



2016

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Recommended Citation

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Entering Into Dialogue with Pope Francis' ***Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home***

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Science, Technology, and Society Honors Thesis

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Colby College 2016

"Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind."

– Albert Einstein

Abstract

Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* brings together the spheres of science and religion. In this document, Francis puts forth a call for action towards religious and non-religious communities alike to address climate change. The strength of the document lies in the way Francis expresses his call. By drawing on scientific and religious tradition, he situates the encyclical in a broader conversation about the moral obligation for humans to care for the environment. This thesis explores the reception of *Laudato Si* by religious and environmental communities through political cartoons, written critiques, and personal interviews. Current conversations surrounding the document show that Francis successfully conveyed his ideas about working towards the common good through dialogue to listeners from a variety of backgrounds.

Introduction

Our environment is rapidly deteriorating, and we must act now. Unfortunately, there is no simple formula to solve this catastrophic problem. The thought of taking on the task of reversing climate change seems extremely daunting. Luckily, the environmental movement is gaining momentum. Environmental awareness started to grow in the 1960s and 1970s, starting locally and moving to a more global level (Conroy and Peterson 27). The release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the creation of Earth Day in 1970 increased the focus on conservation towards the end of the 20th century. Furthermore, disastrous events

such as the 1969 oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara and the growing evidence for an ozone hole above Antarctica in 1985 provided the public with tangible examples of grave environmental dangers. Environmental justice is now one of the leading social movements of this time.

Religion can provide motivation for entering into the environmental movement. The dialogue between religion and science has a long history. For centuries, Christianity and environmentalism seemed to be in conflict. Christians viewed Creation as a gift from God to fulfill their needs and desires. That view led to the justification of exploiting nature for human gain. This exploitation came under scrutiny in the 1960s when the Catholic Church took on a more active role in social issues. The Second Vatican Council, lasting from 1962-1965, ushered in an age of change in the Catholic Church. Some of the documents coming out of the Second Vatican Council, such as *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, laid foundation for the Church to become more open to embracing social movements and change. Consequently, the Catholic Church started to engage with the environmental movement. In fact, almost every pope since the Second Vatican Council has discussed the importance of protecting the environment.

Pope Francis falls right in line with these popes. He preaches the importance of a Christian environmental ethic in his recent encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*. This thesis explores ways Francis stresses the importance of an environmental ethic and how people respond to this plea. Pope Francis provides a hopeful outlook for the future of human beings and climate change, and this hope motivates people from religious and environmental communities.

First, this thesis outlines the relationship between science and religion. The two disciplines share fundamental similarities that shed light on ways Pope Francis connects Christianity and environmentalism. Next, the thesis explains themes of Pope Francis' papal ministry. Understanding Francis' ministry reveals how these themes emerge in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*. Finally, this thesis examines responses to *Laudato Si* in various media. First it looks at political cartoons and editorials that portray the encyclical in both a positive and negative light. From there, the thesis explores common reactions found in interviews with people who fall into the categories of environmentalist, religious believer, or some combination of both. This thesis aims to read as an open dialogue, much like Pope Francis' encyclical. I argue that in *Laudato Si* Pope Francis successfully conveys the theme of working towards the common good through dialogue because responses to the encyclical highlight the themes Francis tries to convey.¹ Dialogue is prominent in his ministry as a whole and the encyclical more specifically. It is my hope that this thesis sparks further conversation about the essential intersectionality between Christianity and environmentalism.

Dialogue Between Science and Religion

Contrary to how it may seem, science and religion exist in similar realms and share important similarities lie at their core. First, science and religion both seek to explain the unknown. This world is full of mysteries, and humans have a natural

¹ This thesis draws on responses to the document as concrete evidence to support this claim. For an in-depth look at the teaching method Pope Francis uses in the encyclical to convey this theme please read my other thesis "*Laudato Si*: A New Environmental Ethic?"

desire to solve these mysteries. With our anthropocentric mindset, humans believe we have a right and even an obligation to “know it all.” According to Katie McShane, “anthropocentrism is the view that the nonhuman world has value only because, and insofar as, it directly or indirectly serves human interests” (170). The natural world exists solely for the benefit of humans; humans place themselves in a hierarchical relationship above nature. The notion that ignorance is bliss can easily be replaced with the notion that ignorance is incompetence, and incompetence is failure.

People look towards science and religion to provide answers to the larger questions. These questions involve complex answers, which sometimes lead to even more questions. Regardless, one of the methods used to find answers is reason. Science uses reason to explain the mysteries of the material world, while religion uses reason to make claims about divine order (Richardson 17). So if science and religion in fact use similar methodologies, then how different can they be? Furthermore, in both disciplines new discoveries are compared to past notions. An innovative scientific finding must situate itself in relation to pre-existing theories and laws. Similarly, a new religious insight must be explained in relation to historical doctrines and belief systems. In both fields, discoveries fit into a long line of history.

These similarities prove interesting, but they do not necessitate interconnectivity. Science and religion come together in the ways that religion forms a foundation for science. Religion creates ethical guidelines (Narayanan 134). It provides a moral framework for science to function within. These ethical guidelines

give followers a reason for their actions (Veldman 258). For example, Christians point towards more than just science to explain their environmentalism. They call upon their religious beliefs, saying that they have a moral responsibility from God to protect the environment. Faith – whether it be Christianity, atheism, or something else – interprets the meaning of science (Richardson 70). Religion connects scientific knowledge to an emotional motivation. It links the head to the heart.

For those who ascribe to Christianity, religion provides personal justification for environmental awareness. Ian Barbour outlines three themes within Christianity that point directly towards a Christian environmental ethic. First, the theme of stewardship pervades countless biblical texts, such as Genesis 2.15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to tend and keep it” (New King James Version) – or in other words, for humans to be stewards of their surroundings. This passage makes caring for the environment seem like a Biblical mandate (Conroy and Peterson 32). In fact, Genesis encourages more than just stewardship of nature, it calls for the celebration of nature (Conroy and Peterson 33). God points out the goodness of nature in Genesis 1.31 saying, “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (New King James Version). Christians should celebrate nature not just because God said that “it was very good” but also because the Holy Spirit exists in nature. Barbour notes, “The Hebrew word for spirit also means breathe... God breathes the breath of life into creation” (Conroy and Peterson 33). Through this action, God places himself in nature, making it sacred, and therefore worthy of celebration.

Unlike Barbour, some people do not see inherent environmental themes in Christianity. Lynn White Jr. points towards the lack of environmentalism in Christianity with his article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." This five-page document, written in 1967, sparked widespread controversy and continues to influence Christian-environmental discourse today. White claims that Christianity "bears a huge burden of guilt" for our current ecological crisis (White 1206). In White's opinion, as the most anthropocentric religion, Christianity preaches human's mastery over nature (White 1205). As a result, Christians approach their interactions with nature with a utilitarian mentality. Viewing Creation as a means for personal gain. White went on to write that new science or technology will not alleviate this crisis; instead, humans must find a new religion or rethink the old one (White 1206). White's article calls on Christianity to reshape its theology in order to promote environmentalism.

