Often they include anywhere from a quarter to a full page as a weekly column written by the pastor, which could be a good place explain small, symbolic changes such as the hymns or the Eucharistic Prayer and ask parishioners to pay special attention to these shifts.

Bulletins could also help raise awareness about a book study, lay the groundwork for organizing a "Care for Creation" committee in the parish, or provide contact information for a particular person who could take the lead on answering questions about environmental topics. Most

bulletins also have between half a page to two pages of ad space at the end which frequently has empty spaces. Clergy could, depending on parish policy, allocate one or two of these open blocks to environmental causes in the area or promote specific local events. They could also include a prayer, reflection, or other document about the environment as a bulletin insert. This is one of the few potential changes that is already happening, as a couple churches across the diocese included leaflets in their bulletins that called on people to reduce their plastic use because of its influences on marine life (Appendix A).

Bulletins are also objects that present an opportunity to incorporate changes directly into parish life. Across the Diocese of Syracuse, I found bulletins ranging from two to eight pages, some in color and others not, some stapled and some not, and some printed on less durable paper while others were made of heavier, more robust materials. Understanding the environmental impact of whatever bulletin a parish uses and working to lessen it could be a good first step for a parish office or green team, especially in larger parishes that print hundreds of bulletins every week. An alternative option some churches already use is to have seasonal main bulletins that are used over multiple masses and perhaps months while much smaller weekly inserts are provided that contain specific details parishioners need to know at that point.

While these shifts concerning bulletins, as with any that is restricted solely to the mass, should not in any way be the final or even central steps that a parish takes around these issues, they are possible starting points. Rather than trying to start with the vast problems in contemporary nature-society relationships, clergy can use these symbolic changes as a way to get their community used to thinking about the environment at mass and engaging them with basic principles of Catholic environmental teaching. Small changes can alter the context within a parish and start conversations about environmental issues without upsetting the apple cart. They are also a signal that environmental thought and teaching can be a central rather than ancillary part of Catholic life and

worship and is going to be a serious part of what a particular parish is trying to do. Making tangible changes is a good place for parishes and clergy to begin bringing Catholic environmental teaching into their community. These steps are by no means enough and cannot be the end, but building a new church starts with the first brick. If the Church is going to change, it has to start somewhere.

Special Events

If priests and deacons are unsure about how to incorporate environmental teachings into their parishioners' lives, there are a few times in the Catholic liturgical year when priests and deacons that might prove fruitful for introducing such ideas. Several clergy mentioned Earth Day in April and the Feast of St. Francis in October as the two days in the liturgical year when raising these topics made the most sense. On these days many clergymen said that they could, and in a few cases already had, put the environment at the forefront of their ministry. In general, however, most clergy only spoke hypothetically about using these moments to raise environmental concerns within their parishes.

Earth Day (April 22) and the Sunday closest to it was the time of the year most frequently raised as a clear opportunity to engage with environmental issues. Several priests spoke about how Earth Day would be an easy time to justify preaching about these topics to their parishioners, while others raised the possibility of using the day to launch longer-term programming concerning these issues. Father Mark thought that it would be nice if the lectionary was shifted to incorporate more readings with a stronger environmental connection as he thought that right now environmental themes are mostly absent from the readings in late April. Nonetheless he felt that there was a strong opportunity to use that celebration of the mass as a way to focus on environmental topics in recognition of what is going on beyond the church's walls. Clergy could also use Earth Day to address relationships between humans and the environment in youth education, possibly by bringing in an outside speaker with expertise in this area. Though it may take some work on the part of the

priest or deacon to determine how best to do so in their parish, Earth Day is a clear time for Catholic environmental teaching to shine in any parish. Moving beyond the broad, empty platitudes often offered by others on Earth Day to push for meaningful change would be difficult but not impossible. For instance, a parish might be able to bring in an outside scholar or activist to speak or partner with an environmental organization focusing on a local problem where congregants could meaningfully help, either by changing their behavior directly or pressuring local governments.

The feast day of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4th was another day many clergy suggested as a suitable time to raise *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teaching. St. Francis's feast is already part of the liturgical calendar and thus it is somewhat easier for clergy to licitly incorporate a focus on the environment within the mass than Earth Day. In many churches, especially in farming communities, St. Francis's feast commonly includes a blessing of the animals, or sometimes just pets, where parishioners bring a host of (mostly) domesticated animals to church for the priest to bless. When this happens there are clearly ample avenues for homilists as they could choose to talk about cycles of life and death, the love and emotional bonds people share not just with other humans but also non-human creatures, the beauty and wonder of life, or the stewardship responsibilities that people individually have for their pets and collectively for the entire world. Even for those priests and deacons not in a parish with such an event, St. Francis's feast offers a time to think and reflect on his life, ministry, teaching, and importance to Catholics today. Environmental concerns clearly fit into parish life on this day.

Not every time clergy thought might be suitable for incorporating environmental issues into parish life is as obvious as these two days. They instead require somewhat more theological grounding to understand the rationale underlying such a connection. Lent, the holy season beginning on Ash Wednesday seven weeks before Easter and lasting until the Easter Mass was one such period where environmental programming had been successfully implemented in a couple parishes around

the diocese at one point or another over the past few years. Often running from mid-February until mid-April, Lent is one of the most important seasons in the Catholic calendar as it is a time to reflect on one's life and work to revamp areas that needed improvement. Lent typically is a time when people try to incorporate moral critiques of their lives and change their behaviors for the better. Primarily focusing on environmental degradation during this season may come as a shock to some, but it is both in line with the underlying rationale of the season and in the eyes of some clergymen a more efficacious way to incorporate *Laudato Si'* into parish life. Their hope in doing this over the course of almost two months is that far more reflection and sustained change in people's day-to-day lives could be achieved over this time than just focusing on Catholic environmental teaching for a day.¹⁴

Links between Lent and concern for human-environment relationships can take several forms. The most direct of these might involve clergy using the season's built-in moral critique and emphasis on the future to discuss the poor stewardship and degradation characterizing contemporary nature-society relationships. Preachers could do so directly from the pulpit or, as was the case in at least one parish, provide a list of bulletin inserts prepared by Catholic organizations that focus on different environmental themes (such as food, water, consumption, or energy) meant to spark parishioner reactions and show people a way forward. Consistently returning to these topics over the season may help some parishioners actually make changes and reflect deeply on their lives as Lent is meant to be a period of constant liminality.

This disruption comes in many forms beyond a sharpened focus on morality on the part of parish clergy within the church or the mass itself. Many U.S. Catholics give up some vice for the Lenten season, often cigarettes, sugar, coffee, or some other thing they want out of their lives. Others use the season as an opportunity to add a practice, such as meditation or an exercise regimen, into their lives out of a similar desire for self-improvement. Parishioners already frequently

use the season and their perceived religious duty to attempt difficult but necessary changes in their lives.

Typically these Lenten changes focus on the body or individual health. However, any area of life someone seeks to better can be substituted into this practice. Deacon Cristobal's parish had tried to incorporate Catholic environmental teaching into their Lenten ministry by organizing a parish-wide Carbon Fast. This idea, which several others mentioned as an intriguing possibility they had considered but never implemented, begins with clergy or a Care for Creation team creating a list of forty actions and behavioral changes people can make in their day-to-day lives. These could be anything from carrying a reusable water bottle to researching the possibility of composting to forgoing driving for a day and relying on other means of transportation to reading a few pages of *Laudato Si'* and reflecting on them. On each day of Lent participants would do one of these with the hope that at least some of them will inspire longer-term behavioral changes. By altering a ritual practice that already existed and is easily modified rather than trying to start something completely new, Cristobal thought his parish was more excited about with the Carbon Fast than more traditional Lenten practices. Yet despite finding it useful they did not repeat the fast the following Lent. The idea of such a program is easy enough to explain to parishioners, yet still in almost all cases across the Diocese of Syracuse it exists only as a concept, not a practice.¹⁵

Another interesting connection between Lent and Catholic environmental teaching is that it remains one of the very few times in the Catholic calendar when fasting is still required. In many cases this takes the form of abstaining from meat on Fridays during the season or of limiting oneself to only one small meal a day, though as with most Catholic ritual traditions there are a myriad of different manifestations of this fast. Regardless of what type of fasting a parish or individual parishioners participate in, however, food is at the front and center of Catholic life during this season. Parishes often have a "Friday Fish Fry" or some other communal meal as a way to use

fasting in order to create community. As a result, there is ample opportunity for clergy to bring up food-related topics that intersect with the environment and other Catholic justice concerns.¹⁶

Though Lent is a surprisingly good time to raise environmental themes among Catholics, very few clergy I spoke with mentioned raised this potential themselves. After our formal interviews concluded, however, several people asked me whether I had suggestions as to practical steps they could take. I often mentioned Carbon Fasts as one possibility and talked about some of the success the communities who ran these programs had seen. In general priests reacted positively to this idea and were interested in pursuing it further, though there is no data as to whether they have done so. Lent is one of the clearest potential times to bring Catholic environmental teaching to the forefront parish and parishioner life.

Several priests including Father Walter added Easter Sunday itself to the list of times during the liturgical year when environmental topics could come to the foreground. Easter is a unique day within Catholicism and important for parishes around the world. Theologically it is the focal point the Christian calendar, for it is in this celebration that Christianity recounts its core meaning and message for the world. Historically many baptisms happened during the Easter season, a concentration that continues today.¹⁷ Pragmatically many Catholics and other Christians who do not regularly attend services come to church on Easter out of a sense of duty and thus for this one day the congregation is often larger and far more diverse than on a typical Sunday. Clergy as a result focus fundraising and membership drives on Easter Sunday in an attempt to show how the Church could matter to those who have fallen away from Catholicism. The Easter celebration is one of very few days they can pitch the Church's message to those who have lapsed, especially among younger generations, and try to get them involved with the parish.

Additionally, and especially important for this thesis, the creation stories in Genesis are read in full on Easter. Many of the clergy I spoke with mentioned these stories as the key texts about the

relationship between humans and the environment in Catholicism. Since homilists are restricted topically to the assigned readings when preaching, Easter might be another highly convenient time to bring up the created environment and people's relationships with it. However, those like Father Walter who mentioned this possibility did not think such a focus was pragmatically possible since he felt bound to focus on the story of the resurrection during Easter to the exclusion of all else.

Creation, for him, could never take the foreground on Easter.

Yet incorporating more discussion of the creation story and the environment into an Easter homily might be beneficial, and not just because it addresses links between the resurrection and creation stories often marginalized in Catholic theology. One of the central concerns clergy expressed when prognosticating future directions for the Church was the lack of youth and young, child-bearing adults in their congregations. Without these people clergy do not expect their parishes to survive. This concern shared by many across the U.S. Catholic Church, as most Catholics under the age of thirty and a sizable minority of those under sixty-five attend mass only on a monthly or yearly basis. While it is unclear what is driving throngs away from Catholicism and other traditional religious institutions, a leading hypothesis focuses on people's affective disengagement and a belief that the religious institution has little for them as the reason why they do not attend religious services. Several priests agreed that it was not entirely clear to them what the church offered younger Catholics today.¹⁸

At the same time youth and young adults across the United States are likely to be more concerned about contemporary nature-society relationships than older generations. Many clergy hoped an increased focus on the environment within the Church might help draw some of these people into regular Catholic life as it would give them a reason to attend church and provide activities they cared about to get involved with. Engaging with environmental topics during Easter when mass attendance--especially by the youth--is far higher than at other times might be a

particularly good time to emphasize creation and the environment in mass. There is already good theological reason to focus on these topics during the Easter season for to understand full meaning of resurrection and salvation requires an underlying understanding of the beauty and wonder of creation. Making an engaged effort to include Easter as a time in the Church when Catholic environmental teaching can enter a parish could be key to underscoring the centrality of environmental thought to both a particular parish and to Catholic thought on a far broader scale.¹⁹

Given all of this, the clergy's reluctance to engage with creation as it is different from their traditional message may be the very reason to bring environmental issues to the forefront during Easter. Francis himself suggests as much when he comments on the gravity, urgency, and immensity of environmental challenges facing the world today with serious ramifications for all (Francis, 2015: §15). The pope implores all Catholics to care about the environment and hold loving others at the center of human life. Adding Easter to the list of times when the environment comes to the foreground of liturgical life could be an important step in renewing and revivifying the U.S. Catholic Church in the twenty-first century. There are several other times during the Catholic year beyond these four when concern for the environment could not just be one of many topics but come to the forefront as an issue of preeminent concern. Taking advantage of all potential opportunities to build an ecological Church is an important step for any community trying to meet the challenge of changing people's deeply rooted worldviews and behaviors.

Parish Buildings

There is one final key dimension of parish life where environmental issues must come to the forefront in an ecological church, though it is mostly separate from liturgical life and worship. Any parish, even a small one, owns and manages at a minimum two buildings--the church proper and a rectory for their priests to lie in, with many also having a separate parish hall. Larger parishes may manage multiple worship spaces or have additional buildings such as a school on their grounds.

