Laudato Si’ and the Environment

This volume is a response to Pope Francis environmental encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Published in 2015, the encyclical urges us to face up to the crisis of climate change and to take better care of the Earth, our common home, while also attending to the plight of the poor.

In this book the Pope’s invitation to all people to begin a new dialogue about these matters is considered from a variety of perspectives by an international and multidisciplinary team of leading scholars. There is discussion of the implications of *Laudato Si’* for immigration, population control, eating animals, and property ownership. Additionally, indigenous religious perspectives, development and environmental protection, and the implementation of the ideas of the encyclical within the Church are explored. Some chapters deal with scriptural and philosophical aspects of the encyclical. Others focus on central concepts, such as interconnectedness, the role of practice, and what Pope Francis calls the “technocratic paradigm.”

This book expertly illuminates the relationship between *Laudato Si’* and environmental concerns. It will be of deep interest to anyone studying religion and the environment, environmental ethics, Catholic theology, and environmental thought.

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Part 1

Introduction
The challenge and the opportunity

Some perspectives on *Laudato Si’*

Robert McKim

1 The challenge and the opportunity

The challenge

The challenge presented by the ways in which we human beings are harming the earth is plain for all to see. We are destroying ecological systems and wiping out numerous forms of life. We are adding carbon dioxide and methane to the atmosphere, and thereby changing the climate. The consequences will include higher temperatures, rising sea levels, the swamping of coastal areas, a major global loss of biodiversity, and more besides.

The scope and consequences of this crisis are difficult to exaggerate. Consider, for instance, the shocking fact that about 50% of all wild animals on earth have been wiped out in the last 40 years (World Wildlife Fund Living Planet Report, September 2014). Reduced populations of wild animals might recover. But we are also eliminating forms of life, a process that will not be reversed. The fact that one species is in the process of wiping out in the blink of an eye a significant portion, maybe as much as half, of all other forms of life on earth is beyond tragic.

Consider the plight of our closest biological relatives, the non-human primates. A recent comprehensive review finds that “about 60 percent of primate species are now threatened with extinction and about 75 percent have declining populations.” (https://news.illinois.edu/blog/view/6367/453054#image-1. For the full study, see Estrada et al., 2017.) Paul Garber, a co-author of this study, recently observed that for apes, monkeys, tarsiers, lemurs, and lorises inhabiting ever-shrinking forests, and with their habitat disrupted or destroyed across the planet, “[this] truly is the eleventh hour” (https://news.illinois.edu/blog/view/6367/453054#image-1). The culprit is the expanding human presence. Agriculture, hunting, the illegal pet trade, illegal trade in animal parts, and logging are all contributing factors.

We urgently need to reduce the human impact on the earth. This requires polluting less, consuming less, protecting biodiversity, arresting the major global loss of habitat, and slowing down and then reversing humanly induced changes in the earth’s climate.
The task we confront—and here I ever so slightly abuse a motif from Aldo Leopold—is learning to live on this planet without ruining it. This challenge is plain for all to see and it confronts all human institutions. It also provides an opportunity for the religions of the world.

The opportunity

How might and how should the religions of the world respond to this unprecedented challenge? What should they be accomplishing? What standards should they hold themselves to? In probing these questions, I will consider a number of areas of inquiry. Part of my purpose, of course, is to provide a framework within which what Pope Francis has accomplished in *Laudato Si’* can be considered. But I also want to make some broader observations about religion in general, especially about what it would take for the religions to rise to the occasion and to meet this challenge. Pope Francis says that we currently lack the requisite culture and leadership to do so (53). I want to probe some aspects of what it would take for a religion to fill this cultural gap, and to provide the leadership that is needed.

I will discuss five ways in which the religions can be relevant and, we might decide, should be relevant to addressing this challenge. This adds up to a five-part framework within which the relevant resources and the relevant accomplishments of the religions in this area can be considered. In probing these areas, many of my observations are based on what impressive religious communities are already achieving.

Someone might wonder why we should turn to the religions for help with meeting this challenge. The question might even be formulated as an objection: to do so—the objection might go—is to burden religion excessively, to expect it to play a role to which it is not suited.

The answer to this question (or objection), however, is straightforward. The religions exercise considerable influence in the lives of many people. They do not hesitate to try to provide guidance in many other areas of life. Why not in the case of this contemporary crisis? Why shouldn’t we turn to them for help in this case? Rita Gross has it right in these remarks in her widely cited essay on Buddhist environmental ethics: “[W]e know that all living religions have gone through the major changes required to remain relevant in altered circumstances. There is no reason that the same thing cannot happen in response to the ecological crisis” (Gross 1997: 334). Moreover, the religions have some relevant resources. And some of the relevant accomplishments of some of them, especially at the local level, have already been impressive.

A thorough exploration of the potential of religion in this regard would require us to ponder what might be the role of religion in the lives of human beings in the future; and who is to say what that will be? However, the predictions of those who have thought that religion would disappear from human affairs have so far proven utterly mistaken though, to be sure, they might yet be proven right if we humans have a long future. In any case,
the religions are important now and they aspire to providing guidance and leadership now. And there is a great deal to be said about the guidance and leadership they could provide.

**Providing guidance and providing inspiration**

The first of the five areas of inquiry I will consider is the extent to which the relevant teachings of a religious tradition are environmentally constructive. Here, Pope Francis has much to say to us. As discussed in many of the chapters that follow, Pope Francis writes about the value and significance of each creature, about reverence for life in all of its forms, about the value of other species, and about protecting ecosystems. He says that we have an obligation to be good stewards of the earth; that we should care about the survival and flourishing of other species; that it is not our place to wipe out other forms of life and that we have no right to do so; and that we should take a considerate and merciful attitude toward all beings that can suffer. He says that we should live simply, reduce our impact, and avoid wastefulness. He calls for an ecological conversion, which works best when implemented communally. This ecological conversion has many dimensions, including this one: “simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack” (222). (Additional aspects of this ecological conversion are discussed in Zainal Bagir Abidin’s chapter.)

Of course, the category of environmentally constructive religious teachings—that is, environmentally constructive ideas that are available in any religion whatsoever—is a very broad one. It includes teachings that may be difficult to reconcile with monotheism. Perhaps an example of such a teaching is the idea that other animals are our kin. (Interestingly, this is an idea that Pope Francis comes close to endorsing.) It includes too ideas that are not compatible with monotheism such as the idea that whatever sacredness there may be is to be found in nature.

But let’s face it: all is not sweetness and light when it comes to the environmental implications of religious teachings. The teachings of a religious tradition can also include elements that are not environmentally constructive and even some that are environmentally obstructive. Ideas such as the following at least run the risk of being obstructive:

- the idea that “the end is nigh” and hence the world and everything in it are not to be taken too seriously or—worse—that the destruction of the world is to be welcomed because this would usher in a new age of some sort;
- the idea that once you have taken the step of having faith about, say, loss of biodiversity, this matter is out of your hands so that having faith is itself an adequate response to the loss of biodiversity;
the idea that any environmental harm that occurs is in accordance with the will of God, perhaps because everything that happens is in accordance with the will of God, and hence not something about which we should be unduly concerned;
the idea that the more people there are, or the more of one’s co-religionists there are, the better; and
the idea that the most developed human beings have transcended all concern for earthly things and are wholly concerned with an afterlife or liberation from rebirth or the like.