Many vehemently disagree with White's blame of Christianity's flawed anthropocentric mindset for the current environmental crisis. Numerous scholars nitpick and refute his argument. This paper does not need to reiterate the flaws in his argument. Instead, I use White for a different purpose. While I disagree with his claims, I do commend White for creating an important dialogue regarding the role of religion in the current environmental situation. Nothing will change if the root of the problem is not acknowledged. Now that Christianity and environmentalism are in the spotlight, the potential for change becomes possible.

Laurel Kearns finds three notable patterns in her study of Christian environmentalism in the United States from 1987-1992, at time when the

environmental movement was gaining momentum. Kearns categorizes the patterns as Christian stewardship, eco-justice, and creation spirituality (Kearns 55). Christian stewardship draws on the biblical mandate I referenced earlier – Genesis 2.15. God calls humans to be caretakers of His creation, and therefore, environmental crises occur when humans commit the sin of disobeying God’s command (Kearns 57). Eco-justice moves away from the textual emphasis and focuses more on social justice actions. It evaluates human inequalities that lead to the unequal distribution of resources. As a result, eco-justice solutions are more political and secular than religious (Kearns 64). The third Christian environmentalist model is creation spirituality. Creation spirituality aims to situate humans within the broader order of creation. When humans become too anthropocentric, they forget their place in nature, which leads to environmental crises. These three environmental ethics generalize a multiplicity of views, but they help explain an overall thought process.

The Christian environmental movement in the United States relates more broadly to ways that religion and science can come together. In reality, the two disciplines share many similarities, starting in the roots of their methodologies. So often, people ignore this fundamental link. Luckily, Pope Francis understands the inherent relationship between religion and science, and he uses *Laudato Si* to share that importance with the world.

Who is Pope Francis?

When TIME magazine named Pope Francis “Person of the Year” in 2013, they dubbed him “the people’s pope” (Chua-Eoan and Dias 1). TIME was in no way saying

Pope Francis was perfect, but they did acknowledge, “What makes this Pope so important is the speed with which he has captured the imaginations of millions who had given up on hoping for the church at all” (Chua-Eoan and Dias 2). Pope Francis has my attention, and from my research, it is clear that he captures the attention of others too. TIME evaluated Pope Francis’ papacy by saying, “In a matter of months, Francis has elevated the healing mission of the church – the church as servant and comforter of hurting people in an often harsh world” (Chua-Eoan and Dias 2). The motif of healing pervades Francis’ papal and pre-papal ministry, along with his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*.

It is important to touch on certain aspects of Pope Francis’ ministry in order to understand his encyclical and the dialogue resulting from it. Pope Francis took on his role as leader of the Catholic Church when the Church was in great need of a healer. As a result of financial and moral scandals, the current Catholic Church needs help (Boff 36). Francis entered into his papacy with a keen awareness of the suffering felt by many oppressed groups and an invigorating energy to address the not-so-glamorous issues. In his ministry, Francis seeks to heal the environment, call attention the poor, and alleviate ruptures among communities.

The name Pope Francis suggests some level of care for the environment. He is the only pope to choose the name Francis, a reference to St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology (Boff 1). St. Francis of Assisi viewed his relationship to creation in terms of kinship (Boff 41). For those familiar with St. Francis, his name commonly conjures up images of a humbly dressed man sitting with birds on his shoulders, interacting with creatures surrounding him. Pope Francis does not give

off quite this image in his outward appearance, but he does emphasize the same interest in the inherent value he places in Creation. According to him, this intrinsic value of nature leads to the importance of caring for it and protecting it.

Many attribute Pope Francis' interest in science and the environment to his education in chemistry. This knowledge contributes to Francis' respect for and implementation of scientific data, but there are some misconceptions, which must be cleared up. According to the *National Catholic Reporter*, the numerous reports saying that Pope Francis has a master's degree in chemistry are not true (Reese 1). Francis graduated with a *titulo* in chemistry, which could be compared to that of a community college degree in the United States (Reese 1). So no, Francis is not a "master" of science as many were led to believe, but he clearly has a certain respect for science as a result of his studies.

Another area of concern for Francis is marginalized people. When Pope Francis took office, he said that he would like "a poor church for the poor" (Boff 72). This mentality can be traced to the fact that he originates from Argentina, where in 2001, 50 percent of its citizens lived below the poverty line (Aguilar 160). During his time as a priest and Bishop in Latin America, Francis had a keen interest in marginalized people (Aguilar 102). In fact, he walked everywhere so that he could interact with his neighbors and live out his ministry on the streets (Aguilar 92). According to Francis, humans have a moral responsibility to work towards alleviating the suffering of the poor.

One way Francis carries out healing and solves misunderstandings is through dialogue. Society today is plagued by ruptures and divides. Francis wants to create

open and respectful dialogue among these disillusioned communities. He strives to create a dialogue between the Catholic Church and the rest of the world – believers and non-believers. I believe his efforts so far are working. Pope Francis has the ears of non-Catholics, politicians, scientists, and other world leaders, regardless of whether they are in agreement with him. The way he lives out his papacy causes people who never placed authority in the Catholic Church to turn their heads. Francis' strength in fostering dialogue comes from his days as a bishop and priest when he sought to interact with different voices and bring people into conversation as a teacher in Santiago, Chile, and Buenos Aires, Argentina (Aguilar 55-7). Francis also tries to promote dialogue between the disciplines of religion and science. He views the two subjects as interrelated, and he uses evidence from both to explain his argument in *Laudato Si*. This encyclical is merely one tangible example of the way Francis creates open dialogue throughout his ministry.

Francis puts forth efforts to protect the environment, call attention to the poor, and promote dialogue in hopes of creating community. Like St. Francis, this pope wants to include everyone in this community – especially marginalized animals and people. Francis' papacy marks a transition in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is enduring a mass exodus of followers, so clearly something needs to change (Boff 10). On March 13, 2013 when the papal conclave elected Francis, they acknowledged that it was time for a change. We have yet to see just how drastic this change will be, but so far Francis has tackled issues of homosexuality and environmental degradation head on. Of course, not all of his actions garner unwavering support. For many reasons, TIME magazine's designation of Pope

Francis as “Person of the Year 2013” encountered pushback. But isn’t that to be expected of a religious leader? If everyone agreed with him we’d all be Catholic. And it’s not in the spaces that everyone agrees where change occurs; it’s in the dialogues that challenge us and push our limits.

Pope Francis challenges Catholics and the World. He came into his papacy with an agenda of caring for the marginalized, which does not always mean supporting the most favorable positions. But Francis does not back down. He takes a stand that speaks to Catholics, non-Catholics, scientists, and politicians. The vast amount of people he engages in his actions truly characterize him as the “people’s pope.” As we will see in reactions to *Laudato Si*, Francis works towards his goals in what many consider to be a productive fashion.

What is *Laudato Si*?

May 24, 2015 was the day religious communities and environmental communities had anxiously awaited. For several months leading up to this point, rumor ran rampant about Pope Francis publishing an encyclical focusing on the environment. What would it say? How would it impact the Catholic Church and the environmental movement as a whole? Many people, including me, still seek to answer this second question in a variety of ways. But as of May 24, 2015, we can now confidently answer the first question about *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*.