From time to time, either because of age or the growth of the parish, parishes undertake serious renovations and may even construct a new building entirely, as was the case at Holy Cross in Dewitt. They recently built a new church to account for growing membership, and according to a publicly available pamphlet the new building covered 37,000 square feet and could seat 900 worshipers (Appendix A). While this was on the larger side, churches are generally massive buildings that go mostly unused during the week and ensuring their passive efficiency should be a key part of any construction or renovation. Similar to others from around the diocese concerning specific renovations, this pamphlet noted nothing about the environmental impacts of this new church building or indicated in any way that environmental considerations were considered during its design.

As a result of owning several buildings, many of which are old and poorly insulated with cavernous halls, heating and electric bills are often a major part of parish budgets. Several parishes published these figures in their bulletins, and while I will not identify them by name to avoid comparisons between specific congregations, bills often ranged from two to three thousand dollars per month. Slight shifts in the efficiency of their operations, especially increased insulation or repairs to seal cracks and other small holes in the church, have the potential to dramatically reduce a parish's bills and allow them to divert their scarce funds to other causes. A detailed energy assessment of parish buildings and exploring ways the community could reduce energy consumption are steps a parish's clergy could begin looking into for the community's economic well-being in addition to focusing more on their relationships with the non-human world.

Father Alex was one of those most interested in physically building a "green church," though as is common across the diocese his parish did not have the money to implement the changes he wanted. Much of our conversation was spent discussing the history different churches where he had served across the diocese. Alex had nothing good to say about most churches

constructed in the post-war period. Often these projects were contracted with whoever offered the lowest bid and then proceeded with shoddy materials and ineffective insulation. A particular bugbear of his were “single paned windows with aluminum siding” prolific across the diocese and, as he saw it, doing everything in their power to frustrate attempts to moderate church temperatures. Father Alex wanted to replace all of these windows, install solar panels, set up rainwater catches, and a host of other things to improve worship spaces he saw as “environmental disasters.” This was a concern of his long before *Laudato Si'* was released, but he had yet to figure out how to actually do so.

This focus on energy efficiency is a way to draw together clergy from range of ideological perspectives than some other dimensions of Catholic environmental teaching (such as the rejection of consumerism and profit motives). Such was the case with Deacon Arthur, who self-described as highly fiscally conservative yet was very concerned about environmental change and degradation. Arthur hated the destruction of the Amazon, thought the sewer system in Syracuse and other cities was too old and needed to be replaced as they continued to contaminate many, many people, thought of industrial feedlots whenever he ate a steak, and abhorred greed and taking the gifts of the environment for individual use. This is not to say that he completely embraced all elements of the environmental movement--he still was unconvinced by climate science and reiterated the ad hominem hypocrisy often (rightly or wrongly) aimed at Al Gore in conservative media outlets. Though abortion was his dominant political focus and beyond that he identified as deeply fiscally conservative, he still was concerned about the environment and in his personal life had made several conscious changes, such reusing water bottles, as a way to try and care for creation.²⁰

Even so, Deacon Arthur was a major proponent of implementing renewable energy projects in his parish, though primarily due to potential savings than any other reason. He wanted the church to save money, though he returned throughout our interview to the need to focus on respectful relationships with all life as the link between his concern about abortion and about non-human

creatures. Environmental concerns did not drive him, but they were a part of his calculus. While his parish had not yet installed solar panels, it was a topic of interest among the parish council that they were trying to find the budget for. More than anything, however, his parish's practical approach to the world was driven largely by financial concerns as opposed to anything else. Arthur said that the environment mattered and influenced parish decisions about their physical campus, but as of yet it is unclear whether this actually was an impetus for change. Without financial incentives it seemed unlikely that his parish would change their behaviors, regardless of his discursive support for Catholic environmental teaching.

While money was a major concern most clergy had with regards to changing parish buildings, Father Alex noted that this was far from the only factor standing in the way of such a transition. Especially among older generations who make up much of his parish, the emotional attachments to places parishioners had so many fond memories in impeded any substantial changes. For many congregants the church is a place filled with nostalgia of weddings and baptisms and they did not want any changes to these places. While such nostalgia may not be a barrier everywhere--for instance one priest's parishioners came to him with a desire to install more expensive energy efficient roofing in their historic church--in many places such changes are met with reactions ranging from grumbling reluctance to visceral resistance. Churches are major places in the lives and especially the memories of parishioners. These memories are a major barrier to any changes that may be desired, even if on all other accounts the change seem ideal. This barrier is even more formidable for clergy as much of the Church's connection with its members occurs through similar affective and familial bonds. Knowing that parish life is often deeply place-based comes through when discussing its buildings and is key to understanding the geography of Catholicism and some difficulties with implementing Catholic environmental teaching in parishes.

Though several clergy mentioned renewable solar energy, or in the case of Father Mark geothermal, a change they would like to see in their parishes, none had actually gone through with implementing these changes. Other possible options, such as installing a charging station for electric vehicles, purchasing fuel efficient vehicles for clergy, or connecting with urban forestry projects, not only were these not happening but no one I met with said they had even considered these possibilities. Almost every facility change clergy did mention was purely hypothetical shifts they would like to undertake, not realized implementations of Catholic environmental teaching in these parishes. With regard with parish building in the Diocese of Syracuse little has been done so far.

Of course, physically incorporating Catholic environmental teaching into buildings need not happen only during large-scale renovations or expansions--significant changes can be made at other times as well. Fathers Matthew, Karl, and Walter each talked about gardens and grottos that their parish had and maintained so that parishioners worship and pray while simultaneously caring for the environment. Gardens were also thought of as ways to beautify surrounding neighborhoods and provide access to green spaces that otherwise might be unavailable in urban areas. Fathers Walter and Sebastian also discussed trying to mow parish lawns less frequently and leave grass cuttings and leaves where they lay rather than bagging them up and throwing them out. Subtle changes of this sort meant to raise awareness rather than actually address environmental problems themselves were somewhat more common than large scale renovations, though they only had happened in a minority of parishes. Yet even symbols they are not yet that effective, for no one draws attention or talks about them. There is still a lot to do in order to materially bring Catholic environmental teaching into parishes.

Conclusion

The question of what Catholic clergy and parishes are *doing* in response to Catholic environmental teaching and *Laudato Si'* in particular has a far less optimistic answer than whether or

not they know about this teaching and discursively agree with it. The parishes of the Diocese of Syracuse are still far away from the “radical change which present circumstances require” Francis pushes all people to make. While there are a few parishes where an ecological conversion is beginning, by and large, by and large such changes are not happening. Father Tobias best captured the tone of many clergy when he responded to a question about whether Catholic environmental teaching was a part of his ministry by saying “umm, it doesn’t come up much in church. I think I really should address it.”²¹

There remains, however, a significant potential for change in many parishes and reason for hope that, if given a proper push, this change may occur. Clergy are overall supportive of Catholic environmental teaching and are open to emphasizing these issues and changing their parishes in a variety of ways. Though there could be a stronger will drive for change, it is far more the intersecting lack of money, time, and energy that impedes implementation of Catholic environmental teaching across the diocese. These are not insurmountable barriers, but they are serious ones. If an ecological Church is going to be built, parochial clergy need external support. They cannot accomplish the increasingly critical task of changing parishioners’ hearts, minds, and actions on their own.

Many of the changes that I have outlined here are quite small and run the risk of being considered entirely ineffective in actually changing the world. Causing such change directly, however, is hardly the point of these changes, for it entirely misses whatever power and influence twenty-first century Catholicism has. The Church, whether it is able to or not, tries to set the agenda for public discourse in order to have conversations that lead to far larger changes. Doing so will not fix specific problems per se, whether posed by climate change or some other threat, but they hope people will take new perspectives the gain from the Church and apply them elsewhere. Many clergy told me that they did not so much want to enact change directly but inspire others to change the world far beyond the church doors. They want to do their part and make whatever meaningful

changes they can, but they know changing structures of power directly far exceeds their limited role. Small but visible symbolic shifts are far more useful to them than serious internal change people never see or talk about. These changes can be made across the diocese and have the ability to reach the thousands of people who attend mass in its churches every week, hopefully inspiring those with more power and influence to act and/or push for deeper changes to actually address problems facing people around the world. Yet in general none of this is currently happening in the Diocese of Syracuse. There is not an ecological Church today.

¹ For broad comments on the role of clergy and suggestions for implementing Catholic environmental teaching see Walter E. Grazer, “Catholic Social Teaching and the Environment: Pastoral Challenge and Strategy,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 4, no. 2 (2007): 211–225 or Peter Cardinal Turkson, “Family and the Environment—Caring for Our Common Home: The Holistic View of Pope Francis,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 13, no. 2 (2016): 167–174. Additionally, the Archdiocese of Atlanta, “Laudato Si’—On Care for our Common Home: An Action Plan for The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta,” Atlanta, GA., 2015 partnered with scholars at the University of Georgia following the publication of *Laudato Si’* to create an implementation plan for parishes and parishioners across the archdiocese. Though the plan often makes references to Georgia-specific organizations, many of its broad suggestions are applicable for parishes outside of the archdiocese.

² For further information about the development of recycling programs and their links to various industry groups especially including the beverage industry, see Ted Steinberg, “Can Capitalism Save the Planet?: On the Origins of Green Liberalism,” *Radical History Review* 107 (2010): 7–24; Bart J. Elmore, “The American Beverage Industry and the Development of Curbside Recycling Programs,” *The Business History Review* 86, no. 3 (2012): 477–501; and Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, 64–95.

³ For notes on the “Crying Indian” PSA, see Dunaway, 2015, 79–95. Additionally Steinberg, 2010 and Elmore, 2012. Also Francis, *Laudato Si’, or On The Care Of Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, §32, 108–109, 190–192, 195. For a recent discussion of the problems with the recycling industry in the United States see Alana Semuels, “Is This the End of Recycling,” *The Atlantic*, March 5, 2019.

⁴ For some recent (and clear) scholarship concerning the practical efficacy of recycling, see W. Kip Viscusi, Joel Huber, and Jason Bell, “Private Recycling Values, Social Norms, and Legal Rules,” *Revue D’économie Politique* 124, no. 2 (2014): 159–178; Jennette M. Garcia, and Megan L. Robertson, “The Futures of Plastics Recycling,” *Science* 358, no. 6365 (2017): 870–872; and M.K. Eriksen, K. Pivenko, M.E. Olsson, and T.F. Astrup, “Contamination in Plastic Recycling: Influence of Metals on the Quality of Reprocessed Plastic,” *Waste Management* 79 (2018): 595–606. For a far more detailed examination of recycling processes, see Ernst Worrell and Markus A Reuter, eds., *Handbook of Recycling: State-of-the-Art for Practitioners, Analysts, and Scientists*, Waltham, MA: Elsevier, 2014.

⁵ For discussion of metals recycling Barbara K. Reck and T.E. Graedel, “Challenges in Metal Recycling,” *Science* 337, no. 6095 (2012): 690–695 and Worrell and Reuter, 2014, 27–36 and 65–146.

⁶ For discussions of labor and health across various sectors of the recycling industry, see, among others, David Pellow, “Bodies on the Line: Environmental Inequalities: Hazardous Work in the U.S. Recycling Industry,” *Race, Gender, & Class* 6, no. 1 (1998): 124–151; Patralekha Chatterjee, “Health Costs of Recycling,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 337, no. 7666 (2008): 376–377; M. Singh, P.S. Thing, and S. John, “Health Risk Assessment of the Workers Exposed to the Heavy Metals in E-Waste Recycling in Sites of Chandigarh and Ludhiana, Punjab, India,” *Chemosphere*, 203 (2018): 426–433; and Katrina N. Burns, Stephanie K. Saylor, and Richard L. Neitzel, “Stress, Health, Noise Exposures, and Injuries among Electronic Waste Recycling Workers in Ghana,” *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology* 14, no. 1 (2019): 1–11. For the symbolism of recycling, see Gail Markle,

“Accounting for the Performance of Environmentally Significant Behavior: The Symbolic Significance of Recycling,” *Symbolic Interaction* 37, no. 2 (2014): 246–263.

⁷ Concerning Catholic thought and food see Ted G. Jelen, “Catholic Priests and the Political Order: The Political Behavior of Catholic Pastors,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 4 (2003): 591–594 or United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers*, Washington, DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004. For Christianity and food more broadly Ken Albala and Eden Trudy, eds., *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 or Laura M. Hartman, “Consuming Christ: The Role of Jesus in Christian Food Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 1 (2010): 45–62. For religion and food more beyond Christianity, see Todd LeVasseur, Prahmud Parajuli, and Norman Wirzba, eds., *Religion and Sustainable Agriculture: World Spiritual Traditions and Food Ethics*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016. Additionally, Pope Francis (*General Audience: Saint Peter’s Square*, Vatican City, 2013) best encapsulated Catholic social teaching concerning food when he said “whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor” as he saw hunger as a consequence of the same widespread “culture of waste” wrecking the environment.

⁸ For more see Hans Kung and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World’s Religions*, New York: Continuum, 1993; Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010; Stephen Ellingson, *To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016; Maria Nita, *Praying and Campaigning with Environmental Christians: Green Religion and the Climate Movement*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016 or Amanda J. Baugh *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.

⁹ See Pew Research Center, *U.S. Catholics Open to Non-Traditional Families*, Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2015 for recent figures concerning mass attendance across various social cleavages among U.S. Catholics.