Needless to say, these are complicated matters. For instance, some ideas that have some potential for being obstructive are harmless when taken in context. An example of this sort in *Laudato Si’* is provided by the idea that the earth is a gift to human beings. Pope Francis variously refers to the earth as “given to us,” “a gift we have freely received,” “the patrimony of all humanity,” “a gift to everyone,” and “a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone” (see e.g., 67, 71, 93, 95, 159). Part of his point in making such remarks is to emphasize that the poor and disempowered have a place at the table and that the earth is not just for the rich and powerful, a point that echoes much traditional Catholic teaching. However, the idea that the earth is a gift to human beings could be environmentally obstructive. The thought would be that being ours, we humans can do what we please with the world around us. On the other hand, *Laudato Si’* as a whole obviously is opposed to such thinking. For one thing, it also says that the world is “entrusted to us” (244; also 78), which is to say that human beings have a responsibility to look after it. In the very sentence in which we read that the natural environment is “the patrimony of all humanity,” we also read that it is “the responsibility of everyone” (95). And, as mentioned, there are repeated observations to the effect that God cares about all creatures and that we should protect the earth. Eric T. Freyfogle nicely sums up the situation when he writes in his chapter in this volume that, according to *Laudato Si’*, “[the] Earth has been given to us collectively, in trust and with strings attached” (Freyfogle, this volume: 23). Consequently, the potentially harmful effect of the idea that the earth is a gift to human beings need not be a concern—at least when it is considered in the context of *Laudato Si’* as a whole—though perhaps it might usefully have been replaced by the idea that the world is a gift not only to human beings but also to all other forms of life on earth, those that have existed, those that now exist, and those that will exist in the future.

In any case, we have some positive and constructive teachings and some negative and obstructive teachings. And the examples mentioned are all drawn from the extant religions. The situation is that many of the currently existing religions seem to have among their teachings both potentially constructive and potentially obstructive elements. In the case of any particular religion, we can therefore imagine setting about the difficult task of trying to assemble all its relevant teachings—for all I have done is provide a few
examples—and asking what these add up to overall. Members of a tradition might pursue this inquiry in the case of their own tradition.

My main point so far though is that the first (and most obvious) way in which a religion can be environmentally relevant is in terms of its teachings, and the simple and crucial question is whether those teachings provide adequate guidance in this regard. Although there certainly are aspects of what Pope Francis is saying that may reasonably be questioned and challenged on various grounds—see, for example, the chapters in this volume by Paddy Woodworth, Cristina Traina, Darrel Moellendorf, Herman Daly, and David Clough—it seems to me that *Laudato Si’* comes through with flying colors in terms of what its teachings add up to environmentally.

A second respect in which religion can be relevant is in terms of providing encouragement or, more broadly, serving as a source of inspiration, hope, enthusiasm, fortitude, strength of purpose, encouragement, and the like, thereby combatting indifference or pessimism or despair or demoralization or laziness. Pope Francis addresses this possibility in *Laudato Si'* (216). Indeed, he contends that a commitment to protecting the world “cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without ‘an interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity’” (216). Addressing his fellow Christians, in particular, he proposes that “[the] rich heritage of Christian spirituality ... can motivate [Christians] to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” (216).

**The accomplishments of religious traditions**

As we have seen, we can look to the religions for teachings that provide good environmental guidance. And we can ask whether a religion has resources that provide inspiration or encouragement or strength of purpose, helping people to avoid indifference and despair. These areas of inquiry—relevant teachings and sources of encouragement—have to do with relevant resources that religions have or could have. An account of its relevant resources can tell us something about what a religion could accomplish.

Next, I want to focus on a rather different topic, namely what is actually being accomplished. This area of inquiry is very important. It is one thing for a religious tradition to have great resources—to have, say, admirable relevant teachings or a robust capacity to provide inspiration. But it is quite another for it to *implement* the teachings and actually to *inspire*.

First, I will take a “macro-level” approach to this issue, focusing on the accomplishments of entire religious traditions. So we need to consider, for example:

- the extent to which a religious tradition actually implements whatever constructive teachings it may possess and
- the extent to which sources of inspiration that are available within a tradition actually inspire its members.
To these we can add such elements as these:

- the extent to which good environmental citizenship is a priority for the tradition: perhaps it is considered important for, or even partly definitive of, membership in the religion;
- the extent to which a religious tradition leads the way, providing a model for others; and
- the extent to which future leaders in the tradition are being trained for leadership in this area.

I want to highlight in particular the question of whether a religion recognizes the nature and extent of the environmental crisis, sets out to inculcate an appreciation of its nature in its adherents, and encourages them to respond appropriately.

**The accomplishments of religious communities**

Next, I temporarily shift the focus away from entire religious traditions—whether we are thinking of their teachings or their inspirational value or their accomplishments—and in the direction of a more micro-level issue, namely the performance of particular religious communities. So here the focus is on individual churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, chapels, meeting houses, gurdwaras, and so on, and on the communities of worshippers or participants associated with them.

One relevant area of inquiry is the extent to which possible accomplishments of entire religious traditions such as those mentioned in the last section are implemented within particular religious communities. The relevant questions include the following: whether a particular religious community pays attention to the constructive teachings associated with the larger tradition of which it is a part; whether sources of inspiration made available by that tradition have been incorporated into the life of the community and actually serve to inspire its members; whether members actually endeavor to be good environmental citizens and how energetic are their relevant efforts; the extent to which a religious community leads the way, providing a model for others; and the extent to which a religious community promotes awareness that we are in the midst of a crisis.

A second relevant area of inquiry has to do with how houses of worship are designed and used; so the focus here is on the building and on the landscape around the house of worship. Part of the focus will be on energy efficiency and the like. As for the landscape, part of the focus might be on creating a micro-haven for native species. Together the building and the landscape tell us something about the sensitivity and concerns of a religious community.

A third part of this exploration has to do with various practical steps that can be taken. A house of worship can adopt a local species or local habitat
that is under threat. It can become the guardian of a river or lake or of a local landscape or ecosystem. Support can be provided for environmentally focused activities that are carried on independently of the house of worship. For example, this support might include providing local environmental organizations with space or support, or inviting them to explain their purposes or their local projects.

We can also ask how, on the whole, a tradition is doing at the micro-level, in effect summing up its micro-level activities. At least, this can be done in the case of houses of worship that belong to denominations or traditions or groupings of some sort so that such summing up makes sense. In such cases, performance at the macro-level will be in part a function of micro-level performance so that what we have here is another window into the accomplishments of entire traditions.

**New religious practices and rituals**

Here is a related area of inquiry. This is the idea of environmentally constructive religious rituals and practices that can be built into regular religious observances. Here are some possibilities to consider. We can imagine dietary requirements or restrictions or recommendations that target eating food whose production and consumption are in one way or another environmentally problematic. We can imagine extending the idea of sacred places so that the sacredness or special significance of such areas bears on whether they are protected or restored. We can imagine a ritual of repentance or mourning in which we focus on species we have eliminated, or are now eliminating. We can imagine an annual religious celebration of, say, the arrival of migrant species. In the case of non-migratory species, the focus might be on, say, the birth of a new generation or the continued flourishing of local communities of forms of life we cherish.