I hope to take a page from Pope Francis’ book and make my research about this encyclical accessible to anyone who decides to read it. I will spend some time

explaining the themes of *Laudato Si* and the way that Pope Francis presents his argument. In doing so, my goal is to provide enough general knowledge of the document to make my analysis of responses accessible and useful for a variety of people. First, I explore three themes Francis engages throughout *Laudato Si* – the common good of the environment, creating an open dialogue, and the impact on the poor.

The title – *Laudato Si: On Care For Our Common Home*, immediately points towards Francis’ emphasis on commonality throughout the encyclical. Humans share Creation as our common home. Francis reminds us, “The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” (Francis 23). No one possesses absolute power over the Earth. Instead, the Earth belongs to everyone and therefore must be used to further the common good. That means humans’ relationship with nature should benefit everyone. Francis’ call to action is also a call to bring people together. He says, “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development” (Francis 13). Francis encourages familial cooperation regardless of diverse backgrounds. Despite our differences, we find commonality in environmentalism because at the root of our being, everyone relies on Creation. As Francis explains,

Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics. The common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment” (Francis 156).

Francis quotes an excerpt from the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* to define common good. In doing so, he grounds his argument in previous Catholic teachings. According to Catholic tradition, members of society come together to fulfill communal desires – therefore working towards the common good.

Francis explains that the way that we can start caring for the environment, and in doing so also care for the poor, is through dialogue. He opens his encyclical by explaining, “In this encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (Francis 3). There are two aspects of this dialogue Pope Francis wants – dialogue between religion and science and dialogue between the Catholic Church and the rest of the World. As discussed in an earlier section of this paper, religion and science share some clear commonalities, which provide room for fruitful dialogue. Often these two are placed in opposition to each other, when in reality they share fundamental tenets. The fact that the leader of the Catholic Church also acknowledges the need for a dialogue between science and religion is important. His authoritative stance on the matter influences many followers. Francis echoes the fundamental component of reason in science and religion, just as I outlined earlier in this paper. He says, “The ethical principles capable of being apprehended by reason can always reappear in different guise and find expression in a variety of languages, including religious language” (Francis 199). Science and religion find explanation in reason. As a result, Francis emphasizes the importance of an open dialogue between the two fields in an effort to solve our environmental crisis.

Another important area to establish open dialogue is among religions. He believes that the Catholic Church should not be alone in this effort. Francis claims, “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity” (Francis 201). All religions must be aware of their moral responsibility in the matter. Believers have an obligation to care for the oppressed –people or the earth – and work towards the common good. These are the exact reasons Francis provides Catholics for their involvement, and realistically, the reasons he calls for others to join him. Non-Catholics might not share the same theological justification, but Francis knows that all religions have some sort of guidance for morality.

Specifically, Francis calls attention to the disproportionately negative impacts climate change has on the poor. He notes, “Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest” (Francis 48). Global inequality extends beyond just the economic sphere; it is also very much an issue in the environmental sphere. Often, people who contribute the most to environmental degradation are very removed from those most affected. These people must be reminded of the widespread results of their actions. For example, not everyone interacts with the small fishing communities who go hungry when fishing reserves are depleted, but the problem still exists on a very real level for those fishermen (Francis 48). *Laudato Si* calls attention to often-overlooked consequences on the poor. Francis highlights “the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest” (13).

He is aware that he takes on more than just an environmental issue in this encyclical. He understands that at the root of the environmental problem lies social injustice – one of which is global, socio-economic inequality. In fact, the poor and the earth are in the same predicament. Both entities have fallen under serious neglect and require the utmost attention and care to nurse them back to health. Francis laments that, “The earth herself, burdened and laid waste is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail’ (Romans 8.22)” (Francis 2). The Earth might in fact be the worst treated of all the poor. Francis paints a grave picture of our global situation and draws on emotions to highlight the necessity of our moral responsibility to protect Creation.

Taking Francis’ teachings to heart means rethinking our lifestyle, and Francis believes humans have a “moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us” (Francis 208). Our actions impact more than just on ourselves. Humans must reorient our individualist framework to see the effects our actions have on our common home, and more generally the common good. Francis highlights the moral responsibility we have not only to our environment but also to others with whom we share this environment. He is correct in saying that, “Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone” (Francis 93). Individualism that all too often dictates our actions ignores the communal nature of our home.

Although the lifestyle Francis proposes might be new, the central themes he engages in *Laudato Si* are not. These themes regarding the common good of the

environment, a need for open dialogue, and an emphasis on the poor, parallel themes found in Pope Francis' ministry as a whole. Actually, many of Francis' ideas echo statements of past popes. Essentially, since the Second Vatican Council, every pope has discussed the importance of protecting the environment in at least one speech or papal document, with the exception of Pope John Paul I who held office for a very short period. The difference is that now people are listening. Political cartoons, editorials, and interviews reveal the ways in which various communities engage *Laudato Si* and respond to Francis' call for action.

Political Cartoons and Written Responses

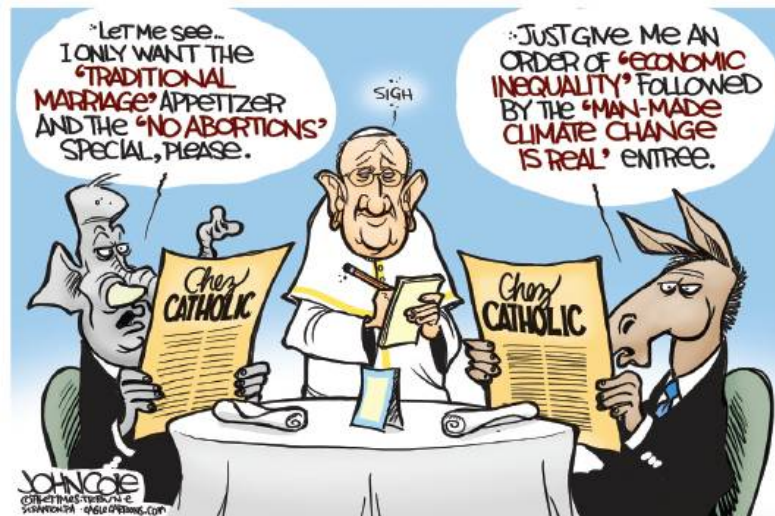
With all the anticipation and discussion leading up to its release, obviously *Laudato Si* was going to create waves. Like any papal document, this encyclical encountered support and pushback. I gauge the reactions in multiple ways; two such ways are through political cartoons and written responses. These mediums relay different messages, both positive and negative, about the encyclical.

Political Cartoons

The tried and true saying "a picture's worth a thousand words" is very applicable to cartoons. These cartoons use pictures and words to convey their message. They provide commentary on the way different groups interact with the encyclical. This section includes cartoons highlighting a variety of views. Two cartoons show the liberal versus conservative reception of *Laudato Si*, and the other

two cartoons provide a pro-encyclical, Catholic view. The images are included so readers can come to their own conclusions about the cartoons, too.

