

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2016.022.062](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2016.022.062)

MARK VAN DE LOGT

Texas A&M University at Qatar, Qatar

“THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN ON THE PLANET

Abstract:

In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home*, Pope Francis I confronted environmental issues and clarified the Roman Catholic Church’s position on global warming. In the United States, *Laudato Si’*, rattled conservative Americans who had falsely assumed that the Roman Catholic Church shared the conservative philosophy on the environment, property, and the economy. Perhaps more forcefully than his predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Francis criticized the “sanctity of the free market,” the worship of property, the obsession with consumerism, the self-centered individualism that is too callous to care about the poor and underprivileged in the world, and the dismissive attitude that the environment is something that can be turned into profit without consequences and with the blessing of Christian “doctrine.”

Ironically, *Laudato Si’* also reaffirmed many conservative principles such as the legitimacy of property, the right of sovereign nations to conduct their own policies, the sanctity of life (including that of the unborn), the concern with scientific experiments on human embryos, and that he hails the work of scientists, engineers, and businesses when they work for the betterment of humanity. Despite outcries by certain conservatives that Francis’s encyclical is virtually a call on Catholics to vote for the Democratic Party in the next election, neither side can claim the Catholic Church as its natural ally. Indeed, the Church has always sailed an independent course.

Keywords:

American Politics, Pope Francis, Environment, Global Warming.

JEL Classification: Z12, Q58

[Sister Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor...

Pope Francis I, *Laudato Si'*, §2

INTRODUCTION

As the leader of an estimated 1.2 billion Catholic Christians, the bishop of Rome, Pope Francis I, is not only one of the most important religious figures in the world, but one who yields great political influence as well. The political influence is felt in many ways: the Vatican (the “country” where the pope resides) holds a special seat in the United Nations, the pope regularly receives foreign leaders, ambassadors, and dignitaries, and he himself travels around the world on both religious and diplomatic matters. He holds considerable power through his appointment of bishops (regional church leaders) but in recent times mostly through the issuance of so-called “encyclicals”: official statements on religious doctrine that become part of the religious instruction of the faithful. In theory, Catholics must observe these statements as they become part of church teaching (newadvent.org, 2015).

When an early draft of Pope Francis’s first encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home* leaked to the public, it caused a great political uproar in the United States where Liberals and Progressives were quick to endorse its call to action to protect the environment, while Conservatives ran for the trenches to denounce the text and soften its impact. Conservatives, especially, were unpleasantly surprised, because they had grown accustomed to the idea that the Roman Catholic Church shared their conservative philosophy. As *Laudato Si'* shows, they were wrong: the Roman Catholic Church remains an institution independent from American politics.

Francis’s encyclical is not merely about global warming, it is about much more. It is about Francis’s overall view of modern-day society and the problems it has created. “Everything is interconnected,” he writes: our disregard for the environment equals our disregard for the poor, the weak, and the unborn. In the process, the encyclical also criticizes neoliberal market capitalism, our current financial system, our obsession with consuming luxury goods, our indifference to the world of plants and animals, our disdain for indigenous cultures, and even the impersonal character of our cities with its slums and crime rates.

It calls on people to change: to learn to live more modestly and humble, to stop fill the world with trash and toxins, and to learn to love all of creation as much as we are supposed to love our neighbor.

In the encyclical, Francis knocked down things dear to (Neo) conservatives. In reality, the encyclical is not a drastic break with Catholic teaching at all, but to American conservatives who felt comfortable to ignore social and environmental issues because they were not priorities under Francis's predecessors John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the new emphasis came as an unpleasant reminder that the Catholic Church remains an institution that formulates its own principles and follows its own course.

LAUDATO SI'

With his statement that global warming is real and that we have made earth "look more and more like an immense pile of filth," *Laudato Si'* quickly captured the headlines. But the encyclical is much more than a statement on the environment: it encapsulates much of Francis's thinking about the kind of world we currently live in. Francis repeatedly writes that everything is "interconnected." One cannot separate social issues (poverty, war, economic inequality, justice, immigration, etc.) from environmental ones. "Today," Francis writes, "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, 2015, 35). Later he makes it even more explicit: "The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty" (Francis, 2015, p. 128).