¹⁰ While there are a great deal of hymns that may be applicable for such worship, clergy listed the following in interviews: “Canticle of the Sun,” “Sing Out, Earth and Skies,” “How Great Thou Art,” “Morning Has Broken,” “All Creatures of our God and King,” “For the Beauty of the Earth,” “All the Ends of the Earth,” “Sing, O Sing,” “He is the Lord,” “O Bless the Lord,” and “Beautiful Creatures.” General references were also made to the psalms as additional places where praise of God through creation came to the forefront in the mass.

¹¹ For a far more theologically rich discussion of the Eucharistic Prayers, see Enrico Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, Translated by Matthew J. O’Connell, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004, 154-189.

¹² All citations from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Roman Missal*, 3rd ed., 2011, 236-242.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ For reflections on the importance of Lent and Easter within Catholicism and Christianity more broadly see Greg Pennoyer and Gregory Wolfe, eds., *God for Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Lent and Easter*, Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013 and Christopher Bryan, “Editorial: New Beginnings,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 57, no. 2 (2014): 114–116.

¹⁵ While a carbon fast or some other Lenten commitment, such as forsaking plastic, waste, or going vegan was uncommon across the Diocese of Syracuse (at least during the study period), there have been some recent high-profile efforts across various Christian denominations to make such changes. For example, see Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “The Latest Lent Challenge for Churches: Give Up Plastic,” *The Washington Post*, March 6, 2019. The Catholic Church, however, has often been on the sidelines in these discussions, with the notable exception of Genesis Butler and Million Dollar Vegan’s challenge February 2019 that Pope Francis ‘go vegan’ during Lent—see Emily Dixon, “A Challenge to Pope Francis: Go Vegan for Lent for \$1 million Charity Donation,” *CNN* February 6, 2019. Further research is necessary to understand the local impacts of such programs in parishes where they occurred, but the prevalence of these articles in contemporary popular media suggests at least the potential for such behavioral changes to spread.

¹⁶ For more on food, fasting, and Lent (and a broader discussion of the influences Catholic food practices had on European history) see Brian Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting and the Discovery of the New World*. New York: Basic Books, 2006, especially pp. xi-xvi and 13-26.

¹⁷ Canon 856 states that “although baptism can be celebrated on any day, it is nevertheless recommended that it be celebrated ordinarily on Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil.” For further discussion on baptisms in early Christianity, see Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009. For a formal theological discussion of

baptism within Catholicism, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993, § 1213-1284.

¹⁸ For mass attendance, see Pew Research Center (2015) and Michael Hout, “Saint Peter’s Leaky Boat: Falling Intergenerational Persistence among U.S.-Born Catholics since 1974,” *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 1 (2016): 1–17. Concerning clerical concern with disengagement among parishioners and factors causing declining attendance see Jessica H. Hardie, Linda D. Pearce, and Melinda L. Denton, “The Dynamics and Correlates of Religious Service Attendance in Adolescence,” *Youth & Society* 48, no. 2 (2013): 151–175; Michele Dillon, “Christian Affiliation and Disaffiliation in the United States: Generational and Cultural Change,” in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Themes and Developments in Culture, Politics, and Society*, edited by Stephen J. Hunt, 346–365. Leiden, NED: Brill, 2015, and Hout, 2016. Additionally, J. Tom Muller and Lauren E. Mullenbach, “Looking for a White Male Effect,” *Generation Z: Race, Gender, and Political Effects on Environmental Concern and Ambivalence* 31, no. 8 (2018): 925–941 have shown that the bias against environmental and climate science prevalent across other generations among white men is far less prevalent among Generation Z, providing additional impetus for a focus on the environment as a way to engage such individuals with Church teaching. Concerning the links between the resurrection and creation, see Michael W. Petty, *A Faith That Loves the Earth: The Ecological Theology of Karl Rahner*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996 on the ecological undertones of Karl Rahner’s theology, especially his focus on the centrality of Creation to understanding the Incarnation on pp. 120-140. For an entirely different Catholic approach the intersection between humanity, the Resurrection, Creation, and the non-human world see Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*, Translated by J.M. Cohen, London: Collins, 1969. Though he was expelled from the Catholic Church a decade later, Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions*, Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1983 was written while he was still a member in good standing with the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) and is a foundational text for many creation-centric theological traditions within the Catholic Church and beyond. Each of these authors, and many more besides, offer different perspectives on the relationship between the Easter season and themes of creation and resurrection. I make these notes less to endorse any single position in particular but rather to point out that there is a deep, ongoing discussion involving theological ideas central to Catholicism that supports emphasizing Creation and nature-society relationships during the Easter Season.

¹⁹ For discussion of age demographics at Catholic mass, see Pew Research Center, 2015. About generational differences in concern with environmental issues see Laura Wray-Lake, Constance A. Flanagan, and D.Wayne Osgood, “Examining Trends in Adolescent Environmental Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors Across Three Decades,” *Environment and Behavior* 42, no. 1 (2009): 61–85; Adam Corner et al. “How Do Young People Engage With Climate Change? The Role of Knowledge, Values, Message Framing, and Trusted Communicators,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 6, no. 5 (2015): 523–534; Matthew J. Hornsey et al., “Meta-Analyses of the Determinants and Outcomes of Belief in Climate Change,” *Nature Climate Change* 6, no. 6 (2016): 622–626; and Muller and Mullenbach, 2018.

²⁰ For a discussion of representations and opinions of Al Gore among conservative groups in the United States see Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, 258-276.

²¹ Francis, 2015, §171

Chapter 6—Community Participation and Parishioner Responses

The process of building an ecological Church is not solely dependent on the clergy. Though by statute priests administer their parishes, in practice they do not operate on their own and are vastly outnumbered by lay Catholics, members of the Church who are not part of formal religious life or ordained clergy. Without their support, no parish program can succeed, for no one will participate or organize it and might even result in the bishop removing a cleric from a parish if they contribute to parishioner discontent. As a result, it is crucial for clergy to understand how the laity might react to attempts to transform parishes into ones where *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teaching are central foci.

How clergy expect their parishioners to react is central to the ways that clergy practically respond to Catholic environmental teaching. These expectations are crucial as clergy often use them to gauge whether they should raise a certain topic. Many priests tasked with community building, fundraising, and expanding parish attendance do not want to embark on a project they think their parish will not support, even if the hierarchy is pushing for these sorts of activities. This chapter thus delves into how clergy expect people to respond to environmental teaching. In several ways these expected reactions, even if they are only hypothetical, stand in the way of building an ecological Church.

Politics and the Church

A major concern several clergy had was that parishioners might perceive discussions of environmental issues, especially climate change, as inherently political and something the Church should avoid. Bracketing the question of whether politics and religion are ever split, the concern that something is a political and not religious topic was something several clergy were concerned about. They thought engaging with politics created a situation of high risk with little potential reward in their parishes. They said that a fear of being perceived as political discouraged them from engaging

with environmental themes in their ministry, especially if the particular topic is not already a major personal concern, for they thought it could only divide a parish rather than build common ground. As Father Nestor said, “my job is not to alienate people, it’s to move them forward.”

Additionally, in the United States the intersection between religious organizations and politics is a sensitive subject. Many Catholics and others oppose mixing these two spheres and do not change their political opinions in response to religious leaders. Father Rene was one of those most concerned about how much influence Catholic priests could actually have if they are perceived as confrontational or controversial. He said that “if someone is a climate change denier, I’m not going to change their heart or their mind” no matter how hard he tries or how correct he is. If the environment and/or climate change remain political topics in broader discourse, he felt unable in his role to do anything that would reframe these as licit topics for him to talk about in his role as a priest.¹

Moreover, Father Rene thought that no matter what the topic only about twenty to thirty percent of Catholics were actually ever listening to what he was saying. This drastically cut into his potential influence before he could even open his mouth. In his eyes everyone else in the pews while bodily present in the congregation did not meaningfully participate in the parish and only showed for forty-five minutes on Sunday mornings out a sense of duty and a desire for eternal salvation. Since his potential reach was already so limited, he saw little use starting any discussion that might lead even more people to reject his message immediately.

Yet Rene did think there was a way to raise topics such as the environment people perceive as political, though it requires far more effort and circumspection on his part. He suggested beginning by looking for some common ground that parishioners politically or ideologically predisposed against Catholic environmental teaching might nevertheless agree. By drawing their attention first to a topic far more within perceived remit of religion, something such as almsgiving or

charity, Rene thought he could get parishioners to agree about something small before challenging them to reflect on what that principle might mean if applied to other topics. Professionally, however, he did not feel able to bring conversations into politics. He only wanted to soften hearts and hope that others could succeed in the far more difficult task of changing people's minds about contested political issues. This was all Rene thought he could realistically do, even though he thought it was far from enough. The environment was too hot a button for him to risk splitting his parish or alienating parishioners over.

Of course, aversion to straying into political terrain did not apply to all issues as many clergy felt that speaking out against abortion in particular was part of their job. Their parishioners, they thought, expected them to say something about what in many cases they agreed was a serious problem in the United States today. Though not everyone went as far as Father Richard to say that this issue alone was responsible for moral decline and all problems across the country, they were all in agreement that this was an area where their religion required them to push politics. When they thought the stakes were high enough—the widespread suffering of innocent life—many priests felt duty bound to bring potentially divisive political issues into their parishes and pulpits.

Similarly, not all clergy are wary of straying into political terrain regardless of topic. Many clergy said they had no problem raising issues that inspire parishioner pushback. This is particularly the case if they know they are on firm theological footing, which is something *Laudato Si'* provides. Father Philippe recounted one such instance where he felt called to publicly condemn President Donald Trump's immigration policies and especially the separation of children from their parents and their detention in summer 2018. Knowing this might cause controversy in his parish, Philippe prepared copies of his homily for anyone who had questions about it. Strongly rejecting contemporary U.S. immigration policy, Philippe named specific administration officials he thought were acting immorally and urged parishioners to reach out to elected officials and condemn these

policies. In doing so he frequently referenced Catholic social teaching and used it to highlight the injustice of specific political positions.

The day or so after Philippe received a long, angry letter from a parishioner accusing him of bringing personal politics into the pulpit where they did not belong. In this letter the parishioner expressed their perspective that immigration should not be discussed in church because it was a political rather than religious issue. Clearly Philippe's attempt to frame immigration policy as a question of loving one's neighbor did not influence at least this parishioner's view of the world. To change minds on immigration, environmental, or other social issues without falling into acrimonious and accusatory politics is, at least from Father Philippe's perspective, "the most difficult task priests have to do." Yet he felt that as a Catholic he had no legitimate choice but to engage with these issues regardless of the conflict he may cause.

Father Otto recounted a similar experience when parishioners immediately accused him of straying into politics the one time he mentioned climate change from the pulpit. Father Don had also received pushback from a parishioner after putting inserts about the environment in the bulletin during Lent. This person claimed that any talk about the environment was nothing but left-wing propaganda and entirely unacceptable behavior by a priest. Despite these confrontations, both Don and Otto had a similar reaction as Father Philippe and did not want to stay away from something just because it might be perceived as a political. For Otto this was especially the case concerning the environment, for to him (and clearly to Pope Francis) the issue so clearly a moral matter and something he must address. Even so, he had not returned to environmental issues in his pulpit.

Each of these priests saw continuing education as the best way to make positive change as they allowed clergy to frame topics as moral rather than political or economic issues. They hoped that doing this would make it difficult for parishioners to close themselves off from the homilist's voice since moral topics are clearly within a preacher's remit. However, these cases also show that

actually succeeding in this is quite difficult and many parishioners may not react positively to Catholic environmental teaching. Concerns about raising the hackles of parishioners and potentially sparking division in the parish are legitimate, particularly if clergy are unable to break away from political frameworks. For Father Matthew, who expected pushback in his parish if he raised these issues, this challenge should not deter him or any of his colleagues from engaging with environmental issues, for “we’re not headed down the right path.” Even so, as of our interview he had not brought up these topics in his parish. Engaging in confrontation is hard, even for those who knew it was something they ought to do, and this is one reason clergy have not moved past their theoretical agreement about the necessity of an ecological Church to actually building one.

Moral Authority

Such attempts to frame the conversation as moral rather than overtly political, economic, or otherwise technical is a tactic embraced by members of the church from diocesan clergy all the way to the pope himself. Claiming authority to speak on any issue so long as they addressed it through a moral lens allowed Leo XIII to develop Catholic social teaching in support of labor unions. This authority has continued to ground papal and hierarchical pronouncements on issues cutting across all facets of human life. Having lost much of its former temporal power, the influence Catholicism has in the world today comes from its ability to educate and train millions around the world. To paraphrase Father Mark, the Church’s moral authority is its primary, and in many cases only, tool for changing the world.²

Yet the Church’s moral authority has eroded in recent years because of the sexual abuse allegations around the world. Thousands of survivors of clerical abuse come forward and share their stories. They have spoken of harrowing, traumatic experiences that require the Church to reassess everything that it is doing. For methodological reasons I did not want to ask about sexual abuse in

the interviews, as that seemed likely to discourage participation as well as potentially raise situations harmful to participants and/or far beyond my training and skill to address.³

However, a few clergy raised the topic on their own and I would be surprised if it was far from the minds of many others. Father Alex spoke for the longest about how even efforts to promote environmental teaching are affected by this crisis. He expressed his abject horror at these events and hoped the global Church could address the conditions that allowed this abuse to continue for so long. Until this happened, however, Alex did not know how he or anyone else could speak with moral authority if as an institution they were unable to protect children. For the most part he thought the Church had “lost a generation” and that re-establishing authority and trust was a difficult process that will (and should) take years of hard work and transparency from clergy at all levels. Yet he hoped the Church could eventually do this because of its core message of love, care, and salvation is important for all. He thought that that all too often this message was lost because of the sinfulness of the people who make up the Church. Yet until they can prove they have addressed these failings, Alex did not think the Church could take a leading role changing hearts or minds on any issue, let alone one as complicated as the environment.