The first cartoon, by John Cole, appears on a Catholic blog site (Mcdonald). This site includes many pro-Vatican articles. The cartoon discussed in one of these articles is below:



This cartoon speaks towards the different agendas Republicans and Democrats want Pope Francis to address. The Democratic donkey and Republican elephant sit in an upscale restaurant giving orders to their waiter – Pope Francis. Each character tells the pope what they want, but if you look at their orders, they specify that they only want to hear from the pope about certain issues. The donkey *only* wants to hear about economic inequality and climate change, while the elephant *only* wants to hear messages supporting traditional marriage and anti-abortion. Pope Francis responds to these requests with a disgruntled *sigh*. There is no way he can please everyone, and more importantly, he should not be taking

orders from politicians. The pope is the leader of the Catholic Church, and Francis finds his inspiration from God. *Laudato Si* does not please everyone, but that is not Francis' goal. Instead, Francis puts forth an argument rooted in religious and scientific tradition while calling for people to enter a dialogue. In this cartoon, the elephant and the donkey are in no way entering into a dialogue. They sit with the menus covering their face, too ensconced in pushing their own agendas. They quite literally hide behind their version of Catholic faith, without paying mind to the fellow Catholic sitting right across from them. People approaching this encyclical, and more broadly their faith, in the same way as the donkey and the elephant completely miss the message Francis tries to convey in his ministry.

Another cartoon highlighting the political divide regarding *Laudato Si* is found on a different Catholic blog site (Consolamini). The author of this site is a Catholic aiming to reveal overlooked parts of Catholic history in light of the Second Vatican Council. One of his cartoons is below:



This cartoon highlights conservative disapproval with *Laudato Si*. Pope Francis stands among his followers as the shepherd of his flock of sheep, preaching his views on climate change. The sheep listen with wide eyes and rapt attention. Meanwhile, off to the side, two sheep labeled as conservatives mumble their disagreement. These sheep only like the Pope when he says things they agree with. They could be what you call “fair-weather- fans.” These two sheep echo sentiments of numerous politicians who identify as Catholic but disagree with some of Pope Francis’ actions. For example, in reaction to *Laudato Si*, Rick Santorum – a self-identified Catholic and former Republican candidate for president – critically declared, “The church has gotten it wrong a few times on science, and I think that we probably are better off leaving science to the scientists and focusing on what we’re really good at, which is theology and morality.” Santorum believes Francis has no business interfering with topics that according to him, are out of the Pope’s league. Another Catholic and former Republican candidate for president, Jeb Bush, also echoed these views

Both cartoons discussed above touch on the idea of cafeteria Catholics. These Catholics wholeheartedly support the pope and heed his statements when his teachings align with their views of what the Catholic Church should be. It’s equivalent to walking down the serving line in a school cafeteria and asking for big helpings of the macaroni and cheese or a big slice of apple pie, while walking quickly past the mystery meat or broccoli without even making eye contact. The political sphere listens to papal proclamations, using them when advantageous and disregarding them when not useful. For example, many conservative Catholics turn

a blind eye towards the Pope's propositions about climate change because it does not contribute to their agenda. However, Pope Francis explains in *Laudato Si* that the environmental issue extends into all realms – social, religious, and political. And as a result, people from all of these areas must enter into a dialogue about how to enact change.

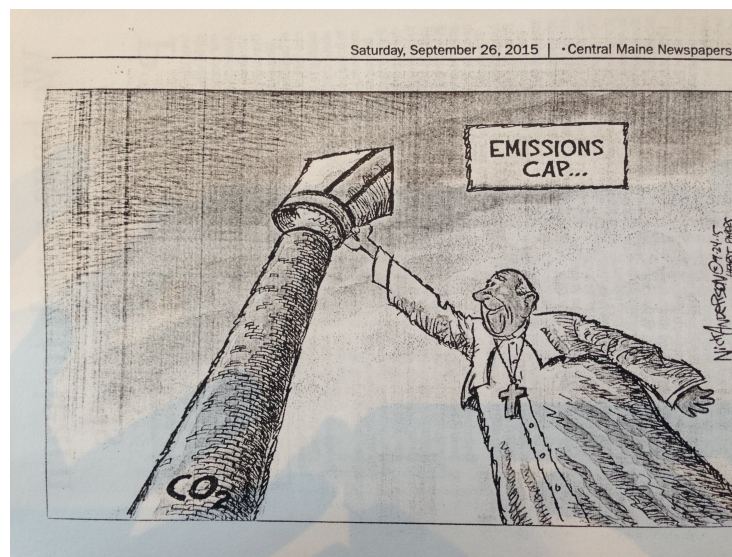
The next two cartoons in this section reveal pro-encyclical agendas from Catholic sources. The first cartoon is by Pat Morrin who regularly draws cartoon strips for the *National Catholic Reporter*. The cartoons aim to satirize Vatican actions in a positive way. One of Morrin's cartoons referencing *Laudato Si* is below:



This cartoon uses humor and hyperbole to portray Pope Francis' focus on the environment in *Laudato Si*. It depicts animals as the "experts" approving the final draft of the encyclical. In some ways, this image parallels common depictions of St. Francis, who sat with animals all around him. Therefore, this cartoon also reinforces the importance of Pope Francis' namesake. Furthermore, the animals included specifically target populations undergoing severe hardship due to environmental

degradation. This cartoon is just one of many that Pat Morrin publishes in the *National Catholic Reporter* to portray Pope Francis and *Laudato Si* in a positive fashion.

Another cartoon depicting a message of *Laudato Si* was given to me during an interview with a Catholic priest. The picture below is drawn by Nick Anderson and appeared in Central Maine Newspapers:



This cartoon shows Pope Francis placing his papal hat on top of a smoke stack giving off carbon dioxide fumes as an emissions cap. Much like this picture, in *Laudato Si*, Francis uses his papal authority to call for a decrease in noxious emissions. It highlights the work for the common good that Francis tries to do. Yes, he must stretch to place his cap on top of the smoke stack, but Francis must also stretch to have his message about caring for the environment be heard and embraced. Both of these cartoons show the positive message Francis relays in *Laudato Si*.

Written Responses

In addition to political cartoons, another medium of response to Pope Francis' encyclical is in the form of written responses. Due to the recent release of the encyclical, there are only a few articles critiquing *Laudato Si* in academic journals. However, people recorded their reactions in the form of editorials and blogs on websites too.

American environmentalist and leader of the anti-carbon campaign group 350.org, Bill McKibben, spoke in favor the *Laudato Si* in his article "The Pope and the Planet." He points towards the good timing of the document and the importance of Pope Francis as the author. McKibben explains, "The power of celebrity is the power to set the agenda, and his timing has been impeccable. On those grounds alone, *Laudato Si* stands as one of the most influential documents of recent times" (McKibben). The environmental crisis needs to be addressed now, and it needs to reach a large audience. *Laudato Si* fulfills those two criteria. McKibben characterizes the encyclical as "both caustic and tender," saying that, "it should unsettle every non-poor reader who opens its pages." Francis frames his message in a poignant manner to resonate even with non-Catholics and kindly, but resolutely, push people towards the path of environmentalism.