Religions often involve the idea of withdrawing from everyday concerns and living an ascetic life or the life of a mendicant. We can imagine this idea being refocused in a particular way. I have in mind the idea of withdrawing from various worldly concerns late in life so that there is at this stage of life a diminished preoccupation with your own affairs and instead becoming an “environmental elder.”

These possible innovations generally extend existing religious requirements or expectations or practices or the like. There might, in addition, be entirely new rituals that are not built on anything already in place anywhere. Innovations in this area are an additional set of possible religious accomplishments.

**Meeting the challenge**

The challenge that confronts the religions is to play all of the roles mentioned—those that have to do with resources and those that have to do
with accomplishments. There are certain steps that can be taken by leaders, and what Pope Francis has done is exemplary in this regard. But there are also steps that only a tradition as a whole can take and the question arises whether the collective accomplishments of his co-religionists, never mind everyone else, will begin to reflect the leadership Pope Francis is providing in the areas of guidance and inspiration. (This is part of the focus of Paddy Woodworth’s chapter in this volume.)

*Laudato Si’* is a challenge to all members of the Church: it specifies a path and calls all members of the Church to take it. In addition, it provides a challenge to other religions, raising the question whether they can match this sort of guidance from within their own resources, providing their own equally impressive, equally inspiring, and equally inviting path.

What is under discussion as we consider accomplishments is religion as it actually is, and not religion as it could be or should be or as its adherents wish it to be or claim it to be, or for that matter imagine it to be. The question is whether a religion, as practiced, actually has the effects mentioned; and whether it has those effects now and not just that they are promised in some future dispensation. And we should acknowledge that while there are impressive local efforts and encouraging local success stories, it is unclear whether any of the religions will rise to the occasion, meet the challenge, and lead the way. (For some general, and generally discouraging, observations on developments to date, see e.g. McKibben 2001: 302; Wilson 2006: 10; Taylor et al., 2016: 348.)

Religions are constantly changing as their members face new ways of life, new experiences, new knowledge, new circumstances, and new challenges. Religion that rises to the occasion and provides guidance on this great challenge of our time would be religion that has come of age in a particular respect: it would be religion that helps us to prepare for the ages to come. It would help us and our descendants, not to mention other forms of life, to continue to live and flourish on earth for a very long time. Toward this end, the religions need to demand heroism and not just minimally decent behavior; when we are wiping out other forms of life on a large scale, it is no time for caution, timidity, or business as usual.

**Some perspectives on *Laudato Si’***

The chapters that make up this volume represent many disciplines and fields and many religious and intellectual traditions. The book has four parts. Part 1 consists of this introductory chapter. Part 2, which is Chapters 2–7, deals with implementation of the ideas in the encyclical, either with what their implementation would require or the extent to which they are being implemented. Part 3, which is Chapters 8–10, deals with scriptural, theological, and philosophical aspects of the encyclical. And Part 4, which is Chapters 11–13, examines some of its central concepts.
Implementation

In Chapter 2, “Laudato Si’ and Private Property,” Eric T. Freyfogle’s main aim is to examine the implications of the encyclical for the institution of private property. He observes that private property has taken, and now takes, many different forms around the world. Thus, it varies in terms of what you may own, who may be an owner, and what rights and obligations follow from ownership. And these matters are settled at local, regional, and national levels, and sometimes internationally. The idea of the common good is central to his exposition of the vision of private property that emerges from Laudato Si’. Promoting the common good requires respect for individuals and for families. It requires sharing with the poor, respecting the rights of all, and promotion of the welfare of society as a whole. It requires care for future generations, for all of life, and for the earth. The common good, so understood, is to be promoted locally and globally and at all intermediate levels. And property must be owned and used in ways that promote the common good. The rights and liberties of property owners are therefore secondary to, and constrained by, rules designed to foster the common good. A conception of private property that is responsive to Laudato Si’ would take account of the presence of moral value all around us so that what people may do with what they own is understood to be constrained by the presence of this value. This includes, for example, the value of ecosystems and the value of individual creatures. Land must remain productive, resilient, and biologically diverse and landowners must limit their activities to those consistent with these goals. Property owners, therefore, have a right to do only what is consistent with an interconnected set of goals and values. Ownership, so understood, should be regulated at various levels, including locally, nationally, and internationally.

In Chapter 3, “Reading Laudato Si’ in a Rainforest Country: Ecological Conversion and Recognition of Indigenous Religions,” Zainal Abidin Bagir observes that saving forests requires saving the people who live in forests, and this, in turn, requires ensuring that their religious practices continue to flourish. Correspondingly, he sees the lack of recognition for indigenous religions, and indeed the failure to even classify indigenous worldviews as religions so that indigenous people are sometimes classified as having no religion, as among the factors that have led to violations of their rights and to degradation of the places in which they live. In explaining these points, Zainal Abidin Bagir provides many examples from Indonesia. He calls for interfaith environmental dialogue that has a more central place for indigenous perspectives and he contends that world religions such as Christianity and Islam need to build theologies that are more friendly to indigenous religious practices and beliefs and that accept indigenous communities as they are. Indeed, he considers this to be central to implementing Pope Francis’s idea of ecological conversion. So he makes an environmental case for recognizing the religious traditions of indigenous peoples. He considers some aspects of what this would require and he probes some resources within Christianity and Islam for granting this recognition.
In Chapter 4, “The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor,” Darrel Moellendorf considers how we might best heed Pope Francis’s exhortation to hear both of the cries mentioned in the title of this chapter. The Cry of the Earth is loud and clear and we need to hear it both for anthropocentric reasons and because of the intrinsic value of nature. Likewise, the cry of humanity suffering under grinding poverty, which is an assault on human dignity, has to be heard. Indeed, the eradication of poverty is a morally mandatory aim for the global community; hundreds of millions of deaths from malnutrition and disease and other conditions associated with poverty are preventable and must be prevented in spite of the fact that poverty eradication requires huge increases in energy consumption, and hence energy generation. While he questions the type of reconciliation between humans and nature that is proposed in the encyclical, he makes some suggestions about how we might best respond to these “two cries.” Central to Darrel Moellendorf’s thinking—which he considers consistent with *Laudato Si’* and its proposal that “we are one single human family”—is the idea of an ecological debt that the global rich owe to the global poor. Partly because of this debt, climate policy should safeguard the right of developing and least developed countries to sustainable development. And highly developed industrialized countries must assume responsibility for a transition to a zero carbon global economy. Developing and least developed states must not have their prospects for development diminished by our collective attempts to address climate change though steps toward development that minimize environmental damage should always be sought.