Francis dispels the myth that by giving humans "dominion" over the beasts and plants of the earth, God had allowed the rampant exploitation of natural resources. Instead, the relationship should be that of a responsible caretaker to his subjects. Francis based his argument not only on Old Testament passages (for example, God had created everything, and saw that it was good) and the statements of predecessors such as John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but especially on the inspired teachings of St. Francis, the popular thirteenth-century defender of the poor who also developed a deeply mystical adoration for all of creation, and whose name then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio adopted as his pontifical name (Francis, 2015, p. 9). According to Francis,

. . . we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts . . . tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working,

while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations (Francis, 2015, p. 49).

But the encyclical goes beyond religion. Francis also gives science the benefit of the doubt on the issue of global warming and environmental degradation. Though he admits that on scientific questions “the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion,” he nevertheless states that

we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair . . . we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation; these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises, for the world’s problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation (Francis, 2015, p. 44).

Once again, Francis here links social and environmental issues. Indeed, he blames the primacy of current economic thinking for social and environmental ills. Francis makes clear that the idea that markets, progress, and growth, are sacred, is deeply flawed. “If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress” (Francis, 2015, p. 57). Instead of focusing on continual growth, Francis suggests to pause and consider limiting growth with the idea to share the wealth more justly and to protect the environment. It is not growth that should drive our actions, but the “common good,” and that includes providing a healthy environment for humans to live in as well.

To Francis, current neoliberal market-thinking is short-sighted and driven by selfishness at the expense of the environment and other peoples. While responsible for growth, it has also caused crises:

The principle of the maximization of profits, frequently isolated from other considerations, reflects a misunderstanding of the very concept of the economy. As long as production is increased, little concern is given to whether it is at the cost of future resources or the health of the environment;

as long as the clearing of a forest increases production, no one calculates the losses entailed in the desertification of the land, the harm done to biodiversity or the increased pollution. In a word, businesses profit by calculating and paying only a fraction of the costs involved (Francis, 2015, p. 142-143).

Science and technology, though not bad in themselves, often inadvertently stimulate economic exploitation. It is this combination of technology and industry (a “technocracy”) that has the potential for danger.

The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings. Finance overwhelms the real economy. The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration (Francis, 2015, p. 81).

Although critical of technology and scientific progress, Francis does not reject science and engineering as important, useful, and necessary fields. However, science and engineering have responsibilities. They must acknowledge that progress can simultaneously harbor the seeds of new problems. The invention of labor-saving machines, for example, can put laborers out of work and place new pressures on the natural environment. In short, weak members of society, as well as the environment, often bear the cost of progress. Thus, instead of focusing solely on “technocratic” solutions, Francis also suggests “spiritual” solutions, such as humility and a more sober lifestyle. This would, in the words of Francis, amount to a “cultural revolution” in the way we view problems. Instead of an “excessive anthropocentrism” (selfishness), he calls upon everyone to consider the common good of current and future generations (Francis, 2015, p. 118).

There are several institutions that must address the social and environmental problems. Francis thanked the ecological movement for having brought the issue to the forefront, and scorns those who complacently and with “cheerful recklessness” continue to deny the problem. He reminds politicians that they have an obligation to consider other factors than economic growth alone. These politicians should also look further than their back yard. In effect, Francis scorned those countries who place “their own national interests above the global common good.” Indeed, citing the bishops of Bolivia, Francis argued that the developed countries “which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gasses, have a greater responsibility

for providing a solution to the problems they have caused” (Francis, 2015, p. 126). Solutions, then, require international cooperation.

But individuals and private organizations can also contribute. Businesses should consider environmental impacts when they begin planning new activities. Ordinary citizens, especially in the affluent world, must tone down their addiction to luxury. Educators should help instill “an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (Francis, 2015, p. 154).

Thus, *Laudato Si'* is not merely required teaching for Catholics, but it calls upon all citizens of the world, Christian or non-Christians, to work towards eliminating environmental problems and poverty.