Another person finding inspiration in Pope Francis' message is Daniel DiLeo, a doctoral student in theological ethics at Boston College. He highlights two strengths of *Laudato Si* – its universal appeal and its author. DiLeo praises Francis' ability to communicate appealing aspects of Catholic tradition while also showing

“how ethical visions of society are congruent with reason” (DiLeo 7). Francis successfully speaks to a wide audience in terms that they understand and respect. According to DiLeo, the other strength of *Laudato Si* reaches beyond just the words in the document. This strength lies in the author – Pope Francis. DiLeo argues, “Pope Francis’ status as an authority in the minds of many. [He] is uniquely *an* authority *in* authority” (DiLeo 8). Like McKibben, DiLeo attributes part of the reason people are listening to *Laudato Si* to its author. In the past three years of his ministry, Francis has caught the world’s attention. His ministry impresses more than just Catholics. Therefore, when the news came that Francis was taking on the issue of climate change, people from a variety of backgrounds listened.

However, not everyone reacts in the positive way as McKibben and DiLeo. There are certainly criticisms of *Laudato Si*. Nuclear physicist and climate change skeptic Martin Fricke vehemently opposes Francis’ message in his editorial “Where Pope Francis Got His Advice on Global Warming.” In the article, Fricke “apologizes for the bad advice Pope Francis has received about global warming and CO₂” (Fricke 1). According to Fricke, the root of the problem with *Laudato Si* is that it addresses a nonexistent issue. Furthermore, Francis’ call for change in fact harms the people he is most trying to protect – the poor. Fricke believes that Francis’ suggestion to close fossil fuel power plants eliminates an inexpensive way to provide energy to the poor (Fricke 1). He goes on to explain that the reason *Laudato Si* contains such fatal flaws is because Francis worked with advisors from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences rather than actual climate scientists (Fricke 2). Fricke cannot look past these flaws to acknowledge the legitimacy of *Laudato Si*.

Laudato Si also encounters criticism in the political sphere along party lines. Jason Plautz published an article in April 2015, before the release of the encyclical, speculating on whether Pope Francis would be able to change global minds on climate change. The hardest people to sway seem to be people with very strong political party affiliations. Plautz cited a recent survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute, which found, “Faith groups are divided on climate change, with the typically Republican-leaning groups – like white Catholics and white Evangelicals – tending to be skeptics.” Noah Toly, a professor at Wheaton University who studies religion and environmental politics, is not sure how much the encyclical will really persuade these groups (Plautz 2). Now that the encyclical has been out several months, it is interesting to look at Plautz and Toly’s warnings about resistance in accordance with political adherence. Political cartoons show their suspicions were warranted.

Laudato Si led to a variety of feedback – both positive and negative. While an overwhelming amount of reactions are positive, it is necessary to note the negative reactions and listen to those arguments. The fact that the encyclical warranted enough attention to garner a vast array of views speaks positively about the document, in a way. Criticism means people find it worthwhile enough to pay attention. Criticism creates dialogue, and dialogue was one of Francis’ goals. Even if critics do not like what they hear, in talking about it, they are still somewhat feeding into Pope Francis’ goals.

Interviews

The timing of this project is unique due to the fact that Pope Francis released *Laudato Si* less than a year ago. People are still reacting to the document as we speak, and only so much has been written about it thus far. Therefore, this paper gathers “real-time” data on reactions to the encyclical and the conversations surrounding it. What are people getting out of it? Coming from the social science perspective, I want a first-hand understanding of what people are saying about *Laudato Si* and the topics that it engages. To do so, I interviewed a variety of people and synthesized their thoughts on the document, themes they found, and how they were engaging with it. This section serves as a narrative about our present moment. These interviews highlight conversations growing out of the encyclical. No doubt, as months and years pass, the narrative about *Laudato Si* will change, but right now, this provides a snapshot of the dialogue surrounding the encyclical. The snapshot reveals themes of the current dialogue and will be useful in the future to trace the trajectory of dialogue resulting from *Laudato Si*.

I interviewed a total of fourteen people in hopes of getting a glimpse into a multiplicity of views. The group included three environmental studies professors, an anthropology professor, the Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life at Colby College, the Director of Sustainability at Colby College, two Catholic priests, a Catholic nun, a former employee of the Maine Council of Churches, two United Church of Christ ministers, and two students at Colby College. This captured a range of opinions, coming from people with interest or background in either the field of religion, science, or, more often, both. Among these participants, there was also a wide range

in familiarity with *Laudato Si*. The range went from someone googling the “spark notes” version of the encyclical the day before, all the way to someone including a chapter on *Laudato Si* in his upcoming book. At first, it might seem like such disparities will lead to a wide range of conclusions, but I found just the opposite. Not all participants provided the same answers, but several common themes prevailed in my conversations. This section uses their voices to explain the themes.² Multiple people interviewed considered their faith to be influential on their environmental ethic. Furthermore, in the encyclical, they see Francis calling for an environmentalism that caters to the common good. They believe that Francis calls us to work towards this common good through dialogue.

Interconnectivity Between Religion and Environmentalism

Before going into specifics about *Laudato Si*, I asked some general questions. I wanted to learn how my participants viewed their religious identities, and the way that environmentalism fit into that identity. Many of them explain the inherent relationship between their faith and their environmental awareness. Kurt Nelson, the Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life who was raised Lutheran, outlined three main ways religion informs his environmental awareness – stewardship, spirituality, and justice (Nelson). Others echo these themes. As discussed in the section titled “Dialogue between Religion and Science,” Laurel Kearns characterizes the patterns of Christian environmentalism in the United States as stewardship, creation spirituality, and eco-justice, so Nelson’s themes are rooted in historical

² I briefly explain their religious or environmental identity when I reference them, but for further detail on their background please reference Appendix 1.

patterns. In fact, Pope Francis weaves religion and environmentalism together in his encyclical through themes of stewardship, spirituality, and justice too. Therefore, I use these three tenets of Nelson's environmental awareness as a framework to examine the way others, including Pope Francis, use religion to inform their environmentalism.

Nelson explains stewardship as, "a basic theological understanding that we are not the owners or creators of this planet that we live on, but rather the caretakers." This theological understanding finds foundation in the Creation story of Genesis 2.4b-25. Specifically, Genesis 2.15 tells us that God places humans on this earth to "tend and keep it." This relationship with the Earth is characterized by an ethic of stewardship. From these same verses, the Roman Catholic priest Father Paul Marquis tells me he understands that, "Creation is a gift from God. God has given us stewardship over creation, which means therefore that we should not abuse it. We should use it wisely." Nelson and Marquis root their environmentalism in stewardship theology. They understand their obligation to protect and care for God's gift of creation. Pope Francis encourages this type of care in *Laudato Si*. Unfortunately, many people stray from this ethic. Francis spends considerable time outlining the ways humans incorrectly assert their dominion over the Earth by exploiting its resources rather than nurturing and cultivating the gift. He urges believers to root their actions in the type of stewardship Nelson and Marquis interpret from the Genesis Creation Stories.