In Chapter 5, “*Laudato Si’* and Population,” Herman Daly bemoans the absence of significant discussion of population from the encyclical. He contends that given the global growth in human population—the quadrupling of human numbers within a lifetime—promotion of justice and care for creation may require both birth control and immigration control, and much of his attention in his chapter is on the latter. As far as solutions to overpopulation are concerned, his view is that there are reasons to be cautious about investing too much hope in the demographic transition because increased consumption and an increased ecological footprint are as central to this transition as is reduced population. He defends robust national boundaries, arguing that these are politically and environmentally necessary and indeed presupposed by the Catholic social doctrine of subsidiarity, advocated in *Laudato Si’*. While emphasizing that the rich have a duty to help the poor, including poor migrants, he proposes that rather than open borders and mass migration what is needed is something along the lines of the Marshall Plan and the Care packages made available after World War II combined with refugee resettlement, urgent steps to limit our own ecological footprint and to live within the carrying capacity of creation, and a shift from a “growth” to a “steady state” economy. And he considers this combination of steps to be in the spirit of *Laudato Si’*. 
David Clough begins Chapter 6, “Rethinking our Treatment of Animals in Light of Laudato Si’,” by highlighting three central aspects of how Laudato Si’ says we ought to look at, and treat, other creatures. First, we ought to cultivate bonds of affection with them; second, we ought to eschew all forms of anthropocentrism that would dull our sense of tenderness, compassion, and concern for other creatures; and third we should recognize that all creatures have a place in God’s redemptive purposes. Next, David Clough provides a brief overview of some of the ways in which we currently use animals for food, and some of the consequences. Finally, he contends that although the encyclical provides the basis for a compelling critique of current practices and especially of industrial scale animal farming, it fails to provide this critique.

Paddy Woodworth is the author of Chapter 7, which is entitled “‘We were nowhere. We’ve got somewhere.’ Does Laudato Si’ go far enough, and is the Church on board for the climate journey?” The focus of this chapter is partly on what has already been implemented. The author expresses appreciation for many aspects of the encyclical. These include the Pope’s contention that consumerism, a throwaway culture, the deification of market forces, valuing private profits over the common good, and the paradigm of infinite growth, all contribute to environmental degradation. Paddy Woodworth also appreciates the encyclical’s emphasis on the close connections between environmental degradation and poverty. But he has a number of concerns. Like Herman Daly, he considers unsatisfactory the way in which the issue of population is handled in Laudato Si’. In particular, he is concerned about its failure to acknowledge explicitly that overpopulation contributes to environmental degradation. He also bemoans the fact that the encyclical fails to specify clearly and forcefully what actions Christians, and people in general, and indeed the church itself and all institutions under its control, should be taking. Instead, it relies on vague and timid aspirational phrases. He also asks whether the encyclical has had much of an impact to date within the Catholic Church. He reports on his own efforts to answer this question and on his conversations with leading Catholic thinkers and activists who are endeavoring to translate the encyclical into effective action and who have plans for how this should be accomplished.

Scriptural, theological, and philosophical aspects

In Chapter 8, “Laudato Si’ and the reinterpretation of Scriptures in light of the ecological crisis,” Margaret Daly-Denton provides an interpretation of the Pope’s use of various texts that Christians have frequently pointed to as evidence that their Scriptures are ecologically sensitive and of his approach to more problematic passages such as the “dominion” remarks in Genesis. She considers the Pope’s use of scripture in the context of a new movement within biblical studies that not only looks to the Bible for advice about how we might live on earth but actually sets out to read the Bible ecologically,
and she provides a brief history of this new “ecological hermeneutics.” Central to this new movement is the idea that believers should reinterpret their Scriptures in light of current realities, thereby gaining new insights. By way of explaining what this involves she writes as follows about an earlier phase in scriptural interpretation in which a particular social context and set of challenges led to new insights:

[From the 1960s onwards], the quest for social justice in the basic Christian communities of South America led to the reading of the Book of Exodus in a new way. People deprived of their fundamental human right to land and housing recognized their story in that of the landless Israelites journeying through the desert. This challenged an ‘official’ church, accustomed to being allied with the rich and powerful, to make ‘a preferential option for the poor’, and consequently to work out a whole new way of being church. Nowadays, something similar is happening as Christians become more and more engaged in the care of our common home.

(Daly-Denton, this volume: 149)

In Chapter 9, “Sources of Authority in *Laudato Si’*,“ Cristina L.H. Traina identifies four sources of authority that Pope Francis relies on in *Laudato Si’* and discusses how these sources of authority are used. These four sources are earlier encyclicals and church documents, scripture, theology, and science; she devotes most attention to scripture. She compares the role of these sources of authority in this encyclical with their role in Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. She notes that Francis takes a “decentralized” and “collegial rather than hierarchical” approach to papal and episcopal magisteria. For example, he relies on episcopal conference statements from around the world rather than on papal teachings. She says that Francis’s use of scripture closely resembles that of John Paul II in *Evangelium vitae*: both seek a devotional reading of scripture that involves private contemplation of scriptural passages and a personal encounter with the text, with a view to finding guidance relevant to your own situation rather than a definitive and universally authoritative reading or a reading that draws on a systematic consideration of relevant scholarship. However, this sort of scriptural interpretation will reflect the reader’s perspective and this can make it harder to appreciate other perspectives: she mentions feminist, anti-racist, and de-colonial approaches in this context. And while she appreciates Francis’s inclusive approach to episcopal statements she notes that at points at which he could have cited the work of female authors, only male theologians, philosophers, spiritual writers, and cultural critics are mentioned. And, she observes, Pope Francis cites the bishops of the poor rather than the poor themselves.

In Chapter 10, “A Constructivist Engagement with *Laudato Si’*,“ Kieran P. Donaghy emphasizes Pope Francis’s wish to include everyone in a broad conversation about current environmental problems. He pursues this topic
by asking whether a constructivist approach to ethics might yield conclusions about how we should live that are close to those advocated by Francis. Constructivist approaches to ethics endeavor to generate action-guiding principles that apply, and that have a capacity to appeal, to everyone. Such approaches, therefore, do not rely on disputed metaphysical or religious views. Kieran P. Donaghy probes this area of inquiry by outlining Onora O’Neill’s constructivist approach to practical reasoning and the action-guiding prescriptions that, in her view, issue from it. He proposes that some of these action-guiding principles are quite close to those recommended by Francis in *Laudato Si’*. So he responds to Pope Francis’s aspiration to address a broad audience—to encourage “a conversation which includes everyone”—by exploring a body of reasoning that purports to apply to everyone because it does not build on the perspective of any particular group or tradition or school of thought. Instead it starts from some general assumptions about agents and conditions of action. And yet, he proposes, it can yield prescriptive conclusions that are close to those advocated by Francis.

