

## Introduction: The ‘Climate Emergency’ and US Catholic Responses to *Laudato Si’*

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**T**HIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE *JOURNAL of Moral Theology* publishes revised introductory, keynote, and plenary addresses from the inaugural gathering of “*Laudato Si’* and the U.S. Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home”<sup>1</sup> held at Creighton University in June 2019. This groundbreaking series was convened by Creighton and Catholic Climate Covenant to help the US Catholic community more robustly incorporate *Laudato Si’* and the Church’s teachings on ecology and climate change across eight of its key ministries. As described below, quantitative data, experience, and conversations suggest that the US Catholic Church has not integrated *Laudato Si’*— which builds on twenty five years of papal attention to ecology and climate change as moral issues—with the priority, scope, and urgency anywhere near what is commensurate with the science and the magnitude of what Pope Francis now rightly refers to as our world’s “climate emergency.”<sup>2</sup> In response, the conference series seeks to inspire and equip the US Catholic community to more sufficiently enact *Laudato Si’* in fidelity to Church’s evangelical mission.

### **CATHOLIC TEACHING ON ECOLOGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

In 1971, Pope Paul VI observed with concern how humanity was “suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature [we] risk destroying it and becoming in [our] turn the victim of this degradation” (*Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 21). In 1990, Pope John

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<sup>1</sup> Creighton University, “*Laudato Si’* and the U.S. Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home,” 2019, [www.creighton.edu/catholicclimate/](http://www.creighton.edu/catholicclimate/).

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the Theme: *The Energy Transition & Care of Our Common Home*,” June 14, 2019, [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190614\\_compagnie-petrolifere.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190614_compagnie-petrolifere.html).

Paul II stressed that “*the ecological crisis is a moral issue.*”<sup>3</sup> At the same time—when global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide were roughly 350 parts per million (PPM) and almost twenty-five years before this number surpassed 400 PPM for the first time in human history<sup>4</sup>—John Paul warned that the “‘greenhouse effect’ has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs.”<sup>5</sup> In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed these insights, saying Pope John Paul II’s “appeal is all the more pressing today, in the face of signs of a growing crisis which it would be irresponsible not to take seriously. Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change...?”<sup>6</sup>

Consistent with these and many other papal, episcopal, and Catholic theological teachings on ecology and climate change, Pope Francis released his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si’* on June 18, 2015. Therein, he repeatedly affirmed *care for our common home* as an urgent moral challenge and underscored that “climate change is a global problem with grave implications” which “represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day” (no. 25). Speaking directly to persons and communities of faith, the pope reiterated the traditional Catholic teaching that “living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (no. 217). Since then, Francis has continued to make ecology a central focus of his papacy. He has been especially concerned about climate change and in June 2019 told fossil fuel executives and investors, “Faced with a climate emergency, we must take action accordingly, in order to avoid perpetrating a brutal act of injustice towards the poor and future generations.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation,” January 1, 1990, no. 15, [www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html). Emphasis in original.

<sup>4</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, “Climate Change: Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide,” September 19, 2019, [www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide](http://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide); Justin Gillis, “Heat-Trapping Gas Passes Milestone, Raising Fears,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/05/11/science/earth/carbon-dioxide-level-passes-long-feared-milestone.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/11/science/earth/carbon-dioxide-level-passes-long-feared-milestone.html).

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation,” no. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation,” January 1, 2010, no. 4, [www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliiii-world-day-peace.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace.html).

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the Theme: *The Energy Transition & Care of Our Common Home.*”

**THE “CLIMATE EMERGENCY” AND THE CHURCH’S MISSION**

Along with national scientific bodies around the world, the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has for years warned that climate change poses a catastrophic threat to humanity and non-human nature. As Martha Shulski and I detail later in this volume, human activities—especially fossil fuel combustion—release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Since the Industrial Revolution, human activities have spiked atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide to levels never experienced in human history and warmed the planet 1°C. This global warming has already produced significant geophysical effects. Extensive ice sheet melt averages billions of tons of ice per year and in Antarctica is occurring at a rate that has tripled in the past ten years.<sup>8</sup> Global glacial melt has eliminated more than ten trillion tons of ice and snow since 1961, currently eliminates three hundred ninety billion tons of global snow and ice annually, and could eliminate water sources upon which millions depend by 2100.<sup>9</sup> Corresponding sea levels rose eight inches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have risen in the past twenty years at twice the rate of last century.<sup>10</sup> The US is experiencing “increasing numbers of intense rainfall events” (which is unsurprising since warm air holds more moisture).<sup>11</sup> Ocean acidity that impacts coral reefs and other sea life has increased roughly thirty percent since the Industrial Revolution as global waters have absorbed some of humanity’s carbon pollution.<sup>12</sup>

Since humans are part of the natural world, these realities are already producing adverse humanitarian consequences in the US and around the world. The World Health Organization estimates that climate change causes an estimated one hundred fifty thousand annual

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<sup>8</sup> National Aeronautics and Space Administration, “Climate Change: How Do We Know?” 2019, [www.climate.nasa.gov/evidence/](http://www.climate.nasa.gov/evidence/).

<sup>9</sup> M. Zemp, M. Huss, E. Thibert, N. Eckert, R. McNabb, J. Huber, M. Barandun, H. Machguth, S. U. Nussbaumer, I. Gärtner-Roer, L. Thomson, F. Paul, F. Maussion, S. Kutuzov, and J. G. Cogley, “Global Glacier Mass Changes and Their Contributions to Sea-level Rise from 1961 to 2016,” *Nature* 568 (2019): 382-386; Doyle Rice, “Good-bye Glaciers: 390 Billion Tons of Snow and Ice Melts Each Year as Globe Warms,” USA Today, April 8, 2019, [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/08/glaciers-melting-ice-melts-due-global-warming-sea-levels-rise/3405569002/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/08/glaciers-melting-ice-melts-due-global-warming-sea-levels-rise/3405569002/); Henry Fountain, Ben C. Solomon, and Jeremy White, “Glaciers Are Retreating. Millions Rely on Their Water,” *The New York Times*, January 16, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/17/climate/melting-glaciers-globally.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/17/climate/melting-glaciers-globally.html).