RESPONSES BY AMERICAN CONSERVATIVES TO LAUDATO SI'

In the current constellation of American party politics, the Catholic Church plays a curious role. The current Democratic and Republican parties, as well as the Tea Party, tend to be non-denominational: they are not associated with one church in particular. Consequently, Catholics are represented in both the Democratic and Republican parties. Roughly speaking, Catholic voters can be at home in either party based on whether they follow the Church's social teachings (care for the poor and elderly, for example) or the Church's moral teachings (on the family, sexuality, abortion, marriage, etc.). This is not an ironclad distinction, however. For example, even though moral issues rank high in the Republican party, the moral rejection of the death penalty is generally a matter of principle for the Democratic Party. Furthermore, moral and social issues are not the only consideration for Catholic voters. Catholics are also led by a whole range of other considerations (employment, crime, environment, women's rights, foreign policy, etc.) in the way they vote. Catholics seem to be represented to a lesser extent in the Tea Party.

Accurately or not, until the 1970s and 80s, Catholics were most often associated with the Democratic Party. Indeed, Democrat John F. Kennedy was the first Catholic president in American history in 1960. However, since the 1970s and 80s, Catholics became increasingly associated with the Republican Party. The rise of the Neoconservative movement under Ronald Reagan, which almost coincided with the election of John Paul II to the papacy, gave rise to this impression. Both prioritized anticommunism and combined it with moral rejection of countercultural phenomena (sexual liberation, for example). By appointing bishops who were especially outspoken on “family” issues, it appeared to many Republicans that the Church was solidly on their side. This view only strengthened during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

The election of Jorge Bergoglio to the papacy in 2013 would signal a “break” to American conservatives. As pope Francis I, Bergoglio changed the Church’s agenda, emphasizing issues that had received less attention under John Paul II and Benedict XVI. After informally speaking out on gay-marriage (the famous “who am I to judge?” remark), Francis criticized modern-day capitalist market-thinking, before addressing social and environmental issues in *Laudato Si’*.

The encyclical even took American bishops by surprise. Although the issue of the environment had been placed on the agenda at the semi-annual meeting of U. S. bishops in the months before the encyclical, only 40 of 250 American bishops attended the session. The majority of bishops instead concentrated on “sex and marriage-related issues” and “religious freedom” (allowing religious hospitals not to cover birth control in health insurance). Thus, as far as American bishops were concerned, environmental issues were not a priority (Miller, 2015).

But where Catholics bishops responded with quiet surprise, (ultra)conservative Catholic commentators responded with vocal indignation. Chris Jackson, a columnist for *The Remnant* (a “traditionalist” Catholic Newspaper), wrote a commentary titled “Why I’m Disregarding *Laudato Si* and You Should Too,” in which he blasted the encyclical:

Having wasted over an hour of my life, I now can say that I have read *Laudato Si*. It is the Pope’s latest verbose tome of an encyclical, which: espouses global warming alarmism, calls for international organizations to police climate change, and waxes poetic about people leading animals to God. In short it is as if Al Gore, Karl Marx, and Teilhard de Chardin wrote an encyclical. What’s worse is that because it came from a Pope, otherwise sane and rational people are actually taking it seriously. For instance, many Neo-Catholics, who would normally laugh *Laudato Si* to scorn it if were penned by Al Gore or Joe Biden, are now praising the encyclical. They are busy touting its hidden genius and quoting banal lines from the encyclical as if they were precious gifts from God. At times, one really is forced to wonder if these people are sane or whether they truly have any core convictions at all. For it is no exaggeration to say that this encyclical is an embarrassment, and I am ashamed as a Catholic that my pope issued it (Jackson, 2015).

Jackson concluded his criticism with a sarcastic thank-you note: “I’d like to courageously call on all Catholics to thank the pope for his over 100 page mix of rambling ambiguous phrases, climate alarmism, heterodox theology, misleading scripture quotations, and

condemnation of air conditioners while Christ's own Church which he oversees drowns in heresy, apostasy, sacrilege, and moral corruption" (Jackson, 2015).