He had some hope that the Church could do this over the next several decades, though he saw the institution currently amid an identity crisis that would in large part determine whether this happened. Alex thought they needed to give up their European predilections and allow clergy from Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia to speak as the voice of the Church, for they were doing good work and retained much of the trust European and North American Catholics betrayed. Catholicism’s voice could no longer come from those who “signed a pact with Corporate America or Corporate Europe because we want the money,” yet this is all that far too many U.S. Catholic have heard. Alex hoped that under Francis this was changing but knew that it will likely take generations if it happens at all. As the only possible influence he thinks the Church has is its moral

authority, no matter how important or correct teaching such as *Laudato Si'* is, nothing the Church says will really matter until it addresses its current moral failings.

Father Sebastian also had doubts about the ability of the Church to speak with the moral authority to inspire behavioral change, though his concerns were not as closely tied to the sexual abuse crisis, for he thought that in many cases parishioners trusted individual clergy even as they ignored the larger institution. His concerns instead were that he did not know how to actually have the uncomfortable conversations with parishioners about their behaviors needed to address contemporary environmental degradation. Particularly given sharply declining attendance already facing parishes across the Diocese of Syracuse, Sebastian did not want to say anything that might upset parishioners. Even if he made an impassioned moral argument, he did not think people would give up cars and rely on public transportation or sacrifice their hobbies and passions, such as NASCAR or gas-powered boats. He thought it was all well and good to want to change parishioner behaviors based on theology and morality. His concern was that having these conversations, actually going up to parents of a young child and tell them that they needed to drive less and as a result would have to make their son give up most sports--steps he saw as required by Catholic environmental teaching in order to reduce fossil fuel use--could not be done in practice.

This reluctance was not because he thought environmental degradation was not a serious issue or because of a lack of knowledge, for Sebastian knew a great deal about Catholic environmental teaching. It instead stemmed from a concern that no one was listening and that, especially for people who came to church looking for comfort and stability, he did not think discomforting them would not effectively address environmental problems and could only make the situation worse. The contemporary environmental situation is so dire and the changes needed so drastic that there was little he thought he could make an impact. Sebastian thought that if he

challenged people's behaviors he would only succeed in driving people away from his parish and the Church's larger message.⁴

Wariness about driving people away from the Church is possibly a larger concern than sparking political disagreement and a fight within the community. The fear that they will drive parishioners away influences quite a few priests' ministries and impedes them from practically influencing the world. If Fathers Alex and Sebastian are both correct and raising Catholic environmental teaching even through a moral framework does not significantly change people's lives even as it contributes to their disengagement this poses a real challenge for any who seek address environmental degradation through the Catholic Church. It is likely that, even if clergy perceive this as a possibility, they will not delve into these issues regardless of how solid their basis in Catholic thought or how much they agree that these are important issues. In these cases, the parishioners steer parishes, parish leaders do not steer parishioners. Efforts to implement *Laudato Si'* or other Catholic environmental teaching must be attuned to these dimensions as much, if not even more so, than the global Church.

Rurality and the Environment

Quite a few other priests, however, did not raise concerns about politics or the declining moral authority of the Church when we talked about how they expected parishioners to react to Catholic environmental teaching. Far from being concerned with splitting their parishes, several priests did not expect any pushback at all from parishioners and thought that implementing environmental teaching in their parishes would be successful.

Often these clergy identified as working with predominantly rural congregations. They thought their congregants were more in touch with the environment because of their day-to-day immersion in nature in a way that urban and suburban parishioners are not. Father Pablo epitomized this view when he spoke about how his parishioners were innately concerned with the environment,

participated in community farming projects and farmers markets, and sought strong connections with nature. As a result, he thought parishioners would be very open to Catholic environmental teaching if he brought it up. To some extent this held true, as on a few occasions since the encyclical's release parishioners had on brought up *Laudato Si'* on their own and asked him questions about it. Pablo expected that if he was working in a city parish he would have difficulty making it relevant to those who "live in a concrete jungle" and might not be able to raise environmental topics.

Father Colin similarly thought that his parishioners, especially those who farmed for a living, were already deeply concerned with changes in the natural world. For years people in his parish have been wary about the consolidation of small farms by large corporations, a process Colin saw as problematically reducing the emotional connections people have with nature and the non-human world. What remains unclear is whether this perceived concern for the environment--especially their environment--among rural Catholic laity means that they are open to discussing these topics through a religious or moral framework that can contribute to meaningful behavioral change.

It would be quite difficult, however, to find an environment-society scholar to agree with Pablo and Colin the environment is solely or even primarily a rural concern, even if they set aside the problems with distinguishing between urbanity and rurality to begin with. These clergymen reveal quite a bit about the broader perspective of the environment that they hold with their focus on its primary dimensions most applicable to rural life, for they think of nature and of the environment as a topic only applicable within rural contexts far from urban life. That does not mean this perceived distinction within their geographic imaginary (or that of their parishioners) does not matter but just to push against those who think *Laudato Si'* is only applicable or important for rural communities. Applying Catholic environmental teaching in urban or suburban parishes where parishioners and even clergy do not immediately see its relevance to their lives may be harder and

require more work. Addressing the perceived distance between urban areas and natural environments is, however, a task geographers and other environmental studies scholars are well positioned to help clergy with.

There are countless ways that the environment intersects with cities, many of which should deeply concern members of these communities. Entire subfields of academic literature, such as urban ecology and urban environmental history, have developed to demonstrate the environmental dimensions of cities. Collectively these cast doubt over the view held by many priests that Catholic environmental teaching only really mattered for rural parishes and that there is no way or reason to engage urban congregations with this teaching. Ignoring *Laudato Si'* simply because a parish is in an urban area entirely misses the encyclical's point, for cities are central to understanding the relationships between humans and the non-human world.

To even begin listing the ways that these relationships manifest is an exhausting process. Cities use fossil fuels for electricity, transportation, heating and cooling, draw water and produce sewage, shift resource flows, refine materials from elsewhere, bring goods into the city, produce waste, eat food, and change land use, local temperature and biodiversity--to name a few. None of these are recent phenomena but have been integral parts of urban areas since the first cities were built. Beyond their direct environmental impacts, cities often drive the very culture of consumption and waste Francis rages against throughout *Laudato Si'*. Catholic environmental teaching is inextricably tied to urban areas.⁵

Cities are also critical for understanding contemporary processes of cross-scalar environmental degradation. They are major sources of local pollution, contaminating air, water, and soil through processes ranging from sewage treatment to industrial chemicals to exhaust from automobiles. The local impacts of cities are well established in the scholarly literature and studying them can provide a consistent stream of topics to discuss in attempts to understand what one's own

community is actually doing with regards to the environment. Globally, processes such as climate change threaten cities around the world in a number of different ways, including but not limited to sea level rise, increased storm intensity, the movement of storms to new places not built to handle them, and heat and drought that threatens their continued viability. Indirectly environmental change may also shift global economic processes and threaten the supply of material goods necessary for urban life.⁶

Food is perhaps the clearest of all such connections, especially somewhere like the Diocese of Syracuse. Due to long, cold winters, large-scale agriculture is extremely difficult for months at a time yet grocery stores around the diocese have a constant supply fruits, vegetables, and other foodstuffs that would be difficult to grow in Central New York even under the best conditions. As demand for such constant supply grows it puts pressure on both the land and people all over the world producing things like tomatoes, bananas, or coffee to be sold in Syracuse. This demand contributes to environmental degradation as well as the oppression of people working and living in these areas, causing the poor and the earth to both cry out in pain. Moreover, understanding the nuances of coffee and chocolate production in particular may be an excellent case study for parishes during Lent. Since people often give up these products during this time and already are thinking about them, it might provide an easily explicable connection for clergy to introduce a broader discussion about the social and environmental justice implications of food choice.⁷

Particularly in an age of globalization, the connections between cities and environments both near and far are innumerable and of critical importance to understanding the moral dimensions of systemic processes that individuals and communities are part of. Understanding where something came from and the consequences of its production is critical to seriously engaging with Catholic environmental teaching. These questions of origin and production are not just applicable to rural areas but need to be talked about in urban and suburban communities, for so often investigation

reveals how parish and other communities may unwittingly contribute horrific, immoral processes of environmental and social degradation around the world. Questions about the relationship between humans and the environment, and the need to treat environments appropriately, are not limited only to rural areas. No matter how disconnected from nature they may perceive themselves to be, parishes are inextricably intertwined with many different environments around the world. Catholic environmental teaching in many different ways is applicable to every parish and every person. Urban and suburban parishes need to engage with these topics, not just if they are to build an ecological church but if they are even to claim to act morally to begin with.

The relationships between cities and environments are quite complicated, but there are without a doubt many different connections. Harkening back to approaches to sin throughout Catholic theology as broken or immoral relationships, evaluating and addressing the moral dimensions of any city's or community's ties to both local and global environmental processes is a critical task for those using a Catholic environmental teaching framework. Teaching parishioners about these connections--especially about local issues, such as Onondaga Lake in Syracuse proper--may be a good way for clergy not serving in rural parishes to develop concern for human-environment relationships.

Francis wrote a brief section in the encyclical about these issues. Priests and deacons can turn here both to educate themselves about how an urban parish might intersect with environmental issues, but perhaps more importantly this section is a good way for them to introduce environmental issues to parishioners who likely have similar preconceptions about the relationship between cities and the environment.⁸

Without engaging with these critical perspectives to understand how Catholic environmental teaching is relevant for all people no matter where they live, especially including cities, clergy and others miss one of the central messages of this teaching. The common equation of environmental

concerns with rurality is a significant barrier to actually bringing *Laudato Si'* to parishes and changing nature-society relationships among Catholic communities.

This is not to say all Catholic priests and deacons share a uniform perspective on the applicability of environmental concerns to cities. A few urban and suburban parishes in the diocese do support urban food justice projects in particular, often by providing produce directly to communities or increasing their access to materials necessary for urban gardening. Yet the view that environmental concerns only exist for rural parishes is widespread among the clergy. This in turn is a significant barrier to successfully make *Laudato Si'* relevant for many communities. Addressing and deconstructing this fallacious equation is a critical step for the Diocesan Office, Catholic intellectuals, and other Catholic environmental movements if Catholic environmental teaching is going to make inroads across the Diocese of Syracuse.

Surprise

Regardless of whether they thought their parishioners would be open to Catholic environmental teaching or not, most priests and deacons thought parishioners would be caught off guard if these topics came up in church. Almost all clergy thought that they would start completely from scratch when trying to teach parishioners about the moral dimensions of nature-society relationships. Moreover, given the discussion about concerning the problems with equating the environment only to rural areas, further study about relationships between humans and the environment might also surprise the clergy, even if they thought the general topic made sense for them to discuss in their parishes. There was a stark difference of opinions, however, in how they imagined parishioners would react to this surprise as some clergy expected quick buy-in from their parishes as others thought it would be a difficult sell.

Though his parish was already tangentially engaging with environmental topics, Father Lorenzo thought parishioners would be surprised if he spoke formally about Catholic environmental

teaching. While he thought they would not be opposed to discussing the environment in church, he expected it would be a low priority among parishioners. As a result of this expected reluctance, Lorenzo expected parishioners to be put off simply because environmental topics were not things they had encountered before. He blamed this entirely on his personal lack of knowledge and engagement with the topic, especially since the encyclical's publication. He hesitated to focus on this topic despite his personal concern about climate change. Lorenzo reflected that he was disappointed in his own ministry thus far, especially because he had not mentioned water crises like the one in Flint, Michigan, but these topics just had not occurred to him before our meeting.

When we discussed what this would look like in practice, Lorenzo also turned to the common theme embraced by clergy when discussing the environment--food. Serving in a parish with access to more than enough green space for a moderately productive garden, he imagined starting a program to bring parishioners together for during the summer to grow vegetables to donate to local food pantries. Over the first summer especially, Lorenzo would constantly press for volunteers to engage with a project that was a real, concerted way they could give to those who needed it most. After the [hopefully successful] completion of the project's first year, Lorenzo expected to emphasize how by caring for the poor by planting and tilling a garden they had also beautified creation. He expected this connection would allow him far firmer footing to begin discussing more abstract principles of Catholic environmental thought. His hope was that through this tangible practice parishioners would let him move past their shock, though he was not sure this would actually work as well as it looked to on paper.