<sup>10</sup> National Aeronautics and Space Administration, “Climate Change: How Do We Know?”

<sup>11</sup> National Aeronautics and Space Administration, “Climate Change: How Do We Know?”

<sup>12</sup> National Aeronautics and Space Administration, “Climate Change: How Do We Know?”

global fatalities.<sup>13</sup> The US experienced its first documented “climate refugees” in 2016, while an average of twenty four million persons globally were displaced annually by “catastrophic weather disasters” between 2008 and 2018.<sup>14</sup> In recent decades, “warmer and drier conditions have contributed to an increase in large forest fires in the western United States and Interior Alaska” that destroy homes and businesses.<sup>15</sup> The US Department of Defense warns that climate change is a “threat multiplier,” given its potential to perpetuate resource conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Citing the experience of Fulani herders in West Africa, this is a reality to which Meghan Goodwin eloquently speaks later in this volume. Relatedly, scholars in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* suggest that climate change-induced drought helped catalyze recent conflict in Syria.<sup>17</sup> As with many other ecological challenges, these and other adverse effects of climate change disproportionately harm the poor who are least responsible for causing the problem.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the Irish bishops’ aid agency Trócaire has found that because of gender disparities, “disasters resulting from climate change are estimated to kill 14 times more women and girls than men and boys.”<sup>19</sup>

Although these realities are ominous, what is arguably graver is the very real prospect of runaway, irreversible climate change that poses

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<sup>13</sup> World Health Organization, “Climate Change,” 2019, [www.who.int/heli/risks/climate/climatechange/en/](http://www.who.int/heli/risks/climate/climatechange/en/).

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Mele and Daniel Victor, “Reeling From Effects of Climate Change, Alaskan Village Votes to Relocate,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/08/20/us/shishmaref-alaska-elocate-vote-climate-change.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/20/us/shishmaref-alaska-elocate-vote-climate-change.html); Tim McDonnell, “The Refugees The World Barely Pays Attention To,” *NPR*, June 20, 2018, [www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/20/621782275/the-refugees-that-the-world-barely-pays-attention-to](http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/20/621782275/the-refugees-that-the-world-barely-pays-attention-to).

<sup>15</sup> Alexa Jay, Christopher W. Avery, Daniel Barrie, Apurva Dave, Benjamin DeAngelo, Matthew Dzaugis, Michael Kolian, Kristin Lewis, Katie Reeves, and Darrell Winner, “Overview” in “Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States,” *Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II* (Washington, DC: US Global Change Research Program, 2018), 39.

<sup>16</sup> US Department of Defense, *National Security Implications of Climate-Related Risks and a Changing Climate*, 8, [archive.defense.gov/pubs/150724-congressional-report-on-national-implications-of-climate-change.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/150724-congressional-report-on-national-implications-of-climate-change.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Colin P. Kelley, Shahrzad Mohtadi, Mark A. Cane, Richard Seager, and Yochanan Kushnir, “Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 112, no. 11 (2015): 3241-3246.

<sup>18</sup> Editorial Board, “Wealthy Countries Are Responsible For Climate Change, But It’s the Poor Who Will Suffer Most,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 2019, [www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-climate-change-global-warming-part-2-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-climate-change-global-warming-part-2-story.html).

<sup>19</sup> Trócaire, “Women Taking the Lead: Defending Human Rights and the Environment,” 2020, p. 10, [www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/women\\_taking\\_the\\_lead\\_lowres\\_1\\_0.pdf](http://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/women_taking_the_lead_lowres_1_0.pdf).

an “existential threat”<sup>20</sup> to civilization. The atmospheric lifespan of greenhouse gases ranges from decades to millennia. The Earth’s climate is also subject to “positive feedback loops” whereby initial warming catalyzes additional warming. For example, warming melts permafrost, which allows microbes to break down previously-frozen organic carbon into the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide and methane (which is roughly 25 times more powerful than carbon dioxide at trapping heat<sup>21</sup>).<sup>22</sup> Additionally, warming melts ice which has a high albedo that reflects solar radiation and exposes darker soil that absorbs more solar radiation.<sup>23</sup> Faced with positive feedback loops, scientists warn of climate change “tipping points” beyond which global warming could become irreversible and effectively runaway. Such a scenario would be, to put it mildly, catastrophic for human civilization. The World Health Organization warns that unmitigated climate change between 2030 and 2050 could produce “approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, leading scientists suggest the future possibility of 20 feet of sea level rise that would submerge parts—if not the entirety—of coastal cities from Miami, Boston, San Francisco, and Seattle to Shanghai, Hong Kong, Mumbai, and Calcutta<sup>25</sup> (to view the US with 20 feet of sea level rise, see “Zip Code-

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<sup>20</sup> Richard W. Miller, “‘All Hands on Deck’: Climate Crisis Coming Sooner Than Targets Project,” Creighton University, October 30, 2018, [www.creighton.edu/publicrelations/newscenter/news/2018/october2018/october302018/climateen10301](http://www.creighton.edu/publicrelations/newscenter/news/2018/october2018/october302018/climateen10301).

<sup>21</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency, “Greenhouse Gas Emissions - Methane,” 2019, [www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases](http://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases).