Just as illuminating are the responses of Catholic global-warming deniers to Jackson's web post. Some outraged conservative Catholics argued that the pope had foolishly sold out to environmentalists. One respondent, nick-named "Sheena-Leader Of-the Fuzzheads," wrote: "It's just a bad encyclical, and a very destructive one. It attempts to conflate morality with the goals of insane environmentalists who will begrudge you the air you breathe. The Pope has let himself be used as a tool of the Sierra Club...or Greenpeace." Another, named VladTepesDracul, responded that "The Pope isn't the Catholic Church anymore than Obama is the United States, thank God. This isn't about Catholicism as a religion or Catholic religious theology with which I have little problem. It's about a defective leader who has been morally shanghaied, sandbagged, and corrupted by Atheists and contemporary Marxists." Most, such as "ssoldie" were simply "embarrassed": "For it is no exaggeration to say that this encyclical is an embarrassment, and I am ashamed as a Catholic that my pope issued it and that I will ignore it." Another converted Catholic was so angry at Francis for "betraying Christ" that he planned to return to his Protestant roots. "Marie" accused Francis for losing sight of the important issues: "WHY does Pope Francis go on about weeping for extinct animal species rather than using all those words to say we ought to weep for the gradual extinction of the human race through contraception, abortion, euthanasia, frozen embryos in science labs, and all of the unspeakable horrors...? Population Control being a strategy that is at the top of the list of environmentalists who -- as instruments of satan -- want the human race to become sterile and deprive God of all those souls who would glorify and rejoice in Him for all eternity?" In what can only be called a paranoid response, "lwhite" called Francis a "heretic" involved in a "Modernist" conspiracy: "This is the tactic the Modernist uses to appear to be orthodox while his purpose is to gain support of his heretical views. You see this in all of their writings. It is how they change the true faith into their false religion. That is what all revolutionaries do. Keep a little bit of truth to keep the masses listening and that gives them time to convert them to support their lies" (Jackson, 2015).

If *The Remnant* is a fringe group within the Catholic Church, similar opinions are nevertheless espoused in now "mainstream" media. Greg Gutfeld, host of Fox News's "The Five," called Francis a "Marxist," a "Malthusian," and "the most dangerous man on the planet" because of his ideas on the environment. Conservative talk-radio show host Rush Limbaugh, who had earlier also called Francis a "Marxist" for his criticism of capitalism, argued that Francis was urging Catholic Americans to vote for the Democratic Party. Limbaugh believed that "the Left" had hijacked the Catholic Church in the shape of Francis. Limbaugh also questioned why the pope spoke about global warming rather than the "global war" against Christians "by Muslims and other enemies" (Limbaugh, 2015). Another conservative radio host, Michael Savage, said that Francis "sounds just

like the false prophet in Revelation, an ecumenical spiritual figure directing mankind to worship the Antichrist,” and promptly called on “Catholic people to turn their backs on this Pope before it is too late, before they wake up and find out that they are in chains” (Savage, 2015). In a column, former Republican Presidential hopeful Alan Keyes wrote that the “Pope’s climate agenda could bring [about] genocide.” Keyes argued that Francis’s teachings reflect more the thinking of Marx, Stalin or Mao Zedong rather than Jesus. According to Keyes, Francis’ encyclical is really calling for population control: “So the agenda Pope Francis seems willing to promote, at the risk of slandering humanity, encompasses punitive action near unto genocide against the human race” (Keyes, 2015).

The responses of prominent politicians are especially noteworthy as they set the issues in the upcoming election season (especially now that issues such as same-sex marriage seem to have been settled by the U.S. Supreme Court). Democrats such as President Obama, Hillary Clinton, Senator Bernie Sanders, Vice-President Joe Biden, Secretary of State John Kerry, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (the last three all Catholics), welcomed *Laudato Si*’s social and environmental message while conveniently ignoring passages referring to the preservation of the unborn. GOP prominents such as Marco Rubio, Bobby Jindal, Jeb Bush, John Boehner (all Catholics), as well as Ted Cruz, Mike Huckabee, struggled with the encyclical. Jeb Bush, a convert to Catholicism and Presidential candidate/nominee for the Republican Party, told an audience at a New Hampshire town hall event “I don’t get economic policy from my bishops or my cardinal or my pope . . . I think religion ought to be about making us better as people and less about things that end up getting in the political realm” (Goldenberg and Siddiqui, 2015).