**Central concepts**

In Chapter 11, “A New Anthropology? *Laudato Si’* and the Question of Interconnectedness,” Celia Deane-Drummond explores some implications of the idea of interconnectedness, which is the focus of much discussion in *Laudato Si’*, for our thinking about what it is to be human and about the significance of being human. She combines reflection about this topic with a focus on another theme in the encyclical, namely the importance of indigenous perspectives, in particular indigenous perspectives on being human. (So one of her topics overlaps somewhat with a theme in Zainal Bagir Abidin’s chapter.) Her contention is that an adequate Catholic theological approach to being human must combine its traditional emphasis on human dignity and human uniqueness with a new appreciation of insights from anthropology and other fields. An adequate approach will also recognize that what Christian theology has thought of as uniquely human characteristics are often present in other social animals. She makes it clear that the way forward will involve rejecting human domination of nature and adopting a more holistic way of thinking about the world and humanity’s interconnectedness with it. It will also involve a non-tyrannical view that puts emphasis on the personhood of much that is non-human. She is calling for an exploratory process, one that *Laudato Si’* also invites us to pursue but that has barely begun. The best we can do at present is formulate tentative interpretive suggestions and pursue respectful interchange and dialogue among cultures. 

In Chapter 12, “‘Realities are More Important than Ideas’: The Significance of Practice in *Laudato Si’,*” Gretel Van Wieren examines some respects in which practice and lived experience are central to the encyclical.
She takes Francis’s remark that “realities are more important than ideas,” (110) to bespeak a recognition that norms and ideas are often best understood as emerging from wrestling with situations and problems rather than solely from theoretical or abstract reflection. If this is so, we should look to practice and lived experience for ethical insights as to how we should act in relation to the natural world. With this in mind Gretel Van Wieren surveys a number of environmental problems and practices that are emphasized in *Laudato Si’*, including pollution, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, in each case proposing that the encyclical incorporates practices and lived experience in its response. For example, she contends that the encyclical focuses heavily on the lived experiences of the poor as it examines the problems associated with the world’s water crisis, how these problems should be understood, and how we should respond.

Finally, in Chapter 13, “Opposing the ‘technocratic paradigm’ and ‘appreciating the small things,’” I ask what exactly is the “technocratic paradigm” that Pope Francis sets out to oppose and what are his main reasons for opposing it. I ask what is meant when Francis says that to be in the grip of the technocratic paradigm is to treat everything around us as if it were “something formless, completely open to manipulation,” to ignore or forget “the reality in front of us” (106) and to disregard “the message contained in the structures of nature itself” (117). The best way to interpret such discourse, I suggest, is as saying that we need to take account of the value of various things that have value. What is prohibited therefore is dealing with other humans, other animals, other species, ecosystems, and the entire world around us while neither restrained nor guided by the value of such things. There are many additional dimensions to the target that Pope Francis has in his sights when he opposes the technocratic paradigm. These include the relentless pursuit of profit and letting technology dictate how we conduct ourselves. In turn, the solution to this interconnected set of problems is also multifaceted. It includes an emphasis on the common good and on ecological sensitivity. It includes the cultivation within ourselves of attitudes such as sobriety, care, generosity, a spirit of sharing, and humility. There is also a set of dispositions and attitudes that, Pope Francis says, we should exhibit toward the world around us. These include awe, wonder, fraternity, a friendly hand, a sense of place, and “an attention full of fondness and wonder” (97). The Pope’s emphasis on the individual, the small, and the local, and on what individuals can accomplish wherever they may find themselves, is especially important.

**Note**

1 References in this book are to section numbers in *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* unless otherwise indicated. The version released by the Vatican is available at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf
1 A useful survey of property thought in the West is Schlatter 1951.
2 A good sense of the variety of land-holding arrangements is found in Cahill 2010 and Linklater 2013.
3 Evidence is offered in Godden and Tehan 2010 and Mostert and Bennett 2011.
4 The specific case of managing land as a commons is considered in Ostrom 1990.
5 I consider the ways private and public are sometimes blended in Freyfogle 2007a: 83–106.
7 A much-cited argument is Epstein 1985.
9 The moral implications of property, and the theories used to justify this institution, are considered in Becker 1977 and Ryan 1987. The importance of cultural and legal models of ownership is explored thoughtfully in van der Walt 2009. I take up in broad terms the tensions between some conceptions of property and human well-being in Freyfogle 2013.
10 For discussion, see Grossi 1981.
12 Freyfogle 2003: 53.
13 I develop the point in Freyfogle 2013. The many major changes to the meaning of land ownership in the United States occurring between the American Revolution and the end of the Civil War are considered in Freyfogle 2014.
14 Pearce 2012; Liberti 2013.
16 The argument is developed in Alperovitz and Daly 2008.
17 Freyfogle 2007b: 29–60 considers the time period in American history when landowners had limited rights to exclude. Public wandering rights in various countries are assessed in Ilgunas 2018.
18 I undertake the task in Freyfogle 2017b.
19 I address the topic in Freyfogle 2003.
20 The idea of land as a marketable commodity, freely traded to the highest bidder, is a relatively recent idea. See Polanyi 1957.
21 The problem is highlighted in Joireman 2011.
22 I develop the point in Freyfogle 2018.
3 The original text and the translation can be accessed at www.gilderlehrman.org/content/doctrine-discovery-1493.
6 The history of the British colonial treatment of sati is surely much more complex. See for example Major 2011; a short but helpful essay related to the topic discussed here is Major 2012.
7 Among a few studies of religious conversion during that historical period, which is still a sensitive issue in Indonesia, Nugroho 2008 has to be mentioned for its detailed study of mass baptism in a Javanese village, involving not only those regarded as having no religion but also Muslims who feared anti-communist Muslim militia; some fragments of the story in East Nusa Tenggara are discussed in Kolimon and Wetangerah 2012.
8 https://integritas360.org/2016/07/10-most-corrupt-world-leaders/
The Pope’s idea resonates with the so-called critical anthropocentrism (Fisher 2010). This view reserves a special place for human beings, which is justified with reference to contemporary science. Yet, while maintaining a theological sense of human significance, it is also aware of ecological and environmental concerns.

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See Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen 1971. “Waste” is too neutral a term. In fact annual production of goods that accumulate into a stock of wealth requires the joint production of “bads” that accumulate into a stock of “illth.” The negative terms are absent from the indexes of economics textbooks, and unsubtracted in national accounts.

Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, Genuine Progress Indicator, Global Footprint, See also H. Daly, “Economics for a Full World,” www.greattransition.org/publication/economics-for-a-full-world. More recently the Lancet medical journal (NYT, October 19, 2017) finds that the financial costs from pollution are some $4.6 trillion annually, about 6.2% of the global economy. If annual growth in Gross World Product is around 2.2%, and cost due to pollution is 6.2%, then with reasonable accounting we would have a net financial decline of some 4% annually. If that financial decline represents welfare loss, and it surely does since we are talking about reduced health and life expectancy, then the benefits of production growth are being more than canceled out by the costs of the pollution generated by that growth. In other words, so-called “economic” growth has become uneconomic at the present margin. So far that seems to have escaped the notice of most economists!

An earlier writer (Carver 1924: 34) defined standard of living as “the number of desires that take precedence in the individual choice over the effective desire for offspring,” thus anticipating the basic idea of the demographic transition.

This is an empirical question. Is fertility being reduced to make room mainly for cars and refrigerators, or for parks and leisure?