<sup>22</sup> T. Schurr, “Permafrost and the Global Carbon Cycle,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Arctic Program, November 22, 2019, [www.arctic.noaa.gov/Report-Card/Report-Card-2019/ArtMID/7916/ArticleID/844/Permafrost-and-the-Global-Carbon-Cycle](http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/Report-Card/Report-Card-2019/ArtMID/7916/ArticleID/844/Permafrost-and-the-Global-Carbon-Cycle).

<sup>23</sup> National Aeronautics and Space Administration, “Impacts of a Warming Arctic,” 2020, [www.climate.nasa.gov/resources/education/pbs\\_modules/lesson2Engage/](http://www.climate.nasa.gov/resources/education/pbs_modules/lesson2Engage/).

<sup>24</sup> World Health Organization, “Climate Change and Health,” February 1, 2018, [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health).

<sup>25</sup> James Hansen, Makiko Sato, Paul Hearty, Reto Ruedy, Maxwell Kelley, Valerie Masson-Delmotte, Gary Russell, George Tselioudis, Junji Cao, Eric Rignot, Isabella Velicogna, Blair Tormey, Bailey Donovan, Evgeniya Kandiano, Karina von Schuckmann, Pushker Kharecha, Allegra N. LeGrande, Michael Bauer, and Kwok-Wai Lo, “Ice melt, Sea Level Rise and Superstorms: Evidence from Paleoclimate Data, Climate Modeling, and Modern Observations that 2°C Global Warming Could be Dangerous,” *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics* 16 (2016): 3761-3812; A. Dutton, A.E. Carlson, A.J. Long, G.A. Milne, P.U. Clark, R. DeConto, B.P. Horton, S. Rahmstorf, M.E. Raymo, “Sea-Level Rise Due to Polar Ice-Sheet Mass Loss During Past Warm Periods,” *Science* 349, no. 6244 (2015): 153-162; Benjamin Strauss, “Coastal Nations, Megacities Face 20 Feet of Sea Rise,” *Climate Central*, July 9, 2015, [www.climatecentral.org/news/nations-megacities-face-20-feet-of-sea-level-rise-19217](http://www.climatecentral.org/news/nations-megacities-face-20-feet-of-sea-level-rise-19217).

Searchable Interactive US Map” from Climate Central<sup>26</sup>). Other researchers submit that unmitigated climate change could cause 2 billion climate refugees by 2100.<sup>27</sup> As with ecological degradation broadly, the poor, who have done the least to cause climate change, are most vulnerable to these calamitous prospects. Additionally, future generations, who have done nothing to cause the problem, stand to unjustly inherit a world that would considerably challenge their ability to authentically flourish.

Perhaps most arrestingly, Richard W. Miller notes that projections from two of the world’s leading climate scientists—Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Director Emeritus of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, and Kevin Anderson, former Deputy and Interim Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research—suggest that in a world with post-industrial global warming “at 4–6 °C the carrying capacity of planet could be reduced to between a half a billion and a billion people.”<sup>28</sup> Although population projections are necessarily uncertain, these seem especially significant in view of their sources and the fact that a carrying capacity of one billion would mean the deaths of 87 percent of the world’s 7.7 billion people. These projections are also stark considering that prior to the Paris Agreement, the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned prior to the Paris Agreement that “in most scenarios without additional mitigation efforts...warming is *more likely than not* to exceed 4°C above preindustrial levels by 2100.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, whether one wants to challenge a particular model or projection, the analyses of Schellnhuber, Anderson, and the IPCC indicate that the potential scope of the climate crisis is arguably on an order of magnitude unlike anything humanity has ever faced.

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<sup>26</sup> Climate Central, “Zip Code-Searchable Interactive US Map,” 2019, [www.ss6m.climatecentral.org/#12/40.7298/-74.0070](http://www.ss6m.climatecentral.org/#12/40.7298/-74.0070).

<sup>27</sup> Charles Geisler and Ben Currens, “Impediments to Inland Resettlement Under Conditions of Accelerated Sea Level Rise,” *Land Use Policy* 66 (2017): 322-330.

<sup>28</sup> Richard W. Miller, “Deep Responsibility for a Deep Future,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2014): 439-440. Miller cites the postulation from Anderson that if post-industrial global warming “hit 4C, 5C or 6C, you might have half a billion people surviving” (Jenny Fyall, “Warming Will ‘Wipe Out Billions,’” *The Scotsman*, November 29, 2009, [www.news.scotsman.com/latestnews/Warming-will-39wipe-out-billions39.5867379.jp](http://www.news.scotsman.com/latestnews/Warming-will-39wipe-out-billions39.5867379.jp). Archived website: [www.timetobehold.wordpress.com/2010/02/14/warming-will-‘wipe-out-billions’](http://www.timetobehold.wordpress.com/2010/02/14/warming-will-‘wipe-out-billions’)). Miller also notes Schellnhuber’s warning that “the estimates for the carrying capacity of the planet [are] below 1 billion people” with post-industrial global warming beyond 9°F (5°C) (James Kantner, “Scientist: Warming Could Cut Population to 1 Billion,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 2009, [www.dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/13/scientist-warming-could-cut-population-to-1-billion/](http://www.dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/13/scientist-warming-could-cut-population-to-1-billion/)).

<sup>29</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report* (Geneva: IPCC, 2014), 18-19, emphasis in original.