Two outspoken climate-change deniers, such as Senators Jim Inhofe (OK) and Rick Santorum (PA) effectively rejected the pope’s statement. “I am concerned that this encyclical will be used by global-warming alarmists to advocate for policies that will equate to the largest, most regressive tax increase in our nation’s history,” Inhofe said. Inhofe, who once threw a snowball onto the Senate floor to show that global warming was “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people,” also warned Francis that he “ought to stay with his job, and we’ll stay with ours” (Goldenberg, 2015). Pennsylvania Republican Senator Rick Santorum told Francis that he should leave the discussion on climate change to scientists: “The church has gotten it wrong a few times on science, and I think we probably are better off leaving science to the scientists and focusing on what we’re good at, which is theology and morality” (Goldenberg and Siddiqui, 2015).

Whereas most conservative Republican politicians claim the science is merely inconclusive (Rick Perry, Jeb Bush, Rand Paul, Mike Huckabee, Bobby Jindal, and others), or they deny that it is man-made, Texas Senator Ted Cruz argued that global warming was a “pseudoscientific theory.” Not all Republicans disregard global warming, however. Lindsey Graham (SC) and Chris Christie (NJ), for example, believe that global

warming is real and man-made. Although global warming and the environment rank higher as issues of importance among liberals, there are also Democrats, such as senators Claire McCaskill (MO), Heidi Heitkamp, and Mark Warner, who do not believe that man-made global warming is real. They and several other Democratic senators and representatives have blocked environmental legislation because their states or districts have important energy interests. In short, both parties (though to varying degrees) are struggling with the issue of global warming (Yale School of Forestry, 2015).

Unfortunately, I was unable to find any comments on Francis encyclical by such prominent conservatives such as Glenn Beck, Michele Bachmann, and Sarah Palin, or current Republican Presidential hopeful Donald Trump. We can only guess what their responses might have been, but past statements may give an impression. Sarah Palin previously called global warming “junk science.” Michele Bachman called it a “hoax,” and claimed that carbon dioxide is not a harmful gas because it is a natural part of the earth’s life cycle. Donald Trump tweeted that “The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.” In an interview with Fox Business, Libertarian Ron Paul, father of Republican Presidential hopeful Rand Paul, agreed that global warming has been the “greatest hoax . . . that has been around for many, many years if not hundreds of years.” (Paul, n.d.).

Tea Party conservatives are even less likely to trust scientists on global warming than mainstream Republicans or Democrats (the difference is sometimes called the “science gap”) (Mooney, 2014). Teaparty.org came up with its own list of scientists who denied that global warming was real, including Norwegian 1973 Nobel-prize laureate Ivar Gleaver (Richardson, 2015). However, it must be noted that Gleaver represents the minority position among scientists on the issue.

Immediately after the draft of the encyclical leaked to the media, teaparty.org headlined that the pope had leapt “aboard [the] ‘Global Warming’ bandwagon.” It did not mince its criticisms of the pope, calling the encyclical “heinous” and “undermining the credibility of the Catholic Church” because it employed “the sort of hackneyed language and extremely dubious science you might expect from a 16-year old trotting out the formulaic bilge and accepted faux-wisdom required these days to pass a fairly typical exam paper in Geography or Environmental Sciences.” Teaparty.org also argued that the encyclical was morally wrong because fossil fuels,

. . . unlike inefficient renewables (solar, wind, etc.) they don’t require poor countries to devote vast government budgets to subsidise them, and they give growing economies the thing they need perhaps above all else which is a cheap, reliable source of energy. If you truly care about the poor—as the Pope professes to do—the very last thing you’d want to impose on them

is carbon reduction targets or green regulations or crazy schemes which involve chopping down rainforest to grow palm oil or using farm land to grow biofuels. This just creates food shortages and drives up the cost of living.