The second way Nelson sees religion informing his environmental awareness is through spirituality. He gains a sense of gratitude from walking through the

woods, speaking to a virtue at the core of his religious understanding of the World (Nelson). Through his time spent in nature, Nelson connects to God on a spiritual level. Multiple people echoed this sentiment. United Church of Christ minister and self-identified environmentalist Reverend Mark Wilson explains,

Every time I hear someone say that they feel close to God in nature or that God is in the sunset of the mountaintops, what I'm hearing is their understanding, which is an understanding that I share also, of the sacredness of creation and how close that brings us to the divine.

For Wilson, spending time in nature is an inherently spiritual exercise. How can he gaze at the sun setting over the mountains and not feel moved by a power larger than himself? In nature, he feels an elevated connection to the natural world and to the divine (Wilson). Andy Burt, a Quaker who draws on a variety of faith walks, understands a connection similar to Wilson. Burt notes, "My spirituality is tied to my experiences in nature... For me it is that profound silence that one can hear in the [Quaker] meeting that reflects the deep spirit that I feel in nature." These sentiments also appear in *Laudato Si*. Francis claims,

The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us... The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good (84).

Francis understands that a personal relationship with nature leads to greater environmental awareness. The spirituality that grows out of this relationship gives people connections, which motivate them to care for a place. Whether it be walking through the woods, staring at a sunset, or sitting in silence, these spiritual experiences in nature influence the environmental awareness of Nelson, Wilson, and Burt, in ways that are similar to Francis' description.

Finally, Nelson sees religion influencing his environmentalism through justice. Nelson has “an understanding that there’s a particular call to advocate for, speak for, and work with those who are on the margins, particularly those who are already and will continue to be most negatively affected by climate change.” His religious values provide him with a sense of obligation to advocate for marginalized groups, especially through environmental justice efforts. One way Nelson exercised this obligation was when he participated in civil disobedience around the Keystone Pipeline in 2011. Susan MacKenzie, founder of the Maine Council of Churches Spirituality and Earth Stewardship Program, explains, “Justice suggests that we have always been told by Jesus to have a heart for those who are marginalized.” She roots the call for justice in Jesus’s teachings in the New Testament. Reverend Wilson also sees the environmental justice component as an important way to foster relationships. According to Wilson, environmental justice “seeks to make our relationship with the Earth and therefore with God whole again. And there’s an inter-human component too – restoring those relationships with each other and with the creatures of the Earth that we share the planet with.” Nelson, MacKenzie, and Wilson believe caring for the marginalized is an integral part of caring for the Earth. Throughout *Laudato Si*, Francis also calls for increased awareness and care for the poor. He explains, “We have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (Francis 49). The earth and poor “cry” out because they are in crisis. Our environmental crisis greatly impacts both groups, and therefore, solutions must

address these two parties. Nelson, MacKenzie, Wilson, and Francis call for religious action that creates a just relationship among humans and with the environment.

Themes of stewardship, spirituality, and justice occur throughout the encyclical and in my conversations with others. Therefore, the way that Francis seeks to weave religion and environmentalism together is not new. Even people coming from non-Catholic, Christian traditions see these relationships. In fact, they put these ideas into practice even before the release of *Laudato Si*, so Francis' methods do not come as a shock. For many Christians, the way Francis roots ethical foundations of environmentalism in a religious framework fall into line with previously held beliefs. The connections Pope Francis makes are not radical. Rather, he spends time articulating relationships that seem inherent for some, in an effort to explain them to a wider audience.

Pope Francis' Argument for Environmentalism

Pope Francis calls for an environmental ethic with the goal of contributing to the common good. The way to achieve this common good is through living in community with people and nature. Britt Halvorson, an anthropology professor at Colby College who identifies as Jewish, says, "A community isn't just people, a community intentionally includes animals, plants, and the broader world as part of what we occupy as people." The term community, as Francis wants people to understand it, includes everyone and everything. Steve Hastings, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, elaborates on Francis' view of nature, explaining that "[Francis] talks about nature itself as our neighbor, non-human life

as our neighbor. So he's really inputting a value to the creation that in the past maybe was reserved just for human beings." In doing so, Francis challenges widely accepted definitions of community. He assigns intrinsic value to the natural world, a value that is often forgotten or ignored. In fact, Father Frank Morin remarks on the notable challenge Francis proposes by assigning such value; he says, "I think [Francis] throws out a real gauntlet for us all to start thinking in a new direction together – for the common good" (Morin).

Laudato Si calls us to come together and act for the common good of humans and creation. Francis explains that a just environmental awareness "also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion" (220). We must work to live in community with all people, and we must also work to live in community with animals. Some of the people I interviewed revealed two ways that Francis' encyclical works towards the common good – by calling on our moral responsibility and creating a universally accessible text.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis links moral responsibility with environmentalism. Caring for the environment is a moral responsibility that cannot be ignored. In fact, Francis laments that "Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded" (25). Humans have not upheld our obligation to care for the environment, just as we have not upheld our obligation to care for fellow human beings. Two people claimed that *Laudato Si* renews the emphasis on moral responsibility in the environmental

debate. Travis Reynolds, a professor of Environmental Studies at Colby College, claims,

[Pope Francis] injected back into the [environmental] debate the moral compulsion to act immediately, to act in greater expense of the wealthy... a return to the notion that we have a moral obligation as the wealthy countries of the world not to be irreversibly destroying the planet in the long-term.

Reynolds does not say that *Laudato Si*, or religion in general for that matter, is the only way to incite a moral obligation for environmentalism. But he says that through this encyclical, Francis employs religion as an effective tool to bring issues of responsibility back into the climate debate. Lucy Hadley, a Colby College student who minors in Environmental Studies and grew up Catholic but now identifies as a progressive Christian, says *Laudato Si* is, “Putting [environmentalism] in a spiritual framework. It’s kind of hard to argue with because it’s not fact any more. You’re taking it out of the context of fact and putting it into the context of moral and ethical and spiritual duty.” Hadley believes Francis poses his call to action in a moral framework, which for some, is more compelling than the scientific framework. Hadley and Reynolds highlight the moral conversation Pope Francis brings to the environmental conversation. As Reynolds explains, the fight for environmental justice is not devoid of morality, but he and Hadley see the encyclical as a way of rejuvenating the moral component of the argument, which was overlooked.

Reynolds thinks that *Laudato Si* helps us take a step back from the “nuts and bolts” of the science behind climate change and reminds us of the social justice arguments.

The moral responsibility that Francis proposes requires a responsibility not only to the environment but also to each other. *Laudato Si* emphasizes the theme of living in communion with everything. United Church of Christ minister Steve

Hastings believes the strength of Francis' argument lies in this communal focus. He claims,

The main thrust of [Francis'] argument is that dealing with the environmental crisis, specifically global warming, is an issue of taking care of the poor. Because [Francis] argues that the poor will be disproportionately affected by the negative impact of global warming (Hastings).