In response to present circumstances and future prospects, the general scientific consensus is that global temperature rise beyond 1.5°C relative to pre-industrial levels significantly elevates the risk of triggering runaway positive feedback loops and irreversible climate change.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the United Nations-brokered Paris Agreement aspires to limit post-industrial global warming to 1.5°C.<sup>31</sup> To this end, the IPCC warned in October 2018 that realization of this goal would likely require the world to cut carbon pollution nearly in half from 2010 levels by 2030 and “reach[] net zero around 2050.”<sup>32</sup> Some scientists, including Veerabhadran Ramanathan, PhD, distinguished professor of atmospheric and climate sciences at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at University of California San Diego and member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, argue this report’s analysis is too timid in part through an insufficient account of positive feedback loops.<sup>33</sup> In any event, the IPCC emphasized that since anthropogenic climate change has already caused nearly 1°C of post-industrial global warming, limiting post-industrial warming to 1.5°C “would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.”<sup>34</sup> Conversely, however, nations party to the Paris Agreement have not taken sufficient initial steps to limit warming to 1.5°C. In November 2019, the United Nations estimated that “if we rely only on the current climate commitments of the Paris Agreement, temperatures can be expected to rise to 3.2°C this century.”<sup>35</sup> The UN also then warned that countries’ stated Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs) to reduce greenhouse gas pollution would need to “... more than fivefold to achieve the 1.5°C goal.”<sup>36</sup> These warnings were, of course, concurrent to President Donald Trump’s stated intention to withdraw the US from the Agreement entirely. Unsurprisingly, then,

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<sup>30</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5°C* (Geneva, 2018), 5, [www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15\\_Full\\_Report\\_High\\_Res.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> United Nations, *Paris Agreement*, 2015, [www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](http://www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf), Article 2.1(a).

<sup>32</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Scott Waldman, “New Climate Report Actually Understates Threat, Some Researchers Argue,” *E&E News*, October 12, 2018, [www.science-mag.org/news/2018/10/new-climate-report-actually-understates-threat-some-researchers-argue](http://www.science-mag.org/news/2018/10/new-climate-report-actually-understates-threat-some-researchers-argue).

<sup>34</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C approved by governments,” 2019, [www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/](http://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/).

<sup>35</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, “Emissions Gap Report 2019,” [www.un-environment.org/interactive/emissions-gap-report/2019/](http://www.un-environment.org/interactive/emissions-gap-report/2019/).

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *Emissions Gap Report 2019* (Nairobi, Kenya: 2019, xx).

average global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide increased 10.6 parts per million (PPM) between December 2015, when the Paris Agreement was negotiated, and December 2019.<sup>37</sup> Especially set against the scope of carrying capacity hypotheses from Schellnhuber and Anderson, it is thus arguably impossible to overstate the potential gravity of the climate crisis toward which humanity is careening.

Amidst these realities, the Church's mission entails working to advance God's kingdom "of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 36) in response to God's love and the "signs of the times" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 4) through evangelization (*Ad Gentes*, no. 6) that requires both "a living testimony as well as the spoken word" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 35). As part of this mission, Pope Francis emphasizes in *Laudato Si'*, "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (no. 217). Since climate change frustrates God's kingdom, injures God's creation, and implicates core Catholic moral commitments, the Church thus has a responsibility to address the climate crisis at levels commensurate with the gravity of climate science in fidelity to its mission.<sup>38</sup> Here in the US, this responsibility is especially acute for at least two reasons. First, our own US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) insist in their 2001 statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, that prudence classically defined as "right reason applied to action" (ST II-II, q. 47, a. 3) must guide the Church's engagement with climate science and response to climate change. Put differently, the US bishops' emphasis on prudence means the US Catholic response to climate change must correspond to the urgent timelines identified by preeminent climate science. Or as Pope Francis said in his 2019 address to oil and gas executives and investors, "Faced with a climate emergency, we must take action accordingly"—i.e., in accord with the scale and urgency indicated by the best available science.<sup>39</sup> Second, Pope Francis insists in *Laudato Si'* that "we must continue to be aware that, regarding climate change, there are *differentiated responsibilities*" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 52, emphasis in original).

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<sup>37</sup> Ed Dlugokencky and Pieter Tans, "Trends in Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide - Globally averaged marine surface monthly mean data," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, [ftp://aftp.cmdl.noaa.gov/products/trends/co2/co2\\_mm\\_gl.txt](ftp://aftp.cmdl.noaa.gov/products/trends/co2/co2_mm_gl.txt). The average global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide were 401.42 PPM in December 2015 and 412.02 PPM in December 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel R. DiLeo, "Climate Justice: Essential to the Church's Mission," *Journal of Religion & Society* Supplement 21 (2020): 188.

<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis, "Address to Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the Theme: *The Energy Transition & Care of Our Common Home*."



Here, the pope echoes the USCCB's insights in *Global Climate Change*:

All nations share the responsibility to address the problem of global climate change. But historically the industrial economies have been responsible for the highest emissions of greenhouse gases that scientists suggest are causing the warming trend. Also, significant wealth, technological sophistication, and entrepreneurial creativity give these nations a greater capacity to find useful responses to this problem.

Since the US is the nation most responsible for historical carbon pollution between 1850 and 2014<sup>40</sup> and as of October 2019 had the world's largest economy by GDP,<sup>41</sup> there is a solemn duty among the persons and the entities that make up US society—including the Catholic Church—to lead a vast, precipitate response to the climate emergency that is sufficient in terms of what the best available science indicates is necessary to avoid climate catastrophe.

### US CATHOLIC RESPONSES TO *LAUDATO SI'*

In the nearly five years since publication of *Laudato Si'*, many US Catholic individuals and institutions have worked to better *care for our common home* in response to an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them” (no. 217).<sup>42</sup> In accord with what evangelical action requires, and as Kenneth R. Himes and I suggest later in this volume, these activities fall across the spectrum between charitable works and social justice – what the US bishops call the “Two Feet of Love in Action.”<sup>43</sup> Catholic Energies, a program of Catholic Climate Covenant, helped Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington build the largest solar field in the District of Columbia<sup>44</sup> and helped Immaculate Conception parish

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<sup>40</sup> World Resources CAIT Climate Data Explorer, “Historical Emissions,” 2019, [www.cait.wri.org/historical](http://www.cait.wri.org/historical).