Father Mark was pessimistic about ever successfully involving parishioners with environmental teaching or even Catholic social teaching more broadly. He thought only between one and five percent of Catholics actually would read, digest, and internalize any document the church produced. In his eyes most Catholics only ever engaged with Church teaching if it received

coverage from the news outlets they already followed. As a consequence he was not sure if there was anything he personally could do to get people to care about Catholic thought since he thought for many people in his congregation did not think the Church had anything to say that might be important to their lives in any way.

Despite his pessimism as to the Church's ability to influence adherent's worldviews and/or behaviors, Father Mark was somewhat more optimistic that *Laudato Si'* in particular had made its way onto people's radars because of the amount of coverage it received in mainstream news outlets. So far he thought that this awareness only had a very minimal and probably unremarkable effect on the daily life of almost all Catholics, but it was enough that he imagined he might be able to engage parishioners with Catholic environmental teaching. Mark expected that people actually would be less surprised by environmental issues as opposed to other Catholic social teaching topics that have received less coverage. Moreover, he hoped they might actually be interested in the topic since it would be a novel type of Catholicism for many people. As a result, he thought parishioners might actually listen to homilies about the environment if he was able to write a compelling homily that clearly showed the connection between these topics and the day's readings.

Father Lee agreed that many of his parishioners would not expect environmental themes and had not engaged with Catholic environmental teaching on their own. For him, however, this was less about the distance between lay Catholics and hierarchical teaching but instead due to the shift he perceived between John Paul II and Benedict XVI's pontificates and Francis's. Saying Francis was too far ahead of others in the Church, Lee expected that most Catholics did not really understand Francis's beautiful message. Moreover, he thought that since Francis had not had the chance to install many of his own people into the hierarchy when *Laudato Si'* was published many of the bishops appointed by his predecessors in the United States and around the world did not support Francis's efforts nearly as much as they could have. This had severely impeded engagement with

Francis's corrective to historically limited Catholic approaches to the environment. However, Lee too was at a loss as to how to get people on board, always circling back to just constantly repeating this message of love and caring to as many as possible in the hope that some would follow. Surprise and novelty both impeded implementation.

Father Vance also expected that no one would inherently understand how the environment intersected with Catholicism, which to him was without question a topic central to Catholic social teaching. Though he saw clear opportunities to raise these issues, Vance did not think that people cared enough about the environment in general and did not really care about environmental changes. Moreover, he did not know how he could in practice move parishioners past this discomfort, as he expected that even if he drew on scriptural references people would accuse him of making things up, which had happened in other parishes. For Vance it was not so much unfamiliarity with Catholic environmental thought as with environmental thought in general that hampered him bringing this into his parish. Not only did the environment not matter to parishioners in church, but it did not matter to them anywhere, and Vance thought he did not have the ability to inspire such concern given all else that he had to do.

Far from every priest who thought parishioners might be surprised was as pessimistic, with several expecting that surprise would actually catalyze integrating *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teachings into parish life. From Father Tobias's point of view the way to best overcome this initial surprise to demonstrate the immediate relevance of environmental issues for parishioners. Like Father Nestor, once Tobias had gotten his congregation invested in environmental issues he thought he would be able to move toward more abstract dimensions of Catholic environmental teaching. As a result of *Laudato Si'* in particular he thought that parishioners would be open to this topic even if they were surprised, for how could they disagree with the pope that something is Catholic. Tobias did think, however, that he certainly had to be the one who raised

environmental issues in his parish and did not expect anyone else in the community to know much about them. While this put the burden on his shoulders, he did not believe it would be a problem once he got the ball rolling.

Though Father Vince thought changing people's worldviews would take years (if not decades), their surprise meant they did not have conscious preconceptions often more difficult in his view to overcome. Because it was completely new, parishioners might actually reflect on their lives and challenge their behaviors rather than just falling into an argument or tuning him out. Coupled with Francis's charisma, Vince hoped novelty would open people's hearts even if they were consciously confused about why a priest was speaking about environmental issues. He wanted *Laudato Si'* to break both clergy and laity out of the comfortable ruts they have fallen into over the past few decades. Surprise offers a chance for change and is his eyes something clergy should embrace rather than worry about.

There were even several priests who thought that these topics would not come as much of a surprise to their parishioners at all. Frequently, though by no means always, these clergy identified their congregations as more progressive than most other parishes, which they expected made them more open to the social justice messages underlying Catholic environmental teaching. These priests often emphasized the engagement their parishes already had with similar concerns, though none were as of yet really working with any environmental issues save for food. Since parishioners already took an active approach to their faith and believed Catholicism required making changes in the world, priests in self-identified progressive congregations thought it would be easy to wrap the environment into this broader framework. While this might not always work, as Father Rene could think of a few people he had crossed paths with before who were staunch advocates against poverty and homelessness while ardently denying climate change and human influence on the environment, on the whole they thought it would be far easier to bring Catholic environmental teaching to these

parishes as opposed to ones where congregants sat in the pews only to tick off the requirement for heaven.

Father Sean was one such priest who thought he would have no trouble explaining the connection between environmental issues and Catholic teaching. Moreover, he thought parishioners would appreciate and engage with this teaching more than they have with other topics in Catholicism since environmental change is obviously a major problem. Since everyone was tied to both the environment and environmental degradation, at least at some level, he thought anyone already interested in Catholic morality would readily and seriously incorporate Catholic environmental teaching in their lives. Even so, Sean said his parish was not doing nearly enough, especially since he expected it to be an easy sell to his congregation, but he thought the path to more engagement was clear. Yet as has become a common refrain in this thesis, his parish was not doing much of anything.

There is simply far more that priests, deacons, and bishops can do to advance Catholic environmental teaching, even and especially when they already understand and agree with its core message. Given the complexity of relationships between humanity and the non-human world, what such efforts entail will likely surprise many people, even those ideologically predisposed to support these changes. Understanding that regardless of venue or framework environmental education will involve overcoming unawareness and often surprise is critical for all those who seek to change environmental worldviews and behaviors among Catholics and others. Without appreciating this as a major hurdle, it may be difficult for anyone to successfully lead people to the deep changes Francis urges. This will not necessarily be easy, but it is a task clergy are called to undertake if their parishioners are to actually live moral lives.

Conclusion

By no means will all parishioners react to Catholic environmental teaching in these ways, if they even react at all. This chapter has not really begun delving into what parishioner reactions might be in practice, for that task falls beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, it has examined how clergy *think* parishioners might react and how such expectations in turn shape their Catholic environmental teaching in their ministries.

The Church's research arm in the United States, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), has found data that supports such a disparate range of reactions. Most U.S. Catholics did not know that *Laudato Si'* was coming and that even after its publication the majority did not have an opinion on the encyclical one way or the other. CARA found that in the year following *Laudato Si'*'s publication U.S. Catholic concern with climate change and Catholics claiming this was a very/extremely important issue to them each rose by between eight and eleven points, an important shift CARA has named the "Francis Effect." CARA also found that sixty-eight percent of Catholics agreed with the idea that they had a moral responsibility to counter climate change, though only around a third of these indicated that Francis's encyclical had influenced this belief.⁹

It is important for clergy to understand the specific and collective personalities in their parish and reflect on how these might influence efforts to incorporate *Laudato Si'* or other Catholic environmental teaching into Catholic life. This will allow them to plan for potential challenges and/or synergies that these efforts may encounter. Even with this preparation, parishes may defy expectations and react in several seemingly contradictory ways. There is no one-size-fits-all method on how to incorporate Catholic environmental teaching into a parish--ascertaining what will work best is, after all, the very role assigned to parochial clergy. Examining and understanding how parishioners actually react, especially in parishes where clergy expect difficulty, will be a crucial area for scholars and activists who are interested in Catholic environmental teaching or are more broadly

concerned about the intersection of religions and environments. While they may in the future, Catholic parishes and parishioners in this diocese are not presently engaging with environmental topics, even in light of *Laudato Si'* and other environmental teaching. Far more must be done to build ecological churches.

¹ On politics and the U.S. Catholic Church, see Timothy Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991; Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; or Bryan T. Froehle, "Research On Catholic Priests in the United States, Since the Council: Modeling the Dialogue between Theology and Social Science," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 29, no. 4 (2011): 19–46. For questions about the global intersection between Catholicism and politics see Ian Linden, *Global Catholicism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, and Charles E. Curran and Leslie Griffin, eds. *The Catholic Church, Morality, and Politics*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001. More broadly for religion, the Church, and secular politics see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. For the ineffectiveness of parochial clergy at influencing individual's views, also see Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) 2016: Attitudes about Climate Change*, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016a; CARA, *Climate Change Concerns Catholics More Than Other Christians. The CARA Report*, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016b.

² For further discussion see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993; Curran and Griffin, 2001; Asad, 2003; or Linden, 2009.

³ Several scholars have already published volumes on the topic, for example Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 and Claire M. Renzetti, ed., *Clergy Sexual Abuse: Social Science Perspectives*, Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2013. They offer thorough, serious perspectives for those interested in learning more about these awful events. Additionally, attorneys general across the United States are currently conducting investigations into both sexual abuse and consequent coverups. The Pennsylvania Attorney General released the results of their investigation in 2018, currently available at <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/report/>, detailing widespread abuse and coverup by various clergy around the commonwealth for much of the late-20th century. As I cannot appropriately delve into this topic here I will not pretend do, but I urge everyone to engage with those who have been able to devote appropriate time and resources concerning these events.

⁴ This want to comfort and support is far from the only vision of the Church's purpose. Several other saw churches as spaces for challenging opinions rather than working to maintain the status quo and discomfort parishioners. Further understanding not just how parishioners but clergy differently understand the purpose and functions of churches and other religious communities for their members.

⁵ A comprehensive bibliography of the ways in which urban areas are tied to environmental conditions would likely be longer than this thesis. However, Ellen Stroud, "Urban Environmental History in the Mid-Atlantic. Pennsylvania History," *A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 79, no. 4 (2012): 428–439 provides a good, quick introduction to a great deal of the work in environmental history that has looked at the ways cities are inextricably tied to nature and natural processes. Brian Stone, Jr. *The City and the Coming Climate: Climate Change in the Places We Live* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012 is another resource clergy and others unfamiliar with these intersections may find useful for as a more thorough resource for teaching about these relationships, particularly as it directly engages with concerning about ongoing climate change. Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016, 85-115 is another good resource that may be short (and clear) enough for a reading group.

There are also a number of resources that may be useful for clergy and others interested in quickly delving into the specifics of particular topics rather than just discussing urban environments in general. Chris Kennedy et al, "Energy and Material Flows of Megacities," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112:5985–5990, 2015 and Pay Dreshel and Hannah Karg, "Food Flows and Waste: Planning for the Dirty Side of Urban Food Security," in *Integrating Food into Urban Planning*, edited by Yves Cabannes and Cecelia Marocchino, 154–170. London: UCL

Press, 2018 each discuss various material resource and energy flows through urban areas, Dagmar Hasse, Niki Frantzeskaki, and Thomas Elmqvist, “Ecosystem Services in Urban Landscapes: Practical Applications and Governance Implications,” *Ambio* 43, no. 4 (2014): 407–412 engage with questions of pollution, ecological processes, and aesthetics. Michael Turner and Rachel Singer, “Urban Resilience in Climate Change,” in *Peace: Impacts on Cultural Heritage and Cultural Diversity*, edited by Sabine von Schorlemer and Sylvia Maus, 63–81. New York: Peter Lang AG, 2014 engage specifically with climate change and other questions about the livability of cities in the future, showing especially the (potential) effects environmental change has on urban communities. By looking not just at the macro but also the micro-scale in a volume engaging with topics that may be particularly useful when discussing these topics. Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 41-45 also delves into these issues with a specific focus on churches, and since he provides discussion questions may be another useful resource for clergy.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si', or On The Care Of Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, §49-53. See also Brian Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting and the Discovery of the New World*, New York: Basic Books, 2006. Concerning food more broadly, see Lynne Phillips, “Food and Globalization,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 37–57; Christopher M. Bacon, “Who Decides What Is Fair in Fair Trade? The Agri-Environmental Governance of Standards, Access, and Price.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 111–147; or Ryan S. Isakson, “Food and Fiance: The Financial Transformation of Agro-Food Supply Chains.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 5 (2014): 749–775. For a more historical examination of these processes see Christopher E. London, “Class Relations and Capitalist Development: Subsumption in the Colombian Coffee Industry,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 24, no. 4 (1997): 269–295 and his analysis of coffee production in particular. Tania Murray Li, “Intergenerational Displacement in Indonesia’s Oil Palm Plantation Zone,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 6 (2017): 1158–1176 also provides a useful overview of long term effects of plantation agriculture for workers by examining rubber and palm oil as case studies.

⁸ Francis, 2015, §147-155.

⁹ See CARA, 2016a; 2016b.

Conclusion—Building Churches Takes A Long Time

I want to end by recalling the story that began this thesis about the hope many had following *Laudato Si*'s release. Throngs of environmental scholars and activists expected that this document would change the Church and consequently the world, helping to stem climate change, pollution, and other environmental degradation. In reflecting on what has taken place, however, it is important to take the perspective of a parish priest to understand this document from the vantage point of those tasked with implementing it. Doing so helps reveal why much of *Laudato Si*'s potential remains unfulfilled and in the general scheme little has actually changed within Catholic churches.