Both Pope Francis and his namesake express a love for God’s non-human creatures. Although “you are worth more than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:31), it follows that a sparrow’s worth cannot be zero, and further, “Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God” (Luke 12:6). Maximizing cumulative numbers over time applies to populations of all living creatures, including sparrows, but does not tell us how much of the ecosphere’s carrying capacity should be reserved for non-human creatures. Naturalist E. O. Wilson has recently suggested one half as a somewhat arbitrary preliminary answer. One suspects that Francis’s answer would be “more than at present.” However, one also surely expects that Francis takes seriously the statement that a human is worth more than many sparrows. How many sparrows he wisely declines to speculate. Francis would buy more ecological space for sparrows by reducing luxury consumption by humans, not by limiting human numbers. One can agree on that as a first step (pace demographic transition advocates), but eventually growth in cumulative numbers of even frugal humans means fewer cumulative sparrows, and vice versa. Environmentalists often value other species instrumentally according to their ecological services to mankind. In addition, there is the intrinsic value of other species, also affirmed by Francis (see paragraphs 140 and 90), as sentient creatures of God who presumably both suffer and enjoy their own lives to varying degrees. Intrinsic value is usually neglected by ecologists, but emphasized by humane societies. Humane societies lean toward deontology; ecologists toward consequentialism.

Indeed, some Evangelical Christians in the current Trump administration are a clear and present danger to creation.

For a helpful discussion, see Amstutz 2015.

While the main lesson of the parable remains to avoid the trap, the ethical question of what to do if you are actually in the trap also remains. For the strict
consequentialist, the answer seems to be just save as many lives as you can with the limited resources available. This is similar to the medical practice of triage—devote your scarce resources to those you are able to help, don't waste time either on those who will recover without your help, or on those who are hopeless cases. The overall principle is clear, and usually favors helping first those who are nearest, and whose situation you best understand. As the airlines say, “put on your own oxygen mask first before helping others.” Some deontologists will consider this nationalistic or nativist, if their rule of right action is that everyone anywhere counts equally, and that any priorities are unjust. Regarding triage, the deontologist might reach the same practical conclusion as the consequentialist if his rule of right action is to “maximize total lives saved with limited resources.” But if his rule is more absolute, for example, “never deny aid to any individual who needs it,” then we have an unresolvable conflict—an implicit denial that resources are limited. Deontologists argue that the end does not justify the means. Consequentialists ask, if the end doesn't justify the means then what does? Absolute commandments, presumably. The Catholic Church’s prohibition of artificial contraception seems deontological; its advocacy of responsible parenthood seems consequentialist. Francis does not resolve this venerable philosophical problem in *Laudato Si*’, and I certainly cannot. As an economist I lean in practice toward consequentialism, but recognize that for truly absolute values deontology should prevail. At a more general level, I believe that the economist’s absolutist end of GDP growth is often considered a deontological commandment that trumps the consequential collateral damage of the ecological ruin of creation.


2 Christian ecofeminists have extensively and, in my very limited experience of their work convincingly, critiqued the impact of the traditional Christian vision of an exclusively male and patriarchal God on our relationship with the environment (for a survey, see for example ‘Ecofeminism: the Challenge to Theology’ by Rosemary Radford Ruether: www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/n20-2012/Ricerche/Riflessione/4_Ruether_Ecofeminism.pdf).

I do not dwell on this issue here because patriarchy is so embedded in mainstream Catholic teaching, and it would be naïve to expect the Pope to challenge it in this document.

3 The Pope sometimes falls back on the idea of humanity’s innately supreme place in nature even when not quoting the Bible, albeit conceiving it as a role to be exercised responsibly rather than a power to be arbitrarily wielded: “The work of dominating the world calls for a union of skills and a unity of achievement that can only grow from quite a different attitude” (219) (Italics mine).

4 For a thought-provoking discussion of the idea that the evolution (“Creation”?) of our natural world, far from being a benign and innocent enterprise, is a “universal scandal” since it inevitably obliges animals, including humans, to survive by killing and eating other created beings, see Jordan 2003: 72–73, 137–159. Jordan argues that we need to differentiate ‘guilt’, which applies to our optional violations of moral codes, to “shame,” which we have no choice but to feel before the biological facts of our existence. He argues that this sense of ‘shame’ can be resolved by innovative cultural and even liturgical “performances” and that ecological restoration projects provide excellent vehicles for this process. I have discussed these ideas further in Woodworth 2013: 404–405.


6 Since writing this section, I have had the illuminating experience of reading Margaret Daly-Denton’s chapter in this book, “Laudato Si’ and the Re-interpretation of the Scriptures.” Daly-Denton sheds much light on how various strands of ecological hermeneutics approach the Bible, and the distinctive ways in which the approach of Pope Francis and his collaborators fit into this new tradition. I’m delighted to find that some of the points that trouble
me in the encyclical’s appeal to the Bible, the rather inconsistent struggle with
the biblical use of the word “dominion” for example, are explored in a much
more erudite fashion in her contribution. However, reading her essay has also
clarified for me why, as an agnostic, I have doubts about the project of turn-
ing scriptural texts into environmental teachings. And my comments, despite
some overlap, are inevitably different from Daly-Denton’s in a fundamental
way. I concur entirely with her statement that “the application of an ecologi-
cal hermeneutics to the Bible makes little sense outside the Judaeo-Christian
faith communities. Ecological Hermeneutics is practised by and intended for
people whose approach to the plight of our planet is shaped by their faith in
God...” Since I do not belong to any of these faith communities, and therefore
do not have any reason to expect that the Bible might be a source of ecological
wisdom or ecological ethics, I am perforce at a considerable distance from
members of those faith communities as they attempt to find a coherent sus-
tainability narrative in the Old or New Testament. And I have to state frankly
that, from where I stand, such attempts mostly seem very unconvincing. If
God did, as it were, dictate the Bible, I can see very little evidence that S/He
is an environmentalist. I am, however, delighted that so many Christians are
deeply concerned about the state of the Earth, and that Laudato Si’ is increas-
ing their numbers.

https://danassays.wordpress.com/collected-essays-by-aldous-huxley/aldous-
huxley-essays-wordsworth-in-the-tropics/
8 www.teebweb.org/
irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/the-capitalist-environmentalist-and-
the-price-of-nature-1.608632
10 Woodworth 2013.
11 The Society for Ecological Restoration’s Primer on Ecological Restoration is
recognized as a key guiding document by, among others, the International Uni-
on for the Conservation of Nature, Parks Canada, the TEEB reports, Nature
Conservation Foundation India, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the
Ecological restoration is also a major plank in the Global Strategy for Plant
Conservation; it features as a leading element in the Aichi Targets (2011–2020)
of the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the very ambitious goal of
restoring 15% of degraded ecosystems across the world over the next ten years

The SER Primer is available for download at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.
SER’s International Standards, which may supersede the Primer, are cur-
cently being updated, but the first edition can be seen at https://cdn.ymaws.
com/www.ser.org/resource/resmgr/docs/SER_International_Standards.pdf
12 All quotations from McDonagh are from an interview with the author in Janu-
ary 2019, unless otherwise attributed.
15 https://seasonofcreation.org/about/
16 Email to author, 6 February 2019.
17 McDonagh 2017: 28.
18 Ibid., 29.
19 http://ecocongregationireland.com/about
20 These and the following quotations are from notes sent by Catherine Brennan
following an interview with the author, February 2019.
21 The Catholic Church in Ireland operates as one organisation in the separate
political jurisdictions of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.
22 www.catholicbishops.ie/2018/08/24/statement-by-bishop-william-crean-
announcing-the-decision-of-the-bishops-conference-to-divest-from-fossil-
23 Ibid.
24 https://catholicclimatemovement.global/announcements/
25 www.irishtimes.com/opinion/it-s-time-for-a-green-lent-1.3813976
26 Li et al. 2016. 367.