<sup>41</sup> International Monetary Fund, “GDP, Current Prices - Billions of US Dollars,” October 2019, [www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOORLD](http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOORLD).

<sup>42</sup> For an overview of US Catholic actions on climate change since *Laudato Si'*, see Catholic Climate Covenant, “Our Work,” 2019, [www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/about/work](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/about/work).

<sup>43</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Two Feet of Love in Action,” 2019, [www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/two-feet-of-love-in-action.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/two-feet-of-love-in-action.cfm).

<sup>44</sup> Hannah Natanson, “A Field in DC Will Soon be Home to 5,000 Solar Panels. It's All Because of Local Catholic Groups — and a Message From the Pope,” *The Washington Post*, July 21, 2019, [www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/a-field-in-dc-will-soon-be-home-to-5000-solar-panels-its-all-because-of-local-catholic-groups-and-a-message-from-the-pope/2019/07/21/6b82223a-a7ff-11e9-a3a6-ab670962db05\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/a-field-in-dc-will-soon-be-home-to-5000-solar-panels-its-all-because-of-local-catholic-groups-and-a-message-from-the-pope/2019/07/21/6b82223a-a7ff-11e9-a3a6-ab670962db05_story.html).

in Hampton, Virginia, switch to one hundred percent solar energy<sup>45</sup> (per its business model, Catholic Energies provides project financing).<sup>46</sup> Nearly 800 Catholic institutions signed the Catholic Climate Declaration affirming support for the Paris Agreement and echoing the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' criticism of the Trump administration's announced intention to withdraw the US from this accord.<sup>47</sup> Hundreds of parishes have founded Covenant-supported Creation Care Teams and members regularly work together and as individuals to reduce local waste and energy consumption.<sup>48</sup> Thousands of Catholics in parishes, schools, and other communities have engaged Feast of St. Francis and Earth Day educational events.<sup>49</sup>

These actions are all important and successes must be celebrated. Despite such discrete positive steps, however, evidence suggests that the ecological vision of *Laudato Si'* has not been widely or deeply integrated into the US Catholic Church relative to the community's potential or in accord with prudence—i.e., commensurate with what science tells us is urgently needed to avoid climate catastrophe. The US Catholic community has roughly 17,000 parishes, 36,000 priests, and 76 million people.<sup>50</sup> Yet one month after *Laudato Si'*, only 22 percent of US Catholics who regularly attend Mass reported having heard about the encyclical from their celebrant.<sup>51</sup> Several months later, just 18 percent of Catholics reported having heard Pope Francis's climate change teachings discussed in their place of worship.<sup>52</sup> One year after

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<sup>45</sup> Brian Roewe, "A Virginia Parish Switched to 100% Solar Power — and Paid Nothing," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 1, 2019, [www.ncronline.org/news/environment/virginia-parish-switched-100-solar-power-and-paid-nothing](http://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/virginia-parish-switched-100-solar-power-and-paid-nothing).

<sup>46</sup> Catholic Energies, "Home," 2019, [www.catholicenergies.org](http://www.catholicenergies.org).

<sup>47</sup> Dennis Sadowski, "How Catholics Spearheaded Efforts to Combat Climate Change in 2018," *Catholic News Service*, January 31, 2018, [www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2018/12/31/how-catholics-spearheaded-efforts-combat-climate-change-2018](http://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2018/12/31/how-catholics-spearheaded-efforts-combat-climate-change-2018); United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "US Bishops Chairman Regrets the President's Withdrawal From The Paris Agreement," June 1, 2017, [www.usccb.org/news/2017/17-092.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/news/2017/17-092.cfm).

<sup>48</sup> Catholic Climate Covenant, "Creation Care Teams," 2019, [www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/creation-care-teams](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/creation-care-teams).

<sup>49</sup> Catholic Climate Covenant, "Feast of St. Francis," 2019, [www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/feast-st-francis](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/feast-st-francis).

<sup>50</sup> Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "Frequently Requested Church Statistics," 2019, [www.cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/](http://www.cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/).

<sup>51</sup> The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, "Speaking Out on Global Warming: Public Attitudes toward the Papal Encyclical on Climate Change," 2015, [www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/speaking-out-on-global-warming-public-attitudes-toward-the-papal-encyclical-on-climate-change0813-5383.aspx](http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/speaking-out-on-global-warming-public-attitudes-toward-the-papal-encyclical-on-climate-change0813-5383.aspx).

<sup>52</sup> Edward Maibach, Anthony Leiserowitz, Connie Roser-Renouf, Teresa Myers, Seth Rosenthal, and Geoff Feinberg, *The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis Changed the Conversation about Global Warming* (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication and Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 2015), 5.

the release of the encyclical, only 32 percent of US Catholics reported having heard of *Laudato Si'*.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, researchers using nationally-representative surveys with supplemental samples of Catholics found that within one year of the encyclical, politically conservative US Catholics aware of *Laudato Si'* reconciled the dissonance between papal climate change teaching and overwhelming Republican disbelief in anthropogenic climate change by “devalu[ing] the Pope’s credibility on climate change.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, “these results suggest that the worldviews, political identities, and group norms that lead conservative Catholics to deny climate change override their deference to religious authority when judging the reality and risks of this phenomenon.”<sup>55</sup> This is not surprising since around the world political affiliation is the biggest predictor of belief in climate change by a factor of nearly two.<sup>56</sup> Two years later, this partisan ideological divide seems to have persisted: in 2017, 78 percent of Republican Catholics did not believe that the “Earth is warming mostly because of human activity, such as burning fossil fuels.”<sup>57</sup>