Take for instance Father Jack, a sixty-three-year-old priest in the Diocese of Syracuse. He has lived in the diocese for thirty-seven years and served at seven different churches and is currently the pastor at St. Luke's, a moderately large parish on the outskirts of Syracuse. He is the only priest there now, though the rectory where he resides has enough space for three others. All alone now save for his five-year old sheltie and the two stray cats his predecessor always used to feed, Jack rarely sees any of his brother priests these days. As a result, papal teaching and theology is often far from his mind and much of his job now involves budgets, argument mediation, and event planning.

On that warm, sunny day in June 2015 when *Laudato Si*' was released, Jack woke up around seven in the morning. He had not slept that well the night before--he almost never did these days--and his left shoulder was unusually sore. That would be something else to ask his doctor about during his appointment that morning. At his age, doctor's visits always fed into Jack's anxiety even though he felt fine, for you could never tell what the tests might reveal.

Half an hour later he made his way over for morning mass a few minutes early to greet the regulars. Unfortunately, attendance was a little light that morning as only sixteen people showed up. Three couples were on vacation that week, and his long-time daily altar server Louis Barker had gone in for pretty extensive kidney surgery a couple days before. Father Jack would have to visit

Louis after his own doctor's visit since he had not been able to get over there yesterday. He also noticed Mary Jo was missing, though hopefully she had just slept through her alarm again and it was not anything more serious. Jack had just been cracking jokes with that eighty-seven-year-old woman yesterday and could not bear the thought of burying her. Funerals were coming faster and faster these days--he had celebrated three already that month and could not remember the last time a month went by without at least one.

Mass went by smoothly enough, as it should given that he had celebrated over 10,000 since his ordination. Except for his appointment at ten and the visit with Louis afterwards, Jack did not have any meetings scheduled that morning. Finally, some time that week to write his homily for the weekend, one of his least favorite tasks. He was not very good at it, at least in his opinion, and he could never really get into anything interesting without people complaining that he was droning on and on. Worse, they might not like something he said and complain to the bishop's office. He did not mind the bishop, actually he liked him, but a complaint might lead to another hour-long meeting Jack would rather just avoid about attendance and finances and how the Church could not afford anyone else to lapse.

His afternoon schedule was a bit busier, though thankfully also more pleasant. He was supposed to stop in during the youth group bible study his parish was running around noon to talk with them about...what was it again? Something about drugs or sex or smoking? Whatever it was would be easy enough to wing on the fly, as no one would listen to a word he said anyways.

After that, two couples who were getting married in July had counseling later that afternoon--those would each take up about an hour of his time, as long as nothing problematic came up. Oh, and that was right, Diane and Jason had also just gotten engaged and wanted to come talk about getting married around four. That would be a tough conversation, as they had only been together for the year after Jason's divorce, and Father Jack was not sure there was any way he would be able to

marry them. They had only been coming sporadically over the past few months anyway, so that was probably another young couple that would stop attending since he had to turn away their marriage.

That would probably take him to the end of his office hours, though he should probably take the time to look over the paperwork that had been piling up before the office closed. He definitely had to approve the bulletin before noon tomorrow so that they could send them off to the printer, and he had a meeting with the parish business administrator all morning tomorrow to go over the next year's budget before the parish council meeting next week. That was going to be a nightmare--donations had dropped this past year as they had been for some time and it did not look like they were going to be able to cover their operating budget.

All told, Father Jack might be able to get out of the office by six, walk his dog, and grab a bite to eat before Bible study started at seven. At least they were looking at nothing too strenuous, just some parables from Mark, and might be able to wrap up before eight. Andrew and Liz might want to stick around and chat afterwards though, they often did, and he had not figured out a polite way to ask them to leave immediately so that he could get to bed. Though his age, both had retired a few years ago and did not have to get up anywhere near as early as he did. Jack did not usually make it past ten these days (or if he's being honest with himself, nine-thirty). He marveled at how twenty years ago he had so much energy at the end of the day, though he often wondered if in a decade or so he might look back at today and think this was a lot of energy.

It was on his way back from visiting Louis--who was not doing that well and needed to be added to the already too long list of people the parish was praying for--that Jack heard a story on the radio about the release of a new papal encyclical titled *Laudato Si'*. He quickly checked his email and yup, there was a message from the bishop about the encyclical with an English translation attached for his perusal.

Scanning through it, Jack was shocked. It was so long! Who did Pope Francis think was going to read this? When was *he* going to have time to read it? And the environment--that did not make any sense. Where on earth was this coming from? He was not really sure about that global warming stuff himself, and he had no idea about some of these other terms the pope was using. Biodiversity--what on earth did that have to do with Catholicism, heck, what even is that? How was he supposed to explain any of this to his parishioners? He knew they were supposed to care for creation and not hoard resources, so he supposed he could talk about charity and love. That was usually a safe take on any topic, and maybe he would return to it in a couple of weeks once he had time to read and think about what the pope was saying. He probably should do something, but he had no idea what and hoped that it would come to him later.

Over the rest of the month Jack finished reading most of the encyclical during a few free hours he had scattered around. The parts he read he enjoyed, but he did not really know what to do to get it in the hands of his parishioners. None of them had any questions or even brought up *Laudato Si'* at all in their conversations. The bishop distributed a few copies to the parish for them to try and sell, but no one had bought them yet. Maybe he could organize another book study, though realistically how many people would actually come to that? And Jack still had no idea about any of this environmental science stuff, only that he was supposed to love the world and treat it kindly. He recycles and walks to the store every Monday for groceries, so he guessed he was doing his part.

For the next year or so Jack looked at the encyclical in the pile on his desk corner, often remarking to himself that he really ought to do something with it since the pope took the time to write so much. By Advent, however, it was structurally integral to a stack of papers on the corner, and after Easter the next year it had been completely buried by stacks of bulletins, plans for fundraising, travel forms and waivers, Sunday school teacher certifications, copies of various homilies, and other books people thought he might like. It was quickly out of sight and then soon

out of mind. The week before Thanksgiving Father Jack asked people to give food to the poor and to thank the earth for providing food to sustain them and at a few other times he reminded parishioners that the pope wanted them not to litter, though it never really crept into his homilies or weekly emails to the parish. *Laudato Si'* did not really change his thought, his behaviors, or those of his flock in any significant way.

Jack's story is not a specific anecdote I was told during any one interview. I instead came to it by compiling what participants told me about the aftermath of *Laudato Si'*'s release in their parish and synthesizing that with my observations about what was actually going across the diocese. As a result, it is not about any person in particular but instead about how the Diocese of Syracuse as a whole has reacted to *Laudato Si'* and other Catholic environmental teachings. Not a lot is happening as they are struggling to recruit enough clergy to take on the heavy burden of leading a parish. There is a lot of work they have to do just to maintain their status quo and adding more on top of that is just something few clergy are willing to do on their own. A crisis in numbers looms on the horizon both in this diocese and across the U.S. as clergy grow closer to retirement (and reach an age where health becomes a more pressing concern). This past year the diocese ordained only one priest. The clergy they have are tired, overworked, and often do not have much of an ability to take on any new project, let alone one as grand as implementing Catholic environmental teaching. There are certainly a few exceptions where *Laudato Si'* has had more of an effect, though speaking broadly this effect has been negligible. It was more often a story like Father Jack's that played out in one form or another across the Diocese of Syracuse. This does not have to be the case, but as of today it is.

While popes since Paul VI have expanded Catholic thought concerning the environment as the seventh pillar of Catholic social teaching, under Francis (2013-present) this teaching has blossomed into a key focus for many Catholic scholars and hierarchical leaders. Weaving together Catholic spirituality, environmental thought, and scientific insights, Francis has stated that care for

the environment should be a central concern for all Catholics around the globe. Beyond the formal hierarchy, theologians and other intellectuals have written innumerable pages about Catholicism and the non-human world. This urgent call extends beyond just giving charity, donating to a food bank, or recycling as it requires people to also work to dismantle structures and ideologies that facilitate such destruction. Francis wants people not only to change their lives but to change the world.¹

Yet none of this means much of anything to the ongoing relationship between humans and the environment if no one is reading it and changing their lives in response. Documents by themselves are not enough to change the world. To ascertain whether this was happening I wanted to look at whether one small part--the Diocese of Syracuse--was fulfilling Francis's call to build an ecological Church or using any other Catholic environmental thought to influence its behaviors.

Yet Francis's hope that *Laudato Si'* would prevent climate change and other environmental degradation is not bearing fruit. Whether in the long run this attempt to refocus Catholics is successful and what its consequences will be remains unclear. Examining this process where (and if) it unfolds can allow scholars to understand a great deal more, not just about how people think about their relationships with the world but also interrogating whether these perspectives influence people's behaviors. All that is clear right now is that an ecological Church is still far away. If this is something clergy and others affiliated with the Catholic Church want to see accomplished, far more must be done. As of today, it is not.

There is reason for cautious optimism that this could change. For some priests, Francis's writing has opened their eyes to potential intersections between Catholicism and the environment in a way they never considered before yet now are interested in, though they are hesitant to actually change their parishes. Far more hope stems from the realization that, while many of the clergy have not seriously read *Laudato Si'* (much less any other Catholic environmental teaching text), they knew about it and saw potential for Catholic environmental movements they had not considered before.

The conversation about the environment among clergy has begun shifting, but the actual construction of an ecological Church has barely begun.

There are significant logistical hurdles to building an environmental or ecologically minded parish, let alone diocese. Taking on new projects requires additional people and money that they simply do not have. Despite this the majority of clergy said they would be willing to try and change their parishes if they had the know-how and the resources. Almost no one wanted to take this task on personally, which certainly stymies efforts to implement this teaching, but clergy indicated they would support efforts to change their churches if others took the lead. The clergy are not likely, however, bring Catholic environmental teaching into their parishes or to parishioners by themselves.

Providing such support is a key area where environmental activists and church leadership may be able to make headway in changing the minds and actions of people around the world. For these groups, this thesis's most important conclusion is that the efforts undertaken thus far have not been enough. To put it bluntly, Catholic clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse are not speaking about environmental issues, even though they interested many clergy. Environmental activists could provide the knowledge needed to successfully raise these topics and help clergy tie them to their broader ministry. Other priests and deacons were interested in running book studies, bringing in speakers, or connecting their parishes with local causes, which are similarly all areas where activists could help them. More than anything, however, environmental activists can help push clergy to do more and provide the immediate local impetus for incorporating environmental teaching into parishes. This is not to say that the process will be easy or successful in every case and it may require environmental activists to develop a rudimentary understanding of Catholic environmental thought themselves. Such partnerships, however, have the potential to benefit both clergy and activists, allowing the former to connect more elements of Catholic teaching to their parish while the latter may access a far larger audience than their movement is likely able to reach on its own.

For scholars, this thesis's contributions are somewhat distinct. Academics certainly can (and in my view should) be activists and contribute in those ways, but there are a few particularly important scholarly takeaways for geographers and others interested in the relationship between people and the environment. The first, and I think most striking of these, is that Catholicism is in many ways a geographic imaginary--something I expect further study might reveal as a useful way to understand the geographies of religion elsewhere. By this I mean that Catholicism proffers a framework that influences how people see themselves, the world, what they value (and do not value), and consequently how they act. Understanding the Catholicism and Catholic environmental teaching are in many ways one part of a contestation between different geographies individuals have is a crucial step in synthesizing discussions of religion and geography.²

This thesis adds to this general idea an understanding that there are *multiple*, coexistent Catholic geographic imaginaries, and though these are by no means the only geographic imaginaries in Catholicism they are the ones most prevalent among clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse. Currently a dualistic understanding of humanity as separate from all else that exists is by far the most prevalent. As the only organism that joins spirit and matter, those operating under this imaginary value humanity far more than other creatures and certainly the non-living world. Consequently, they approach much of the non-human world through a utilitarian lens that sees all as meant to support human flourishing. While in this view humanity is made of the world it yearns to transcend its material existence. The world, however, exists solely for humanity, and its use and degradation are acceptable so long as humanity progresses toward reunification with God. In its stricter forms, this imaginary's adherents care little for environmental degradation as they believe God will provide whatever is necessary for humanity to survive. Less rigid dimensions of such an anthropocentric, utilitarian, and eschatological imaginary advance an ethic of stewardship envisions a need to protect the environment from degradation so it can support as much of humanity as possible in perpetuity,

but at its core such approaches are still deeply instrumental and thus licenses degradation if it supports human progress. Different versions of this broad anthropocentric imaginary are of course not as uniform as I have presented here but in general this is how many of the clergy across the Diocese of Syracuse conceptualize the ethical dimensions of humanity's relationships with the non-human world.

There is, however, a drastically different Catholic geographic imaginary present among a few clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse. Though far less common, this approach personifies other creatures and in extreme forms such as those advanced by Father Lee, extends this personification to the sun, water, mountains, and land. Humanity is not at center but instead part of a milieu with all life. As a result, the relationships people have with the non-human world cannot solely be instrumental or focused on use but instead must be driven by love, caring, and deep emotional attachment that respects intrinsic value in the material world external to humanity. Such approaches do not permit unfettered use of the non-human world regardless of how much it may benefit humanity. The world is valuable because it *is*, not for any utilitarian reason.