1 To date, volumes on Genesis 1–11, Luke, Deuteronomy, Job, Numbers, Matthew and Romans have been published by Sheffield Academic Press. Bloomsbury/T & T Clark have now taken over the series and have so far published volumes on John and Ecclesiastes.
2 E contrario hominis, universi quidem domini, conceptio recte retenta, ea est quae ipsum officii conscium vult administratorem.
3 Cited in the NRSV gender-inclusive language version. The original Hebrew has “man” understood generically as a reference to humankind.
4 For a more detailed explanation of this suggestion, see Daly-Denton 2017: 61–63.
5 For John 10:10, see Daly-Denton 2017: 140–141; For Col 1:15–20, see Horrell, Hunt and Southgate 2010: 87–115.
1 Thanks to Hille Haker for her helpful suggestion of Evangelium vitae as an apt comparison and to Robert McKim, for many suggestions that improved the article. Its remaining faults are mine.
2 In addition, Attridge noted, “Dei Verbum’s eirenic tone on issues that had long divided Catholics and Protestants [also] signalled [sic] that Biblical interpretation should be ecumenically engaged.”
3 See Curran 2004: 123–125 for greater detail. EV’s key demand is strict obedience to God’s law, which John Paul II believes follows from the Gospel of life (e.g., EV 51).

4 Italics added. Even here, John Paul II concludes that the proper response to looking on Christ crucified is obedience; see 36, 51, and 52, for example.
5 See also LS 14, 143. Two examples among myriad may help. First, in regions with coal power, transportation by high-efficiency gasoline or diesel engines is the most climate-friendly choice; in regions that generate electricity renewably, electric motors make more sense. Second, as Rosemary Radford Ruether pointed out years ago, well-nourished Americans with plentiful food supplies may have an obligation limit themselves to vegetarian diets, but poor people in regions with limited, uncertain food access ought to eat animal protein when they can get it (Ruether 1992: 225).
6 James Gustafson asked these and other questions in Gustafson 1975.
1 References to Laudato Si’ will be to sections from which text is quoted.
2 A system of systems perspective is one that views subsidiary systems that are interconnected and interdependent as components of a larger, integrated system. The human body or the infrastructure system of a modern city are examples.
3 This view is developed at length in Charles Taylor’s essay, “A Catholic Modernity?” in Heft 1999: 13–38.
4 In fact, the only references given for Laudato Si’ are previous encyclical letters and statements issued by Catholic Church authorities.
5 O’Neill is certainly not the only contemporary philosopher setting out an influential cosmopolitan constructivist perspective. Seyla Benhabib’s 2006 and Kwame Anthony Appiah’s 2006 volumes have also garnered much attention. O’Neill, however, was named the winner of the 2017 Berggruen Prize in Philosophy, which is awarded annually to a thinker whose ideas “have profoundly shaped human self-understanding and advancement in a rapidly changing world,” in large part because of the influence on the field of moral philosophy of Towards Justice and Virtue (see www.nytimes.com/2017/10/03/arts/onora-oneill-berggruen-prize.html).
The crisis of modernist self-justification is the crisis of *not* being able to justify criteria to which we can appeal in judging behavior, conventions, and institutional arrangements *without* begging the question in favor of an otherwise unjustified normative perspective. For a book-length discussion of different views of and responses to this crisis, see Habermas (1987).

A virtue is an excellence of behavior in a given domain, usually a “mean” between two or more competing ends or goals (arêtes). Virtues may be thought of “in terms of the act descriptions and principles that virtuous people embody in their lives and display in their action as dispositions or capacities to act, respond, and feel in determinate ways” (O’Neill 1996: 138). Subsequent references to O’Neill (1996) will be to pages in that text.

There are different conceptions of practical reasoning—end-oriented and act-oriented. The former take in Platonism (or action oriented by objective ends), perfectionism, metaphysical realism, and instrumentalism. Action-oriented conceptions justify actions, policies, or characters by showing that they embody certain types of principles of action and include Kantian conceptions, according to which reasoned action is informed by principles in the relevant domain all can follow, and particularist conceptions, according to which action is informed by actual norms and commitments.

By “metaphysical argument” is meant an argument that proceeds from first principles of ontology, or theories about the nature of being, in this case, the status of principles of right and wrong.

This modality is really the crux of the matter for O’Neill (as well as Kant)—what action-guiding principles *can* be accepted by all in the relevant domain. To anticipate where her argument is headed, any principles whose acceptance *would* result in harm to some *cannot* be accepted by all, and so *must* be rejected.

Following Amartya Sen, O’Neill takes capacities to be individual traits and talents. Capabilities are abilities to exercise capacities in institutionalized settings, and vulnerabilities are absences of capabilities.

An example demonstrating this point is the old socialist maxim “from each according to their ability and to each according to their need.”

This, of course, is the point of the “Grand Inquisitor” episode in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*.

By activity O’Neill means individual acts and responses, feelings and attitudes, support for policies, and participation in practices.

For example, we cannot acknowledge that someone has disabilities that prohibit them from taking a job and then argue that they should be denied public assistance because they are not actively seeking employment.

If others separate from the agent are not affected by an action, it is not an ethical matter.

Nussbaum 2006 notably takes the opposite position.

“Unless obligation-bearers are identifiable by right-holders, claims to have rights amount only to rhetoric” (pg. 129).

In the interest of concision, we will not further pursue O’Neill’s discussion of this material here. Her distinctions between “liberty” and “welfare” rights and “universal,” “special,” and “perfect,” and “imperfect” duties or obligations are discussed with examples in her Chapter 5.

O’Neill does not argue that perfect justice is attainable and that all injury can be avoided, only that justifiable action-guiding principles will be ones that reject principles whose adoption will foreseeably injure some.

This view was also expositied by Kant in his essay “Towards Perpetual Peace” (Kant 1996) and by Rawls in his *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999).

O’Neill continues, “They do not invoke either starting points or conceptions of practical reason that need unavailable metaphysical support or unavailable proof that the particularities of a given society or life are not open to ethical question” (pg. 179).
23 O’Neill observes that “[principles] of justice specify ethical requirements and
their recipients; their observance can in principle be claimed, waived, and
enforced by publicly recognized actions that can be invoked even between
strangers ... Required virtues, if there are any, will also make demands that
fall on all, but will not specify recipients and occasions for virtuous action”
(pg. 184).
24 On a personal note, the author can state that, after teaching courses on making
ethical judgments where cultural viewpoints conflict for over 20 years, students
from agricultural and life sciences, engineering, humanities and arts, architec-
ture and urban planning have found O’Neill’s constructive account of practical
reasoning, when applied to case-study material, to be accessible and useful.
25 As noted above, Francis goes further to observe that the Judeo-Christian tradi-
does not sanction a “tyrannical anthropocentrism.”