Hastings astutely notices the many times Francis references the poor in *Laudato Si*. Even in the introduction of the encyclical, Francis says, "I will point to the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected" (16). When humans harm the environment, we also harm the poor. Coming from the third world, Pope Francis witnesses the devastating affects environmental degradation has on marginalized communities. He firmly believes in the moral obligation for humans to care for the marginalized – whether they be the poor or the Earth – through environmentalism.

In order to heighten necessary environmental awareness in all communities, Francis makes *Laudato Si* a very universal text. This universality refers to three characteristics – values, language, and dialogue. Francis emphasizes values that are important to everyone – regardless of religion. He understands the need to appeal to the values of humanity rather than just rely on scientific facts. Francis explains, "That is why it is no longer enough to speak only of the integrity of ecosystems. We have to dare to speak of the integrity of human life, of the need to promote and unify all the great values" (224). An appeal to universal values makes the appeal for environmental consciousness more broadly received. Environmental Studies professor Travis Reynolds praises the document because "It is not framed in Christian values – it wasn't pitched as a Christian values thing. It was pitched as a

human-values thing.” As a result, people in non-religious circles, like Reynolds, listen to the Pope. Father Frank Morin sides with Reynolds in saying, “[Francis] doesn’t write for just Catholics. He has a very universal focus. It’s a challenge that we all put aside our differences and work together so that there’s a future for everybody.” Francis challenges us to keep the universal focus he explains in mind as we work together to alleviate this crisis.

Many people understand the values Francis draws on because he makes a concerted effort to write *Laudato Si* in accessible language. Steve Hastings, a United Church of Christ minister, says, “I think [the encyclical] is pretty readable; I thought it was pretty well-written.” Sister MJ Ferrier, a member of the Roman Catholic Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, admits,

I have not read very many encyclicals because I find them to be impenetrable. They’re written in a kind of formal, abstract language that I call “Vaticanese,” and they don’t really speak to me easily. This is written in straightforward language. You don’t have to beat around the bush.

Francis takes this encyclical out of the “theological ivory tower” and places his arguments in terms accessible to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. He understands the importance of getting everyone on board to create environmental change. Francis repeatedly references the necessity of equal access to goods such as clean drinking water or renewable energy, but on a broader level, he also wants equal access to *Laudato Si* itself. Through his use of comprehensible language, Francis takes the first step towards emphasizing the importance of universal participation in this effort. The fact that multiple people interviewed, who are not necessarily Catholic, understand the themes Francis relays, speaks to the universality of the document in and of itself.

Entering into a Dialogue

As a means of working towards the common good, Francis hopes to create a dialogue open to all. Due to the fact that “The book of nature that we’re looking at is open to all and we’re all in this together,” Francis’ call to action includes starting conversations among a variety of people (Ferrier). Francis says, “I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.” (14). There are several types of dialogue Francis encourages – a dialogue between science and religion, a dialogue with God, and a dialogue among all people of the world regardless of religion or socio-economic status. These dialogues mirror the dialogue Pope Francis promotes in all of his ministry. Father Paul Marquis explains, “I think he was hoping to open a dialogue... I think it’s good that he tries to create a dialogue with people that probably wouldn’t normally be involved in dialogue with us and that he’s creating a desire for that.” Francis’ call for dialogue would not be successful if he didn’t also create a desire for dialogue that Father Marquis references. Quaker Andy Burt thinks Francis was successful in creating this desire. Burt relays, “It’s so fascinating to me... that so many people who are not Catholic have been so enthusiastic about recognizing the significance of the Pope speaking out on these issues. In order to come together, in order to have an awakening, it takes everyone.” I saw this enthusiasm first hand in my interviews and in the number of people from a variety of disciplines wanting to spend time talking about this encyclical with me. In talking with people, it became quite clear that Francis wants his encyclical to have universal appeal.

However, as with any statement from a very public figure, not everyone embraces *Laudato Si* to the same extent. Dialogues surrounding this piece differ. As the section on political cartoons and editorials examined, there is conservative opposition to Pope Francis weighing in on climate change. Rick Santorum and Jeb Bush are just two examples of self-identified Catholic, conservative politicians not happy with Francis' decision to preach about the environment. Environmental Studies professor, Travis Reynolds notes, "The weakness that [the encyclical] seems to be encountering is the large – larger than I would've expected – number of people who are saying climate change is none of the Pope's business." Many people, most notably politicians, think the Pope needs to stay out of this sphere of conversation, and Reynolds is shocked at this response. Environmental Studies minor and self-identified progressive Christian, Lucy Hadley echoes Reynolds' surprise saying, "People are saying that the Church should not be political, but the Church has always been political. The Church is politics. Jesus was political." Hadley understands the necessary link between environmentalism and religion that Francis strives to explain in *Laudato Si*. To her, the Church must exist in the political sphere. In fact, the merging of Church and politics dates all the way back to the time of Jesus (Hadley). Just like Jesus was political, dialogue surrounding the Catholic Church's encyclical is inherently political. As a result, there will inevitably be opposing voices. But this opposition contributes to fruitful dialogue because it forces people with different backgrounds and ideologies to come together in an effort to find common ground.

Despite opposition, much of the dialogue surrounding *Laudato Si* has been positive. Many people interviewed expressed praise and enthusiasm for the encyclical. In fact, when I asked people to share weaknesses of *Laudato Si*, they usually had a hard time answering. Sister MJ Ferrier responded, “Well that’s a good question, I’m not sure I’ve got an answer for that one. I think I was reading it more because of what we’ve been talking about and I may well have just skimmed over things.” That’s not to say there aren’t weaknesses in the encyclical, but she, like others, reads it with more of an eye towards the positives. Environmental Studies professor Travis Reynolds tells me, “you can always nit-pick... But I think it’s a testament to them doing due diligence on the document that that’s not what people are saying... They’re not saying this was bogus, this was made up with cherry-picked data.” The Pope proposes a strong argument that even environmentalists without specific religious affiliation find legitimacy in.

Francis’ efforts are not new. What needs to be new is the reaction people have to Francis’ efforts. Susan MacKenzie acknowledges the importance of dialogue, saying, “Dialogue is the first step, but it’s certainly not the last step, so people have got to take it from hearing it at an intellectual level to feeling it in their hearts to acting it out with their bodies.” *Laudato Si* is not productive unless the people who hear Francis’ call translate it into action. These dialogues prove effective if concrete initiatives working towards the common good grow from them.

The Lasting Effect of Laudato Si

The positive conversation *Laudato Si* inspires in religious and environmental communities right now is apparent through these interviews. But what will be the lasting affects of the document? Will this document just gather dust over the next few years? Some of my participants speculated on the potentially lasting effects of *Laudato Si*. In terms of the current environmental climate, United Church of Christ minister Steve Hastings admits, “There certainly is a movement afoot, and whether it wants to be swept along with it or not, the church is implicated in it. It has been for about fifty years now, so I don’t see any of it going away.” The environmental movement is growing, and it will continue to do so. If the Church does not want to be left behind, it must hop onboard. *Laudato Si* provides tangible ways for the Catholic Church, and everyone, to do so. Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life at Colby College Kurt Nelson explains, “I hope that this is a reboot to the sort of really tiresome conversation about faith and science...I hope it will help us talk about the fusion of scientific and moral concern in more serious ways than we have been for the past generation or so.” Hastings and Nelson offer hopeful hypotheses about the lasting effects of *Laudato Si*. Francis shares this hope. He hopes his encyclical will contribute to the forward momentum of the environmental movement.