According to Teaparty.org, the pope's encyclical made no sense theologically because it deals with politics rather than matters of faith; and it was wrong economically because fossil fuels "keep the world's industries spinning round." Citing a report in *The Australian*, renewable energy (wind, solar, etc.) would provide the world with heat, light and artificial horsepower for only nine days (Teaparty.org, 2015).

Fringe-Catholics and conservative politicians were not the only ones caught by surprise by *Laudato Si'*: many ordinary conservative Americans (I am not sure that the Tea Party accurately represents "ordinary" conservatives) were also taken aback by the socio-environmental message of the encyclical. In the weeks after a draft of *Laudato Si'* appeared on the web, Francis's approval ratings took a plunge. According to a Gallup Poll taken shortly after the text of *Laudato Si'* circulated in the media, Francis's approval ratings in the United States dropped from 76 to 59 percent among all Americans and from 72 to 45 percent among conservative Americans (Gibson, 2015).

Still, the Pope's words may have had a positive influence by pushing the issue onto the American agenda, especially during an electoral year. It may be that more Catholics will consider the importance of global warming as a social and political issue.

For many conservative ordinary Catholics who are unwilling to change their opinion, conservative Catholic thinkers offered an intellectual escape. For example, Dwight Longenecker, a parish priest writing for a Catholic Website, argued that Catholics could dissent from the encyclical "in a positive and creative spirit" because the encyclical was not talking about matters of faith and morals and therefore it did not fall under papal infallibility (Longenecker, 2015). Thus, Catholics who take the Pope's words on abortion, homosexuality, marriage, etc., as great moral truths, can feel justified to disagree with and ignore the same Pope's comments about the environment because it is supposedly not a moral issue.

However, careful reading of *Laudato Si'* reveals that the argument that the Pope separated morality from the environment is false. As mentioned above, the Pope clearly linked environmental concerns, including global warming, to matters of justice and morality. The same unbridled capitalism (greed) that led to the exploitation, abuse, and enslavement of humans (all clearly moral issues), also led to the exploitation and abuse of the natural environment which now puts humanity in danger. Although the devastation caused by global warming is not immediately visible like spectacular industrial tragedies such as Bhopal, Three-Mile Island, Chernobyl, Fukushima, the Deepwater Horizon Oil

Spill, or others, its consequences are potentially *more* devastating to humanity. How can it then be exempt from morality?

CONCLUSION

In *Laudato Si'*, pope Francis rattled views that were dear to conservative Americans who had falsely assumed that the Roman Catholic Church shared the conservative philosophy on the environment, property, and the economy. Perhaps more forcefully than his predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Francis criticized the “sanctity of the free market,” the worship of property, the obsession with consumerism, the self-centered individualism that is too callous to care about the poor and underprivileged in the world, and the dismissive attitude that the environment is something that can be turned into profit without consequences and with the blessing of Christian “doctrine.”

In knocking down established conservative principles, Francis seemed to cheer those groups that conservatives had previously ridiculed. He praised ecological activists, whom conservatives had earlier dismissed as “tree-huggers.” He sounded like a “hippie” with his calls for toning down our addiction to luxury and materialism (consumerism) by living more modestly and humbly, and like a “socialist” for praising local people forming cooperatives to counter big corporations or large landowning elites. His scorn for bankers and speculators who caused the financial crisis of 2008, echoed the criticisms of members of the “Occupy Wallstreet” movement. His appeal to NGO’s and ordinary people to call for more regulation of polluting industries and businesses stings conservatives who disdain “big government.” His siding with the scientific community on global warming and his call to mobilize educators to teach children the value of environmental preservation alarms conservatives used to criticizing “liberal academia.” And, finally, Francis’s call for international cooperation to address the issue of global warming and support for the poor, sounds like dangerous “Marxist” and “Communist” rhetoric to conservatives who dearly defend American sovereignty and exceptionalism.