Beyond such empirical research, anecdotal experience of US Catholics who regularly work on ecology and climate change suggest that in many communities *Laudato Si'* has not been extensively or acutely assimilated. The US Catholic community has approximately 6,200 elementary and secondary schools, 220 colleges and universities, 3,500 graduate-level seminarians, and nearly 3 million primary and secondary school-age children in parish religious education.<sup>58</sup> Yet numerous US Catholics—lay, religious, and clergy—have communicated to Catholic Climate Covenant and its national Catholic partners that many institutions have not worked to consistently and robustly incorporate “ecological education and spirituality” into catechesis, worship, or priestly formation as Pope Francis entreats (*Laudato Si'*, Chapter

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<sup>53</sup> Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, “CARA Catholic Poll (CCP) 2016: Attitudes about Climate Change,” 2016, p. 4, [www.cara.georgetown.edu/climate%20summary.pdf](http://www.cara.georgetown.edu/climate%20summary.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> Nan Li, Joseph Hilgard, Dietram A. Scheufele, Kenneth M. Winnege, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “Cross-Pressuring Conservative Catholics? Effects of Pope Francis’ Encyclical on the US Public Opinion on Climate Change,” *Climatic Change* 139 (2016): 367.

<sup>55</sup> Li et al., 377.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew J. Hornsey, Emily A. Harris, Paul G. Bain, Kelly S. Fielding, “Meta-Analyses of the Determinants and Outcomes of Belief in Climate Change,” *Nature Climate Change* 6 (2016): 622-626.

<sup>57</sup> Pew Research Center, “Catholics Split by Political Party on Climate Change, Abortion,” January 23, 2019, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/24/like-americans-overall-u-s-catholics-are-sharply-divided-by-party/ft\\_19-01-18\\_catholicspartisan-ship\\_climate\\_abortion640px/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/24/like-americans-overall-u-s-catholics-are-sharply-divided-by-party/ft_19-01-18_catholicspartisan-ship_climate_abortion640px/).

<sup>58</sup> Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, “Frequently Requested Church Statistics.”

Six). Catholic Energies estimates that the US Catholic community operates about 75,000 buildings (schools, hospitals, etc.) that together consume vast amounts of energy. Yet many Catholic facilities managers observe that relatively few Catholic institutions have developed and implemented science-based, systematic plans to enact Pope Francis's emphasis that "technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas—needs to be progressively replaced without delay" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 165). And of likely particular relevance to many *Journal of Moral Theology* readers, some theologians—whose vocation, as Mary Ann Donovan notes, calls for particular participation in "the prophetic office of the people of God" through Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12)<sup>59</sup>—have commented that generally few colleagues lead passionate, organized, persistent campaigns across higher education or in their own dioceses for more sweeping institutional responses (ecclesial, political, educational, etc.) to *Laudato Si'* and its clarion call for decisive structural climate action (Chapters Five and Six).

Of course, as Sister Patricia Siemen quotes Ken Untener later in this volume, "We cannot do everything."<sup>60</sup> No one person or institution can do everything on every front to enact *Laudato Si'*. In the face of our climate crisis, recognition of this limitation can produce anxiety and hopelessness. Yet, as Untener continues, "There is a sense of liberation in realizing that [limitation]. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well." Unfortunately, quantitative data, experience, and conversation strongly suggest that US Catholics have not done enough "somethings" very well to prudently and sufficiently incorporate *Laudato Si'* into the US Catholic community in fidelity to the Church's evangelical mission.

### **LAUDATO SI' AND THE U.S. CATHOLIC CHURCH: A CONFERENCE SERIES ON OUR COMMON HOME**

Despite the US Catholic community's inadequate and imprudent response to *Laudato Si'* vis-à-vis the climate crisis, the people of God who are the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, Chapter Two) remain a people of hope who believe that "human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start" to care for our common home (*Laudato Si'*, no. 205). This belief is especially bolstered when hope is understood theologically as "relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Catechism*, no. 1817) and the

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<sup>59</sup> Mary Ann Donovan, "The Vocation of the Theologian," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ken Untener, "Prophets of a Future Not Our Own," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2019, [www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prophets-of-a-future-not-our-own.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prophets-of-a-future-not-our-own.cfm).

recognition that every mitigated degree of global warming will save human lives, promote human dignity, and protect creation.<sup>61</sup> Animated by such hope and in faithfulness to the Church's teachings on ecology and climate change, Catholic Climate Covenant and Creighton University have partnered to convene "*Laudato Si'* and the US Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home."<sup>62</sup> Catholic Climate Covenant was founded in 2006 with support of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops to complement the bishops' Environmental Justice Program and works with nineteen national Catholic partners—including the USCCB, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities—to inspire and equip people and institutions to enact Catholic ecological teaching with particular focus on climate change. Creighton University is a Catholic, Jesuit institution located in Omaha, Nebraska, with an expanding School of Medicine campus in Phoenix, Arizona. Creighton is home to nearly nine thousand undergraduate, graduate, and professional students across its nine schools and colleges. As a Catholic, Jesuit university Creighton seeks to enact "the faith that does justice"<sup>63</sup> and respond to the Society of Jesus's Universal Apostolic Preferences that includes "Caring for Our Common Home."<sup>64</sup>

Convened and informed by the ministries of Catholic Climate Covenant and Creighton University, "*Laudato Si'* and the US Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home" is a biennial series designed to help the US Catholic community more deeply integrate *Laudato Si'* and its climate change teaching into eight key US Catholic ministries: Advocacy, Adult Faith Formation, Creation Care Teams, Energy Management, Higher Education, Liturgy, School Education, and Young Adult Ministry. The inaugural gathering was held June 27-29, 2019, at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, and gathered two hundred Catholics from thirty-two US states, the District of Columbia, and the Vatican. Conference participants came from Catholic organizations, dioceses, colleges and universities, schools, and media outlets from across the country and were either invited based on their experience and capacity to operationalize *Laudato Si'* or had applied and were accepted to attend based on these criteria. The 2019 convening began on June 27 with the keynote event "'The US

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<sup>61</sup> I am grateful to Richard W. Miller, professor of theology and sustainability studies at Creighton University, for this insight.