In some ways, *Laudato Si* has already contributed to this momentum. The broad reaches of this encyclical were clearly felt at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference. Father Paul Marquis said, “At the Paris Climate Summit there were representatives of the Catholic Church there and there was a lot of focus on it in the Catholic press.” The Catholic Church was paying attention, but more importantly,

delegates at the Summit were paying attention to the Catholic Church. Philip Nyhus, the head of the Environmental Studies Program at Colby College, said,

At the Paris Climate Accords I heard a lot of people saying, if the Pope can think it's important then certainly the world leaders should think it's important... There's a moral dimension that's been legitimized because of the religious statement that came up.

Once again, this idea of moral responsibility Pope Francis brings to the climate conversation resonates with people. The Paris Climate Conference is just one example of ways *Laudato Si* enters into conversations in a variety of disciplines.

By interviewing people coming from a variety of backgrounds – religious and scientific – I caught a glimpse of the reception of *Laudato Si*. I found similar themes that people approaching the document from different angles ascertained. For some who share Pope Francis' views, religion and environmentalism were inherently linked, while for others, their environmentalism was informed by non-religious values. Nevertheless, both parties found aspects of the document that resonated with them. They understood the necessity of an environmentalism that worked towards the common good of all –animals and people. Francis proposes laying the groundwork for this type of environmentalism through dialogue. The conversations I had with people contribute to this dialogue. The dialogues will not always be in agreement, but even so, Francis views them as a key factor in addressing the dire environmental situation outlined in *Laudato Si*.

Conclusion

The dialogue surrounding *Laudato Si* shows that Pope Francis was successful in conveying his message. Various responses reveal that Francis' ministry centers on

the themes of caring for the common good and working towards this common good through dialogue. His pastoral actions and proclamations speak to the value he places on these two goals. Francis uses *Laudato Si* as a teaching document to exemplify the importance of caring for the environment as well as the poor and working towards a better situation through dialogue. Political cartoons, written critiques, and personal interviews show the way audiences engage with these themes.

People from a variety of backgrounds understand the arguments Francis presents in *Laudato Si*. Their responses serve as an example for how scientific and religious communities enter into the dialogue of climate change with Pope Francis as a guide. Francis uses the encyclical as a way of showing how people should enter into those conversations. In calling for dialogue, Francis himself models the correct way to have that dialogue, by drawing on different authorities and making his ideas accessible to a large audience. Further conversations about climate change should follow this model in an effort to address one of the most pressing issues of our time.

Bringing science and religion together makes Francis' call for action in response to our current environmental crisis even stronger than the call from previous popes. Reverend Sally Bingham understands the inherent link between religious faith and environmental action in a similar way to Pope Francis. She explains that, "The bottom line is this: Facts alone will not convince and are insufficient in and of themselves to motivate us to act. To tackle climate and mitigate future suffering, we must connect our heads to our hearts" (Bingham). *Laudato Si* works connecting both the rational and the sentimental, providing scientific facts

about climate change that are grounded in a larger, moral argument. For people of faith, it builds on traditional values to explain the obligation of caring for the environment. Even for those who do not identify religiously, Pope Francis makes a persuasive call to action. His focus on personal connections to the environment and a moral responsibility to the vulnerable provides a foundation for environmentalism.

The success of *Laudato Si* lies in the fact that Francis brings together the spheres of religion and science. What first appears as a contradiction, in fact becomes a strongly interconnected relationship. Albert Einstein's famous quote "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind," speaks towards that interconnectivity. The two spheres support and challenge each other, much like a healthy relationship. Current dialogue surrounding *Laudato Si* shows Francis' success at building up a relationship between religion and science, and in the coming years, it is my hope that this dialogue between the two spheres translates into action.

Appendix 1

Andy Burton identifies as a “convinced friend” in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). She worked with the Maine Council of Churches on environmental justice issues, specifically educating congregations about climate change. Burton also organized a forum on *Laudato Si* at Bowdoin in Fall 2015.

Britt Halvorson is a mildly observant Jew who grew up with very zealous environmental parents. From vigilantly conserving resources to making their own fertilizer from eggshells, environmentalism was a way of life for Halvorson’s family.

Father Frank Morrison has been a Catholic priest for forty-three years. He makes a concerted effort to place justice issues at the center of his ministry and places environmentalism at the center of his preaching and concerns. In Fall 2015, he organized a ten-week Bible study about *Laudato Si*, which had a total of about 75 people.

Father Paul Marquis has served as a Roman Catholic priest for thirty years. He describes himself as tending towards the more traditional understanding of Catholic teachings but with an openness to dialogue. Marquis tries to incorporate environmental consciousness into his actions, but he would not characterize himself as an activist.

Kevin Bright is the Sustainability Coordinator at Colby College. Professionally, environmentalism is his line of work, and he also tries to incorporate the concepts of conservation and sustainability into his family life. He grew up in a Catholic family but does not currently identify with a religion.

Kurt Nelson was born and raised Lutheran and is now the Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life at Colby College. He practices environmentalism by sustainable lifestyle choices and activism. Nelson participated in civil disobedience surrounding the Keystone Pipeline in 2011.

Lucy Hadley is a student at Colby College minoring in Environmental Studies. She grew up in a Catholic family and now identifies as a progressive Christian as her faith journey transitions.

Mark Wilson is an ordained United Church of Christ minister at the First Congregational Church in Waterville, Maine. In his personal life, he is environmentally aware and he seeks to spread that awareness through his ministry.

Philip Nyhus is the Director of the Environmental Studies program at Colby College. He channels his energy around environmentalism into scholarship and education. Nyhus grew up in the Lutheran with relatives who were ordained ministers and professors of divinity. Currently, Nyhus is not affiliated with a specific religion.

Sara Lotemplio is a student at Colby College who is majoring in Environmental Studies. She identifies as a Roman Catholic.

Sister MJ Ferrier has belonged to the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for 55 years. She identifies as an environmentalist and organized a group in South Portland to resist the installation of a pipeline for tar sands.

Steve Hastings is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ who currently serves two Presbyterian congregations in Maine. Within those congregations, he advocates for earth care as an expression of justice and peacemaking. Hastings has a PhD in environmental ethics and creation spirituality, and he plans to engage *Laudato Si* in a chapter of his upcoming book based on his doctoral dissertation.

Susan Mackenzie is a Protestant with an extensive academic background in the environmental field. While working at the Maine Council of Churches, she created the Spirituality and Earth Stewardship Program with the goal of bringing people from different faith traditions together to think about protecting nature from a religious-values perspective.

Travis Reynolds is a Professor of Environmental Studies at Colby College. While he does not religiously identify, he works closely with Ethiopian Orthodox Churches as part of his environmental research.

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