Ironically, *Laudato Si'* reaffirms many conservative principles such as the legitimacy of property, the right of sovereign nations to conduct their own policies, the sanctity of life (including that of the unborn), the concern with scientific experiments on human embryos, and that he hails the work of scientists, engineers, and businesses when they work for the betterment of humanity. Despite outcries by certain conservatives that Francis’s encyclical is virtually a call on Catholics to vote for the Democratic Party in the next election (suggesting that American conservatives are so self-occupied that they believe that *Laudato Si'* was specifically directed at the United States), neither side can claim the Catholic Church as its natural ally. The “Cold War” pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI led American conservatives falsely to believe that the Roman Catholic Church was firmly in the “Neoconservative” camp. Fact is that the Church has always

sailed its own course. Liberal Americans, meanwhile, should take that lesson to heart as well.

There is, however, one positive outcome of the public response to *Laudato Si'*: Francis's encyclical has brought the issue of global warming before American Catholics, a large and important demographic in American politics, many of whom until now refused to believe that there even was such a thing as a climate crisis.

REFERENCES

- Catholic Encyclopedia: Encyclicals. (n.d.) Available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05413a.htm> [Accessed 27 August 2015].
- Fraga, B. (2015) "Political Role reversal: Democrats Praise Encyclical, While GOP Remains Cautious," <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/political-role-reversal-democrats-praise-encyclical-while-gop-remains-cauti/> [Accessed 17 August 2015].
- Gibson, D. (2015) "Pope Francis' Approval Ratings Slump Sharply in U.S." Available at: <https://sojo.net/articles/pope-francis-approval-ratings-slump-sharply-us> [Accessed 17 August 2015].
- Goldenberg, S. (2015) "Republicans' leading climate denier tells the pope to butt out of climate debate." Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/11/james-inhofe-republican-climate-denier-pope-francis> [Accessed 24 August 2015].
- Goldenberg, S. and Sabrina Siddiqui. (2015) Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/17/jeb-bush-joins-republican-backlash-pope-climate-change> [Accessed 24 August 2015].
- Jackson, C. (2015) Why I'm Disregarding Laudato So and You Should Too. Available at: <http://remnantnewspaper.com/web/index.php/fetzen-fliegen/item/1819-why-i-m-disregarding-laudato-si-and-you-should-too> [Accessed 10 April 2016].
- Keyes, A. (2015) "Pope's Climate Agenda Could Bring Genocide." Available at: <http://www.wnd.com/2015/06/popes-climate-agenda-could-bring-genocide/> [Accessed 17 August 2015].
- Limbaugh, Rush. (2015) "The Pope's Leaked Marxist Climate Rant." Available at: http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2015/06/16/the_pope_s_leaked_marxist_climate_rant (16 June 2015) [Accessed 17 August 2015].
- Longenecker, D. (2015) "Can a Good Catholic Dissent from Laudato Si'?" Available at: <http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2015/06/24/can-a-good-catholic-dissent-from-laudato-si/> [Accessed 17 August 2015].

- Miller, P. (2015) "Conservative Catholics Try to Domesticate Laudato Si." Available at: <http://religiondispatches.org/conservative-catholics-try-to-domesticate-laudato-si/> [Accessed 17 August 2015].
- Mooney, C. (2014) Available at: <http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2014/05/tea-party-climate-trust-science> [Accessed 24 August 2015].
- Paul, R. (n.d.) "Global Warming." Available at: <http://www.ronpaul.com/on-the-issues/global-warming/> [Accessed 25 August 2015].
- Pope Francis. (2015) *Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home*. Available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf
- Richardson, V. (2015) "Nobel-winning physicist who backed Obama: Prez 'dead wrong' on Global Warming." Available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/7/nobel-physicist-obama-dead-wrong-global-warming/?page=all> [Accessed 25 August 2015].
- Savage, M. (2015) Radio broadcast. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkigptqH9-U> [Accessed 17 August 2015].
- Teaparty.org. (2015) "Pope Francis Leaps Aboard 'Global Warming' Bandwagon." Available at: <http://www.teaparty.org/pope-francis-leaps-aboard-global-warming-bandwagon-103673/> [Accessed 25 August 2015].
- Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, "Yale Project on Climate Change Communication," <http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/article/human-caused-global-warming-senators-v.-constituents/> [Accessed 17 August 2015].