What is particularly intriguing about *Laudato Si'* for geographers is how Francis moves between these different imaginaries and at least in that way is very much trying to change Catholicism. His work is heavily grounded in the more sympathetic utilitarian geography, and these are the sections clergy and other commentators are most likely to pick up on. At points, however, he shifts towards an, if not ecocentric geography, one that looks to severely humble humanity by looking at the wonder of all else that exists. Those most inspired by Francis saw beauty in his writing and were deeply interested in preaching these ecocentric sections. Looking for intrinsic value in the non-human world connected with its beauty in a way they never had before. By bringing parts of a new geography that focuses far more on non-human creation into mainstream Catholic thought, Francis is beginning a process of reworking Catholicism's relationship with the world. These

dimensions of his project have contributed to the resistance and especially reluctance that has hindered *Laudato Si'*'s full implementation by clergy and other theologians. Though it logically builds out of traditional Catholic theology, at its most powerful points Francis deploys a radically different geography. This is not at all to suggest that the pope is not Catholic but merely that Francis is picking up threads of the historical tradition that have recently been neglected and warped how Catholics envision and interact with the world around them.

There is another key conclusion here for scholars interested in meaningfully changing the world. Many academics and especially geographers sharing these political and intellectual commitments to creating a better, more just world often complain about the difficulty of actually shaping how people interact with each other and the world around them through policy decisions or any other mechanism. There are numerous reasons why these scholars are not as effective in changing the world as they would like to be, but a large factor is their inability to reach an audience beyond their own circles. Having conversations, changing people's minds, challenging hegemonic discourse, and shifting practices are difficult and will likely take a long time. These processes cannot start, however, without having productive discussions with people. Where and how to have and frame such conversations, whether in person or over social media, is an ongoing conversation among those looking to change the world.

At the same time, many beyond the academy are trying to improve the world by bringing about these very same changes. This thesis has looked at one particular instance where bringing these groups together could be especially useful. The Catholic Church has a deep concern with systems of injustice, oppression, and degradation that in theoretical dimensions mirrors much of what troubles political ecologists. Both seek to fix the contemporary world by shifting to conditions that allow far wider access to the environment's benefits rather than seeing power and wealth concentrate in the hands of the few while so many suffer.

Yet those in the Church focusing on these issues are not currently in a conversation with environmental justice scholars or political ecologists more broadly, and this absence has serious ramifications. This is particularly evident in *Laudato Si'* itself, for though Francis calls for radical, sweeping changes he is unable to offer many particulars. When he and his lieutenants do offer specifics, they often draw from the tempered sustainable development perspectives to suggest individual rather than collective, deeply rooted changes. Partly as a result of this, clergy and others who read the document are often able to agree with Francis's broad call for change and turning the focus away from profit toward human beings, but after this initial agreement do not know how to bring this about. Moreover, many have trouble discussing how these concerns are relevant to their personal lives or communities.

Bringing these discussions—Catholic environmental teaching and environmental justice—into conversation could help fill gaps in both approaches. For Catholics, political ecologists can provide more information about global and local processes of environmental change and discuss why environmental change and degradation matters for them. They could share knowledge about different climate scenarios and what is required to meet different approaches. They should also be able to suggest meaningful actions people could take. By adding depth and local precision, academics can make abstract notions of climate change and injustice concrete for a community. Doing this is important if Francis's call for ecological conversion will be fulfilled, for if these communities can begin speaking with each other rather than in their own separate spheres, there are far more synergistic possibilities for future change than exist right now.

For environmental justice scholars and others interested in these topics, the benefits for partnering with Catholic churches (or other religious organizations) are deeply tied to the spaces where these discussions would happen. Perhaps most obviously, these are spaces and communities that do not often engage with political ecology or similar sorts of critical academic literatures.

Churches allow scholars to directly speak with people who may infrequently—if ever—be able to engage with the academic conversations scholars put so much effort into. Learning of some sort is going to happen in these spaces, and it make little sense for political ecologists not to get involved. Moreover, these spaces and the education within is not solely based on logic and rationalism but draws on ethos and pathos to strengthen its arguments. The inability to move beyond solely logos-driven discourse continues to stand as a major impediment to discourses around environmental degradation and especially climate change, for often these discussions are enumerated in a technical manner incomprehensible and meaningless to any lay person who walks into these discussions. Additionally, engaging with these communities can allow environmental justice advocates and scholars the opportunity to broaden the environmental justice coalition and incorporate white communities as supporters of a movement historically non-white in the context of the United States.³

A critical reader may note that many of the steps I presented as a possibility in the preceding paragraph sound remarkably similar as attempts to alter climate and environmental policy through increased scientific education the current literature soundly views as ineffective for actually changing people's minds or actions. Often these attempts failed since they were unable to overcome the ideological presuppositions and social affiliations that facilitate climate change denial. Working specifically with religious communities has the potential to address these factors directly, particularly as religion and church communities often were large factors in many of these studies that hampered the efficacy of climate education. As in many cases the very spaces where hierarchical and individualistic approaches are reinforced, engaging with these communities as political ecologists may be a difficult but potentially rewarding way to influence behaviors beyond the academy.⁴

Though this thesis focused on the Catholic Church and environmental issues, there is no reason why scholars with other concerns might not also find spaces to meaningfully contribute

within religious organizations and communities. There are any number of potential intersections between geographic thought and religious organizations. Moreover, religion is part of the research political ecologists, other geographers, and humanities and social science scholars across the academy conduct yet is often left out in theoretical, methodological, and analytical discussions. As an important part of the world we all live in, religion and religious actors should not be left out. The category may not be applicable in every case, particularly given its genealogy, but it is difficult to find an example of a category where religion is not important to consider in some way. Research into these intersections is currently a large gap into the literature, but this is an important area where the discipline can grow both theoretically and especially in terms of inspiring pragmatic change.

With respect to the empirical question about Catholicism and the environment at the heart of this thesis, there are several possible paths for future research. It is too early to write the obituary for *Laudato Si'*, but based on the results of this thesis the document currently remains predominantly on the shelves. It is not, at least in Syracuse, a living text. As such, repeating studies like this in other dioceses around the United States and elsewhere globally to ascertain the range of influences *Laudato Si'* has had is crucial to understanding whether and how this document influences the world. Though I doubt it, the Diocese of Syracuse may prove to be an outlier for how Catholic environmental teaching has influenced Catholic life. In that same vein, research into whether different elements of Catholic social teaching influence behaviors among clergy and laity may help reveal whether Catholic environmental teaching's reception is similar for other papal pronouncements or an aberration. Alternatively, research into these relationships could focus on Catholic organizations that are responding to *Laudato Si'* and other similar teaching. Such a project could also delve into whether and how Catholic environmental teaching can be used to organize and mobilize those who are not currently concerned about nature-society relationships. Each of these possibilities are well within the methodological toolkit of geographers and especially political

ecologists, though topically they are very much unbroken ground. Catholicism and the environment's intersections are currently under-researched, yet it remains a topic that should interest those concerned with how not just religions themselves but humanity as a whole is responding to potentially catastrophic processes of environmental change.

¹ Ernest M. Conradie (*Christianity and Ecological Theology: An Indexed Bibliography*, Stellenbosch, South Africa: SUN Press, 2006), led an early attempt at compiling a bibliography to provide a comprehensive resource on Ecology and Christianity for scholars and others interested in this intersection. Though from the outset he realized that this would always be an incomplete attempt, by the time he stopped he had compiled over 5,000 individual citations. There has been a great deal of work since then, especially in Anglophonic Catholicism and traditional Protestant denominations over the past five years in response to *Laudato Si'*. Two recent short anthologies--Jame Schaefer, ed., *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette: University Press, 2011 and William T. Cavanaugh, ed., *Fragile World: Ecology and The Church*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018--are perhaps the best places to dive into the Catholic branches of this literature. The former encapsulates much of the discourse within the Church that precipitated *Laudato Si'* while the latter compiles reactions from a number of theological and philosophical perspectives to Francis's work.

² In part this resembles the approach Andrew McGregor, "Sustainable Development and 'Warm Fuzzy Feelings': Discourse and Nature Within Australian Environmental Imaginaries," *Geoforum* 35, no. 5 (2004): 593-606 advanced about how different views of the environment influenced which discourses environmentalists participated in. However, approaching religion as geographic imaginary goes beyond this, primarily in a few key ways. Firstly, while this thesis has focused almost exclusively on various elements of Catholic environmental teaching, Catholicism's geographic imaginaries topically extend far beyond this sphere, particularly when it comes to questions of place- and value-making. Secondly, the consequences of these imaginaries extend far beyond just discursive normalization and exclusion to influence not just perceptions but corporeal actions themselves. Moreover, this approach that sees religion as a broader geographic imaginary helps push against the limited categories McGregor deployed when classifying imaginaries to understand both their totalizing character and their internal discrepancies. Saying all that, this is not a break with his argument per se as much as it is a call to take these concerns far more seriously than geographers, especially with environment-society foci, have thus far.

³ For further discussion about the logos-ethos-pathos dimensions of climate change discourse (and the current problems these discourses run into) see Philip Smith and Nicolas Howe, *Climate Change as Social Drama*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015. For discussions of environmental justice and religion, see Amanda J. Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.

⁴ For further discussion, see Asim Zia and Anne Marie Todd, "Evaluating the Effects of Ideology on Public Understanding of Climate Change Science," *Public Understanding of Science* 19, no. 6 (2010): 743-761; Dan M. Kahan et al., "The Polarizing Impact of Scientific Literacy and Numeracy on Perceived Climate Change Risks," *Nature Climate Change* 2 (2012): 732-735; and Kathryn T. Stevenson, M. Nils Peterson, Howard D. Bondell, Susan E. Moore, and Sarah J. Carrier. "Overcoming Skepticism with Education: Interacting Influences of Worldview and Climate Change Knowledge on Perceived Climate Change Risk Among Adolescents." *Climatic Change* 126, no. 3-4 (2014): 293-304.

Appendix A—Supporting Documents

**SERENE
ATTENTIVENESS
TO GOD'S
CREATION**

When we fall in love, become parents, or enter into any significant relationship, it is not uncommon to experience a shift in worldview that shapes our actions.

Consider parents holding their first newborn son or daughter. While there is no instruction manual for all the possible circumstances they may encounter, their guiding framework is the loving, parental relationship with their child. With his encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis invites us to understand more deeply our relationships with God, one another, and the rest of creation, and to live accordingly. "Everything is connected," he reminds us (LS 91).

God uses creation to bring us into loving relationship with himself: most notably through the sacraments. We experience this most powerfully in the Eucharist: the true body and blood of Christ, received under the appearance of bread and wine, where "all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation" (LS 236). God invites us to embrace creation on this deeper level through our worship of himself (LS 235). Our relationship with Christ—strengthened by receiving him worthily in Holy Communion—helps us understand our relationships with one another and with creation.

Pope Francis warns against placing ourselves "at the center," thinking we don't need God and lacking concern for other creatures (LS 122, 68-69). But he also rejects the view that "the presence of human beings on the planet should be reduced and all forms of intervention prohibited" (LS 60). The Holy Father affirms, instead, that human beings possess "a particular dignity above other creatures" and share a distinct responsibility for the world entrusted to us (LS 119, 242). When any of our relationships are out of balance—with God, one another, or the rest of creation—all our relationships suffer.

We see evidence of this imbalance on a large scale today. Building upon the teaching of his predecessors, the Holy Father discusses in great detail the disrepair apparent in creation. Our distorted relationship with God has infected our relationship with the earth, evidenced by pollution, lack of clean water, toxic waste, and immense material waste. For example, "approximately a third of all food produced is discarded, and whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor" (LS 50).

What the Holy Father often calls "a culture of waste" or "a throwaway culture" even goes so far as to see and treat human life as disposable. The elderly are marginalized, and the lives of persons with disabilities are deemed less worth living (LS 123). The fundamental truth that "the inalienable worth of a human being transcends his or her degree of development" is forgotten—leading to the destruction of unwanted babies in the womb and experimentation on embryonic children in the lab (LS 136, 123). Sometimes, even efforts to alleviate the suffering of certain populations lead to offenses against human life. Pope Francis warns, for example, against international

Figure 1: *Serene Attentiveness to God's Creation*, front

“When any of our relationships are out of balance—with God, one another, or the rest of creation—all our relationships suffer.”

pressure which makes the promotion of contraception, abortion, and other harmful practices a condition for economic aid.