There is a delicate balance to be struck here. For while on the one hand hunter-
gatherer societies demonstrate important insights about the possibilities for
human culture living in close connection with other creatures, to presume
that such groups are thereby closer in evolutionary terms to early hominins
or represent a more “primitive” form of humanity or, on the other hand, an
“ideal” humanity, is a mistake born out of neo-colonial and potentially racist
presuppositions. Indigenous communities, like all other human communities,
have had a very long evolutionary history of change. For a very thoughtful in-
terpretation, see Baynes Rock 2017: 47–67.

I am defining exceptionalism here as a particular stress on the moral impor-
tance of the human compared with the moral worth of other creatures.

For an article that discusses the theological importance of symbiosis see
Deane-Drummond, forthcoming.

As taken up in David Clough, “Rethinking Our Treatment of Animals in Light
of Laudato Si’” this volume. See also Clough 2019, an important new volume
that provides an extensive treatment of different aspects of animal ethics from
a Christian theological perspective.

The apophatic tradition is about that which is related to what God is not, or the
mystery of God.

The cataphatic tradition is about what can positively be claimed about who
God is in systematic or dogmatic terms.

Pope Francis mentions Teilhard’s thinking only once (Footnote 53) and this is
in relation to his understanding of Christology as the “measure of all things.”
However, his discussion toward the end of the encyclical of the Eucharist as
the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaust-
ible life” (236) hints at Teilhard’s thinking, though these remarks also hint at
themes embraced by the Eastern church that he references in the previous par-

For a discussion of this point, see Deane-Drummond 2004: 44–45.

I discuss Tim Ingold’s work in much more detail in Deane-Drummond 2019.

For discussion of Cree and their relationships with animals, see Ingold 2011:

Elsewhere I have critiqued the ways in which Tim Ingold’s language of “dom-
ination” and “trust” carries moral overtones, in spite of his protestation that
such terms are morally neutral. See Deane-Drummond 2019, in press.

I have written a monograph on this topic, Deane-Drummond 2014.

An apostolic exhortation is a papal document that focuses on significant past-
toral matters of the church. It is viewed by the Church as less important than
an encyclical or apostolic constitution, but more important that other ecclesi-
atal letters. Exhortations are typically written in response to a meeting of
bishops.

For more on this discussion, see Van Wieren 2013: 6–12.

On the history and emphases of different religious approaches to environmen-
tal issues, see Jenkins 2007.
According to White, the Christian interpretation of the dominion texts in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Genesis 1:26), as well as its transcendent view of God and otherworldly view of salvation, led to an instrumental, anthropocentric, and disenchanted view of the natural world. This view wedded well, White argues, with the mechanized, static understanding of nature, with man as its superior and active conqueror, which developed through the Middle Ages and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scientific revolution and the Protestant Reformation in Europe. It is this nexus of Western science and technology motivated by a Christian anthropocentric worldview that led to the current environmental crisis, according to White. See White 1967. For more on White’s wide-ranging influence in the study of environmental attitudes and behavior, see the following publications: Taylor 2016; Taylor, Van Wieren and Zaleha 2016.


The global religious traditions, or certain segments of traditions, are not precluded from Taylor’s understanding of nature-based religion. However, he is skeptical of Tucker and Grim’s claim that the world’s religions are in fact directly contributing to the emergence of an environmental ethic on a global scale. See Taylor 2016.


See, for example, Kellert and Wilson 1993.

Likely this relates to Francis’s Latin American upbringing and the influence on his thought of liberation theology, which emphasizes critical analysis of socioeconomic and political structures for how they affect the lived experience of oppressed and marginalized communities. Relatedly, during the writing of this book chapter, Francis canonized Oscar Romero which previous popes refused to do. For an essay on how Francis’s liberationist theology relates to his environmental ethic, see Iheka 2017.

I use small “e” for earth in the discussion that follows because that is what the encyclical uses. For an interesting discussion on the use of “earth” rather than “Earth” by the Roman Catholic Church, see his discussion of the debate that ensued over its use during the process of adoption of the Earth Charter in Taylor 2009: 194–195.

For more on this discussion, see Van Wieren 2018.

Consider the topics addressed at the annual meetings of the two largest professional societies dedicated to the scholarly study of agricultural and food ethics—the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society (AFHVS) and the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EURSafe). Of the hundreds of papers given at the 2014–15 meetings, both of which I attended, only one or two related in any way to the topic of religion or spirituality.

See, for example, Shepard 1973 and 1998.

For more on this idea, see Piso, Werkheiser, Noll and Leshko 2016.

There are some sentences in the encyclical that suggest otherwise and I later comment on their meaning. See Notes 7–9.

Here, the encyclical is quoting Guardini 1956: 74.

This idea also seems to be hinted at near the end of 78.

Guardini’s reflections of three decades later in his book The End of the World are acknowledged in Laudato Si’ and have received attention from commentators but the earlier letters are at least as relevant to the encyclical.

Guardini’s distinction between earlier acceptable ways of intervening in nature and current problematic ways of doing so is clearly reflected in these remarks in the encyclical:
Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational.

Francis also seems at times somewhat enamored of Guardini’s opposition to mass production and machine-based production. (I have 203 in mind in particular.) But the clear message of the encyclical is that production should be assessed in large part by virtue of its environmental implications; whether it involves mechanized mass production is beside the point.

Incidentally, I do not propose to try to give a comprehensive account of Guardini’s views in this area. Such an account would recognize that he gave some thought to new ways of being human that would in effect adapt successfully to the technological age (e.g., Guardini 1994: 81–83, 85, 92, 93).

This is a complex passage with a number of strands, one of which is the idea I am referring to as “technology as a law unto itself.” Actually this is an example of a part of the encyclical where technology as such may appear to be characterized as the problem. Here, the technological paradigm, the “ironclad logic” of technology, and the “internal logic” of the resources of the technological paradigm are mentioned as problematic. Francis even appears to say that technology aims for its own empowerment: “in the most radical sense of the term power is its motive – a lordship over all.” However, the main thrust of the encyclical, as I say at the start of this chapter, is that technology as such is not the problem and that technological development is unproblematic and even to be welcomed when it reflects an appropriate sense of responsibility, appropriate values, and an appropriate operation of conscience. Maybe the parts of section 108 that seem to suggest that technology per se is the problem are not really about technology as such but about technology that is being deployed in accordance with the technocratic paradigm. Or maybe what is under discussion here is a danger of technological innovation. Incidentally, the parts of the quoted passage that are in quotation marks are from Guardini 1956: 74.

This is another point at which the finger of blame might seem to be pointed at technology as such. In response, I would just reiterate my points in Note 7.

Here too the finger of blame might seem to be pointed at technology as such.

Here, I draw on these papers: Callicott and Mumford, 1997 and Callicott, Crowder, and Mumford, 1999.

There is a vast literature on this topic. Some seminal discussion can be found in Callicott 1980 and Jamieson 1998.

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