<sup>62</sup> Creighton University, "*Laudato Si'* and the U.S. Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home," 2019, [www.creighton.edu/catholicclimate/](http://www.creighton.edu/catholicclimate/).

<sup>63</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," October 6, 2000, [www.onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/kolvenbach\\_speech.html](http://www.onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/kolvenbach_speech.html).

<sup>64</sup> Society of Jesus, "Universal Apostolic Preferences," 2019, [www.jesuits.global/en/uap](http://www.jesuits.global/en/uap).

Catholic Church—*Laudato Si'*, Creation Care, and the Climate Crisis.” The event featured opening remarks from Daniel J. Misleh, executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant; Most Reverend George J. Lucas, archbishop of Omaha; and Reverend Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD, president of Creighton University. These addresses were followed by keynote addresses from Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy, bishop of San Diego, and Meghan Goodwin, associate director of government relations at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

On June 28, participants heard two plenary addresses: “Spirituality and Conversion,” by Erin Lothes Biviano, PhD, associate professor of theology at the College of Saint Elizabeth, and “What is Happening to Our Common Home,” by Martha D. Shulski, PhD, associate professor of applied climate science in the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who serves as director of the Nebraska State Climate Office and State Climatologist. That evening, the event featured the keynote address “Integral Ecology in *Laudato Si'*: A Holistic Understanding of and Response to the Crisis of Our Common Home,” by Fr. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, PhD, coordinator of the Sector on Ecology and Creation in the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. On June 28, the assembly featured two more plenary addresses: “Love in Action,” by Fr. Kenneth R. Himes, OFM, PhD, professor of theology at Boston College, and “Environmental and Climate Justice,” by Sacoby Wilson, PhD, associate professor of applied environmental health at the University of Maryland-College Park. The convening concluded that evening with the banquet keynote, “In Honor of *Laudato Si'*: Stories of Ecological Conversion in Action,” by Sr. Patricia Siemen, OP, JD, prioress of the Adrian Dominican Sisters and founding director of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence at Barry University School of Law.

Following each plenary address, participants attended one of eight topical breakout sessions to discuss how to better integrate *Laudato Si'* into the aforementioned areas (“tracks”) of US Catholic life: Advocacy, Adult Faith Formation, Creation Care Teams, Energy Management, Higher Education, Liturgy, School Education, and Young Adult Ministry. Each session was guided by a team of experts from leading Catholic institutions (e.g., USCCB and CRS) and on-the-ground leaders who together facilitated discussion with a co-created rubric. The goal of each session was to identify strategies and resources by which to more deeply integrate plenary insights and the vision of *Laudato Si'* into each ministry. Between sessions, participants also had opportunities to join an Environmental Justice caucus and a Latino caucus. On June 30, track leadership teams participated in a debrief with Covenant staff and Creighton faculty to review breakout and caucus findings and discern practical next steps by which

to more firmly “weave the green thread through the tapestry of Catholic life” in the United States.<sup>65</sup> In the months since this inaugural gathering, staff and faculty from the Covenant and Creighton have worked with conference leaders and participants to discern and plan for how each track can more sufficiently assimilate *Laudato Si’* in response to the climate crisis and help US Catholics understand creation care as essential to the Church’s mission—not as “an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 217).

### VOLUME OUTLINE

As previously noted, this special issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology* contains revised keynote and plenary addresses from the inaugural conference series gathering. The goal of their publication is to remind conference participants about the ideas with which they engaged in Omaha and share conference insights with those who did not attend the event. The first text contains the welcome offered by Daniel J. Misleh at the opening keynote event. Therein, he outlines the work of Catholic Climate Covenant, the vision of “*Laudato Si’* and the US Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home,” and his gratitude for participants’ presence and the partnership of Creighton University. The next text offers the remarks from Archbishop George J. Lucas at the opening keynote event. Archbishop Lucas frames the conference in terms of the Archdiocese of Omaha’s Vision and Pastoral Priorities: “Encountering Jesus, Equipping Disciples, and Living Mercy.” He also shares a letter from Pope Francis’s Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, celebrating the conference and communicating Pope Francis’s Apostolic Blessing upon conference participants. Next, the volume presents the opening remarks of President Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, in which he describes some of the many ways that Creighton has integrated ecological teachings from the Catholic Church generally and Society of Jesus specifically into the University’s curricula, operations, research support, staffing, and social projection. He also notes that ecological sustainability has been integrated into *The Creighton 150 Strategic Plan: Lighting the Way* that is charting the University’s path towards its 2028 sesquicentennial anniversary. Against this background, President Hendrickson celebrates support for the conference series as but one expression of Creighton’s commitment to the Society of Jesus’s Universal Apostolic Preference “Caring for Our Common Home.”<sup>66</sup>

Following these texts, “Paradise Lost: The Urgent Summons of *Laudato Si’* to the American People at This Moment in our History,”

<sup>65</sup> Catholic Climate Covenant, “2020 *Laudato Si’* Fund Campaign,” 2019, [www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/2020-laudato-si-fund-campaign](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/2020-laudato-si-fund-campaign).