At times, efforts seeking to protect the environment and other creatures disregarded or even attack the particular dignity of human beings. Although we are called to care for creation, the Holy Father makes clear that this approach is not only inconsistent, it “compromises the very meaning of our struggle for the sake of the environment” (LS 91). Quoting Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Charity in Truth*, Pope Francis explains further:

Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion. How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? “If personal and social

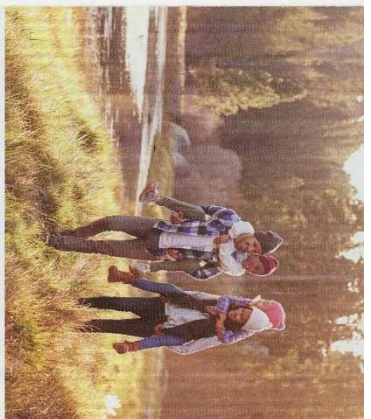


“What the Holy Father calls a “culture of waste” or a “throwaway culture” even goes so far as to see and treat human life as disposable.”

sensitivity towards the acceptance of new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away” (LS 120).

Pope Francis isn’t endorsing a secular environmentalism—he has a broader idea in mind—one that echoes the sentiments of another predecessor, Pope St. John Paul II, in his 1990 World Day of Peace message, the great saint reminded us that “no peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity to creation” (emphasis original, 7). He later addressed Catholics directly, reminding us of our “serious obligation to care for all of creation” (16).

If we are filled with the love of God, a culture of encounter and solidarity will begin to bloom. Pope Francis stresses, “We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next” (LS 226). With this attitude of heart, we neither treat other humans as disposable, nor neglect to care for God’s creation at any level. Through a conversion of heart, repairing our relationships with God, one another, and all of creation, we can combat the many pollutants that poison our hearts and our world.



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Figure 2: *Serene Attentiveness to God’s Creation*, back

Like diamonds, plastics are forever.

Every piece of plastic we have ever used is still on the planet today. That means, like diamonds, plastics are forever. The life cycle of plastic is a dangerous one. It starts in our homes, reaches our oceans, harms our ocean wildlife and enters the food chain – our food chain. The good news is that we can break this cycle. We can all make our lives and our oceans less plastic.

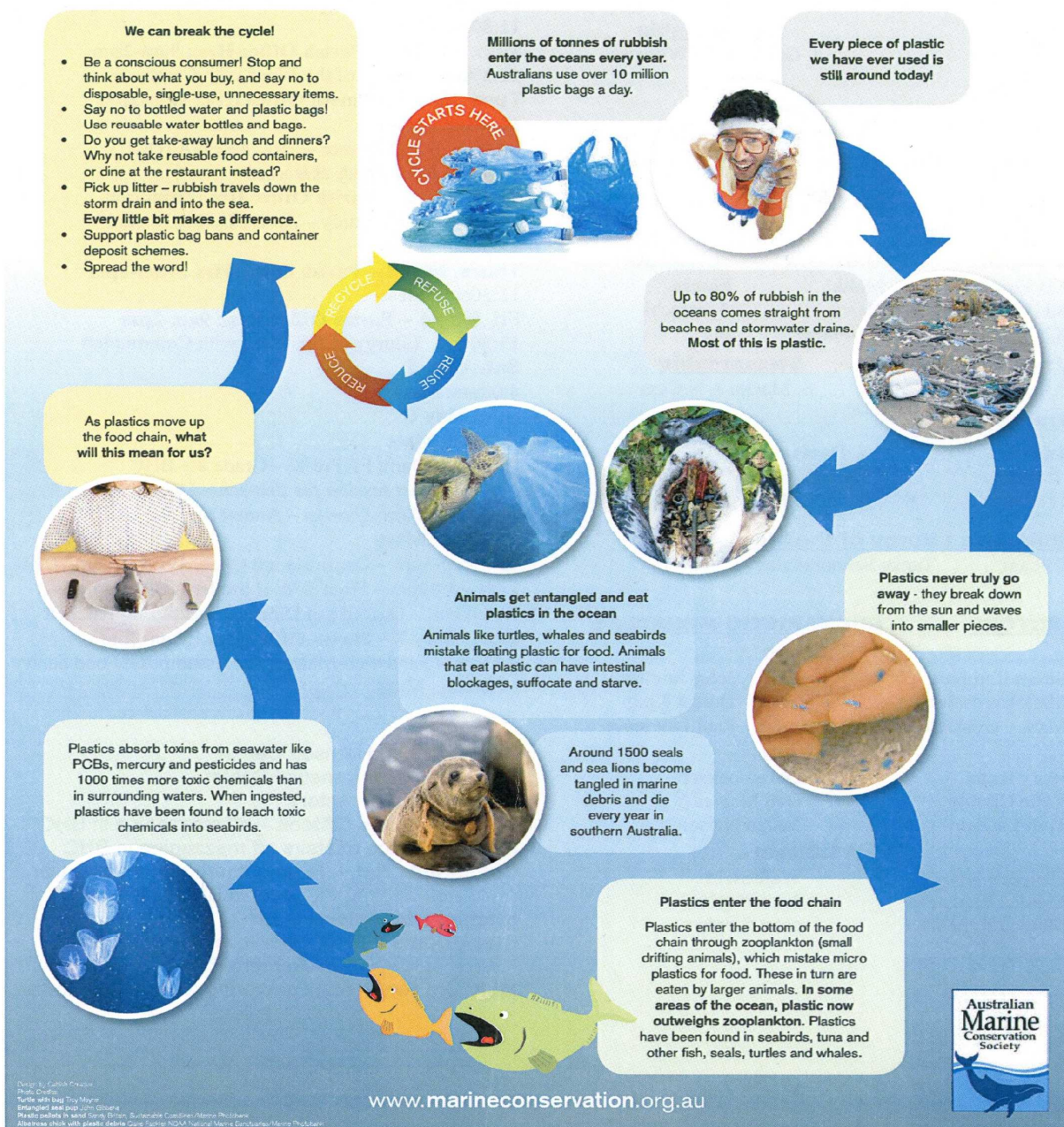


Figure 3: Bulletin Insert on Plastic from one church, deeply focused on individual contributions to plastic pollution

Welcome to Holy Cross Church



Details:

The new church is 37,000 square feet and can accommodate 900 people. An elevator makes all three floors accessible. The architects were Beardsley Design Associates and the Construction Company was Huelner-Breuer Construction Company.

The Main church has seating for 700. The window over the altar was made in Germany. Rambusch Liturgical Design in Jersey City, New Jersey manufactured the stained glass windows on the side. The Altar, Baptismal Font, Ambo are made of Italian marbles, specifically Botticino Classico and Gallo Siena. The hanging Cross was carved in Italy. The wood pews were manufactured in Nebraska by Raigean-Schottler Pew Company.

The stained glass windows represent the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. They are as follows:
 1. The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River
 2. The Wedding Feast of Cana

3. Proclamation of the Kingdom
 4. The Transfiguration of Christ
 5. The Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.
- The sixth window in this set is Our Lady of the Rosary and is representative of the overall importance of Our Lady without whom there would be no insight and no rosary mysteries.

The Chapel is to the right as you enter the church and seats 100 people. As you enter the chapel, the window behind the Altar (the altar was made from the marble of the former church) depicts the Last Supper. To the right of the Altar there are three windows symbolizing the Leaves and Fishes, Jesus, and the Road to Emmaus.

The Children's Chapel on the lower level, has four windows on the outside wall. These windows are from the doors of the Gathering Area of the original church. In addition it has two stained glass windows donated by John Fennessey. Children will share the Liturgy of the Word in this area during Mass and use it as a prayer room during Religious Education classes. There are also 13 classrooms, which include a youth room and a toddler room, with a bathroom incorporated in the toddler room. Each classroom can accommodate twenty plus individuals.

The Social Hall is located in the lower level and accommodates 250-300 people.

There is a large choir practice room on the third level behind the choir loft. The choir loft can accommodate 100 persons. The choir loft is accessible by the elevator or two sets of stairs.

The exterior landscaping was done by Canal Corner Landscaping. In front of the church there is a meditation island. There is a scene from the crucifixion with Christ on the cross and Our Lady standing at the foot of the cross. On the right of the Main entrance there is a statue of St. Francis and near the Office entrance there is a statue of Our Lady of Grace.

The new Holy Cross Church needed a larger instrument than the Schanz two-manual, full pedal organ of 19 ranks that was in the former church. Msgr. J. Robert Veazal and Music Director Ernest Camerda engaged Kemner and Merchant Pipe Organ Builders of East Syracuse, New York to remove the organ from the old church, clean, refurbish and enlarge it, including complete rewiring and revoicing. The electro-pneumatic action of the Schanz was digitized, enabling the organist to make use of an almost limitless array of General and Division pistons with memory and ALLD. capabilities. Enlarging the organ by about 12 ranks of pipes gives much more versatility and tonal colors. The Great unenclosed division is enlarged, as is the enclosed Swell division. A Positive division, the third manual, is new and adds much color to the sound.

The organ case was installed on the southeast wall of the choir loft and the facade of the organ case was restyled for the larger instrument and the new pipe chest. A new console was built, a three-manual with ebony and white bone keys and Kimer pull stops on either side of the manuals. The new organ was stripped and stained to match the Carlsman style finish of the new church. There are also four "preparer" stops for future additions to the organ. The large new organ should serve the people of Holy Cross for many generations.

*A Brief History of Holy Cross Church
 Dewitt, NY*

In the early 1940's Monsignor Edward Bulmer, pastor of Our Lady of Sorace Church in Syracuse, recognized the need for a mission church in the Town of Dewitt. Monsignor Bulmer acquired an existing house at 4112 E. Genesee Street and in June 1943 celebrated the first Mass in Holy Cross mission church.

After World War II construction began on a church building that would accommodate 350 people. The building was completed in 1950 and served the Holy Cross people for 56 years. Due to expansion and continued growth in Dewitt and the surrounding areas, concerns for a new church, which could accommodate more people, surfaced continually. In 2002, Monsignor J. Robert Veazal, Pastor, and the Parish Council voted unanimously to build a new church to seat more people and deal with the consequences of fewer priests to serve the parishes of the diocese.

Ground breaking on the new Holy Cross Church was May 22, 2005. The church is designed to seat 700 in the main body of the church, 100 in the chapel and an additional 75 in the choir loft, if needed. The focal point of the worship space is the beautiful marble altar and ambo, in addition to the glorious crucifix that is a continual reminder of Jesus' unifying love for us by His dying on the cross. The first Mass was celebrated on Sat., July 29, 2006. The church was dedicated on September 14, 2006, the Feast of the Holy Cross.



1 2

3

4

Figure 4: 2006 Renovations Report from Holy Cross Church, Dewitt, NY. Note that throughout there is no mention of the environment or other social concerns (even though they mention a statue of St. Francis at the main entrance

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Maxwell School of Citizenship and Global Affairs, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

MA, Geography, May 2019

Thesis: Building an Ecological Church: Catholic Clergy in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse

Committee: Profs. Robert Wilson (advisor), Thomas Perreault, and Timur Hammond

Colgate University, Hamilton, NY

BA *summa cum laude*, Religion and Environmental Studies (Dual Major), May 2017Thesis (with honors): "Understanding *Laudato Si*"

Committee: Profs. Christopher Vecsey (advisor), Harvey Sindima, and Jason Kwall

Publications

Dominic Wilkins. "Starting Over...and Over...and Over: Religious Life and Religious Space."

Repression, Reinvention, and Rugelach: A History of Jews at Colgate, edited by A. Nakhimovsky. 80-115. (Colgate University Press: 2018).**Conference Presentations***Difficulties with Creating an Ecological Catholic Church: The Diocese of Syracuse*. Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers- April 2019*Climate Change and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Eastern-International Regional Conference, American Academy of Religion- April 2018.*Evaluating the Place of Muslim Refugee Communities in Utica*. Upstate Undergraduate Research Conference, New York Six Liberal Arts Consortium- September 2016.**Invited Presentations and Lectures***ENST Pathways Panel: Continuing Education in Environmental Studies and Sustainability*. Panel Discussion, Colgate University-October 2018.*Is Environmental Change Good or Bad?* Guest Lecture, GEO 215, Syracuse University-October 2018.*Repression, Reinvention, and Rugelach: A History of Jews at Colgate*. Panel Discussion, Colgate University- June 2018.*Climate Action Under the Trump Administration: Sociological Perspectives*. Panel Presentation, Colgate University- April 2017.**Teaching Experience****Syracuse University**

Teaching Assistant for Timur Hammond, GEO 171--Human Geography (Spring 2019)

Teaching Assistant for Emily Bukowski, GEO 215--Global Environmental Change (Fall 2018)

Teaching Assistant for Bob Wilson, GEO 103--Environment and Society (Spring 2018)

Teaching Assistant for Tom Perreault, GEO 103--Environment and Society (Fall 2017)

Service

Geography Department Representative to Dean's Student Advisory Council, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Global Affairs, Syracuse University (Fall 2018-Spring 2019)

Graduate Representative to the Faculty, Department of Geography, Syracuse University (Winter 2017-Winter 2018)

Grants and Awards

M. Holmes Hartshorne Award for Excellence in Religion (Colgate University- 2017)

Award for Excellence in Environmental Studies (Colgate University- 2017)

Award for Excellence in Jewish Studies (Colgate University- 2017)

Upstate-Global Collective Summer Research Fellow (New York Six Liberal Arts Consortium- 2016)

Alumni Memorial Scholar (Colgate University- 2013 to 2017)

Membership in Academic Associations

American Association of Geographers (2017-)

American Academy of Religion (2018-)

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