<sup>66</sup> Society of Jesus, “Universal Apostolic Preferences,” 2019, [www.jesuits.global/en/about-us/universal-apostolic-preferences](http://www.jesuits.global/en/about-us/universal-apostolic-preferences).

by Bishop Robert W. McElroy, uses the classic poem by John Milton to assess and construct a US Catholic response to *Laudato Si'*. Bishop McElroy identifies multifarious estrangements that help define modern human life and, in response, suggests three initiatives by which the US Catholic community can help the nation sufficiently address contemporary ecological challenges. This essay was the first of two keynote addresses and is followed by the address subsequently given by Meghan Goodwin. In this essay, "The Work of the Church and Care for Creation: Implementing an Integral Ecology in Praxis," Goodwin outlines and emphasizes the importance of the USCCB's faith-based legislative advocacy around climate change as expressions of Catholic commitments to protect human life and dignity, exercise an option for the poor and vulnerable, and care for God's creation. In particular, she notes USCCB support for the Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act (S. 520), opposition to the Trump Administration's rollback of the Environmental Protection Agency's Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS), and support for carbon pricing through the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019 (H.R. 763). She also highlights domestic ecological work undertaken by organizations funded through the USCCB's Catholic Campaign for Human Development, highlights international sustainability efforts by Catholic Relief Services, and encourages Catholics to care for our common home by voting, especially in primaries, and pressing candidates to explicate their stands on policies that especially impact all creation.

The next article, "Inspiring the Ecological Mission of American Catholic Church: *Laudato Si'* at a Moment of Crisis and Hope," by Erin Lothes Biviano, explores how *Laudato Si'* grounds ecological action and response to climate change in relational theological anthropology and ecological spirituality. Building on this framework, Lothes outlines a framework for Catholic energy ethics, identifies "gaps" that inhibit adequate climate action, underscores the importance of climate change communication theory, and suggests individual and collective ways to address climate change—especially through impact investing. Following Lothes's essay, "What Is Happening to Our Common Home? Reflections from a Catholic Climate Scientist and a Theological Ethicist," by Martha Shulski and me, presents the scientific consensus around anthropogenic climate change, reviews the humanitarian effects of this reality, and suggests ways to inspire hopeful action to address the climate crisis. Informed by this outline, the article engages Thomistic categories and work by Cathleen Kaveny to consider climate change in terms of evil and structural participation.

Building especially on the previous two articles' treatments of climate change action, "*Laudato Si'* in the United States: Reflections on Love, Charitable Works, and Social Justice," by Kenneth R. Himes, OFM and me, considers what Jesus's great love command might look




like and require of Christians amidst contemporary ecological degradation. The article especially underscores the need for public theology, engages the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral resource "The Two Feet of Love in Action" as framework by which to structure response to God's love. The essay further suggests features of a successful pastoral strategy that can help the US Catholic community suitably enact *Laudato Si'*. Finally, "In Honor of *Laudato Si'*: Stories of Ecological Conversion in Action," Sister Patricia Siemen, OP emphasizes the importance of experience and narrative to living rightly in the relationships for which God creates each person: "with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 66). To this end, Sister Siemen offers her story as a civil attorney focused on the rights of nature, the founding director of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence at the Barry University School of Law, and now Prioress of the Adrian Dominican Sisters in Adrian, Michigan. The Sisters' story, like that of so many women religious, provides an inspiring example of how one Catholic community has discerned how to practically infuse an inspired ecological ethic into its consciousness and activities.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This *Journal of Moral Theology* special issue and the conference series out of which it emerges are the fruit of much labor by many hands. Although it would be impossible to sufficiently thank all those who worked to organize the inaugural gathering of "*Laudato Si'* and the US Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home," I would especially like to acknowledge several people whose efforts were especially central to this initiative. From Creighton University, I am immensely grateful to President Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, and Eileen Burke-Sullivan, STD, vice provost for Mission and Ministry. Their encouragement and collaborative support was and remains invaluable to this conference series. I am also thankful to several members of Creighton's division of University Communications and Marketing (UCOM) who tirelessly planned and coordinated the gathering: Beth Stinebrink, director of University Events; Dana Fettin, event coordinator; Abby Merrill, event coordinator; Shannon Johnson, creative director; and Sara Hoffman, project manager. In addition to those from Creighton University, I want to recognize Catholic Climate Covenant and its core staff, whose extraordinary work to care for creation and the poor enabled this event and inspires the US Catholic Church in more ways than could ever be described: Daniel J. Misleh, executive director; Jose Aguto, associate director; Mike Lewis, former director of operations; and Paz Artaza-Regan, program manager.

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*care for our common home*. Furthermore, I would like to thank Jason King, PhD, professor of theology at Saint Vincent College and editor of the *Journal of Moral Theology*, for providing an outstanding platform through which to share these texts. Finally, I am ineffably grateful to my spouse, Katie Corey DiLeo, whose love continues to animate and empower my work. 

Daniel R. DiLeo is assistant professor and director of the Justice and Peace Studies Program at Creighton University. Since 2009 he has served as a consultant with Catholic Climate Covenant. He is editor of *All Creation Is Connected: Voices in Response to Pope Francis's Encyclical on Ecology* (Anselm Academic, 2018) and author of articles on Catholic social teaching in the *Journal of Moral Theology*, *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, *Journal of Religion and Society*, and *Horizons*. DiLeo is co-PI with Creighton sociologist Sabrina Danielsen, PhD, assistant professor of sociology at Creighton University, on "Climate Change and *Laudato Si'*: A Study of US Catholic Bishops, Priests, and Parishes," funded by the Louisville Institute. He holds an MTS and PhD in theological ethics with a minor in systematic theology from Boston College.